



The North China Lover

Marguerite Duras , Leigh Hafrey (Translator)

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Far more daring and truthful than any of her other novels, *The North China Lover* is a fascinating retelling of the dramatic experiences of Duras's adolescence that shaped her most famous work. Initially conceived as notes toward a screenplay for *The Lover*, this later novel, written toward the end of her life, emphasizes the tougher aspects of her youth in Indochina and possesses the intimate feel of a documentary.

Both shocking and enthralling, the story Duras tells is "so powerfully imagined (or remembered) that it . . . lingers like a strong perfume" (*Publishers Weekly*). Hailed by the French critics as a return to "the Duras of the great books and the great days," it is a mature and complex rendering of a formative period in the author's life.

The North China Lover Details

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Author : Marguerite Duras , Leigh Hafrey (Translator)

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From Reader Review The North China Lover for online ebook

Nhi Nguy n says

Cu n này là b n Marguerite Duras vi t l i câu chuy n tình   cu n ti u thuy t n i ti ng c a bà - Ng  i tình - thay   i ng i k  thành ng i th  ba và c  thêm hai nh n v t m i là Thanh - chàng trai ng  i Xi m    c m  c a cô bé da tr ng  em v  nu i và sau này tr  thành tài x  riêng c a bà, và Alice - cô n  sinh lai da tr ng,  em nào c ng tr n ra kh i tr  ng n i trú    bán thân. M t s  thay   i khác c ng    c th c hi n,   c bi t là   vi c xây d ng hình  nh c a chàng trai ng  i Hoa - ng  i tình Hoa B c c a cô bé da tr ng, t  m t ng  i  àn ông c  đáng v   m y u, m m m i và là ng  i-tình-  -run-r y-s n- -trong-l ng trong “*Ng  i tình*”, anh tr  nên “táo b o h n”, “tu n tú h n, kh e m nh h n”.

Th  nh ng   m khác bi t l n nh t và khi n mình thích cu n này h n c  “*Ng  i tình*”,  ó chính là m ch k  chuy n c a tác gi . Không còn nh ng chi ti t l n x n v  gia  inh c a cô bé da tr ng, nh ng h i  c không   u không cu i tr n l n vào trong câu chuy n tình,   “*Ng  i tình Hoa B c*”, Marguerite Duras    dành th i gian    s ng cùng câu chuy n bà vi t ra,    s p x p l i thành m t th  th ng nh t nh ng di n bi n theo  úng trình t  th i gian, không gian c a s  ki n. Câu chuy n tình yêu c a cô bé da tr ng và ng  i tình Hoa B c c a cô hòa quy n m t cách hài hòa và  áng nh  vào nh ng chi ti t, nh ng tr  ng  o n liên quan   n gia  inh cô bé, nh ng b t  n, nh ng n i h i s  c a ng  i anh th , gây ra b i chính ng  i anh c  Pierre, v n là m t tên nghi n thu c phi n n ng, tr  nên h  h ng và nguy hi m vì chính tình yêu th  ng mù qu ng, thiên v  và hành vi dung túng c a ng  i m . Cá nh n mình  ánh giá r t cao cách k  chuy n c  trình t  h n h i này,   c bi t là cái   m nhìn c a ng  i k  chuy n, nh  th  c  cu n ti u thuy t là m t b  phim,    c quay d  i g c nhìn c a Marguerite Duras. Ng n ng    m ch t   n  nh, nhi u tr  ng  o n d  d i, c  nh ng  o n l i v  cùng nên th .

Và qu  th t,   c cu n ti u thuy t này, mình nh  th  s ng l i nh ng hình  nh trong b  phim “*Ng  i tình*” m i xem vài ngày tr  c. C  c m gi c nh  nh ng nh n v t trong phim là l y t  cu n ti u thuy t “*Ng  i tình*”, còn nh ng di n bi n c a phim thì l y t  “*Ng  i tình Hoa B c*” m i ph i. Vì  a ph n các di n bi n trong cu n ti u thuy t này   u gi ng y nh  trên phim,   c bi t là trong nh ng c nh  áng nh . Ví d  nh  c nh khi chàng trai ng  i Hoa g p cô bé da tr ng trên chuy n ph , nh  nh n m i cô hút thu c. R i c nh khi hai ng  i ng i chung trong xe c a chàng trai ng  i Hoa, m t s  thỉnh l ng tránh né bao ph  không gian c a h , s  thỉnh l ng báo tr  c m t tình yêu chói l a mê ho c, m t m i tình    c  s n    ó r i, không sao tránh kh i:

“Cô    b o r ng ch  riêng s  thỉnh l ng  y, nh ng t  ng  mà s  thỉnh l ng  y tránh né, ngay c  cách ng t, nh n, s  l    ng c a nó, c  trò ch i  y n a, tính tr  th  n i trò ch i và nh ng dòng n  c m t c a nó, t t c  nh ng cái  ó    c  th  khi n ng  i ta nói r ng   y là m t m i tình.”

Và còn n a cái cách Marguerite Duras mi u t  c nh hai nh n v t chính trong c n h    c thân, cái cách mà tình yêu b  c vào qua khung c a, và   l i  ó mãi mãi, cu n h   i trong m t c n bão tình mà cu i cùng ch  còn l i   n  au,   n  au c a s  chia ly v nh vi n. M t tình yêu chói l a mê ho c b  thu l i ch  còn l i là nh ng ký  c cùng m t câu chuy n    k  l i cho nh ng ng  i tình ti p theo c a h , cho nh ng ng  i ch ng, ng  i v  c a h . M t tình yêu c n c  n i  au    gi  cho ký  c v  nó s ng mãi. Và s  ti c nu i không sao t  bày, r ng r i   y, cô bé da tr ng và chàng trai ng  i Hoa c a cô s  ph i làm tình v i nh ng ng  i khác, s  ph i yêu nh ng ng  i khác, c  con v i nh ng ng  i khác, trong khi c  hai m i chính là m i tình v nh h ng c a nhau - m i tình       c   nh tr  c là s  không th  nào c  k t thúc c  h u, không th  nào chào   n nh ng

??a con chung. Trong ti?u thuy?t, có m?t ?o?n khi cô bé da tr?ng b? ch?m kinh nhi?u ngày và c? ng? là mình ?ã mang thai con c?a chàng trai ng??i Hoa, ?? r?i sau ?ó th?t v?ng. Th?t ?au ??n làm sao.

Khác v?i cô bé da tr?ng c?a “*Ng??i tình*”, cô bé da tr?ng c?a “*Ng??i tình Hoa B?c*” ?ã bi?t là mình yêu chàng trai ng??i Hoa c?a cô t? lâu l?m r?i, ?ã tuyên b? v?i anh r?ng mình s? yêu anh mãi mãi, nh? cái cách anh tuyên b? v?i cô, sau này, qua ?i?n tho?i, r?ng anh s? yêu cô cho ??n ch?t. ?i?u này l?i càng làm cho s? chia ly c?a h? ?au ??n h?n, kh?c kho?i h?n. Nh?ng Marguerite Duras không làm cho tình yêu ?y tr? nên bi l?y, b?i bên c?nh vi?c kh?c h?a m?t m?i tình chói lòa và ám ?nh, tác gi? còn khám phá b?n n?ng ph? n?, khát khao tính d?c và ham mu?n th? xác th?m kín c?a cô bé da tr?ng - m?t ng??i ?àn bà ??y nh?c c?m ?n bên trong thân th? c?a m?t thi?u n? v?n còn nét tr? con - trong m?i quan h? v?i Thanh, v?i ng??i anh th? Paulo, v?i cô b?n Hélène Lagonelle. T?t c? ?ã làm nên m?t “*Ng??i tình Hoa B?c*” còn d? d?i h?n, ám ?nh h?n và nhi?u màu s?c h?n c? “*Ng??i tình*”. M?t câu chuy?n không th? nào quên...

Kkaatteenn says

Inte lika bra och suggestiv som Älskaren, men ojojoj vilket geni hon är. Duras duras duras duras ♥?

Eric Cepela says

first 87 pages are like nabokov’s screenplay of Lolita. a salacious, pulp-y rendition of the original. the child running across the street and kissing the limousine window is lo pulling the lipstick tube out of her bikini waistband.

after the child’s dance with helene lagonelle, there’s nothing more. 150 pages of incessant laughing and crying.

the sentimental end of The Lover does not fit the tone of the rest of the book. The North China Lover is written almost entirely in that same melodramatic tone.

for fans of The Lover, a few outstanding scenes make The North China Lover worth reading.

3 stars

Evan says

Maggie Duras was a hot little firecracker, giving up her 14-year-old stuff to the family, the natives, and so on.

But seriously, folks....

This is an expanded recast of a tale Duras had already told in the earlier, shorter and much better autobiographical novel, *The Lover*, and although this one starts off just as beautifully and has lovely bits throughout, it gradually becomes stultifyingly repetitive and dull and fizzles out.

The earlier version, much more internalized, focused, concentrated and concise, was a far finer distillate -- dreamy and swoon-inducing throughout -- whereas this version, with its more removed and distant perspective, conventional linear progression, ampler narrative and autobiographical detail, and extended dialogue passages saps the material of its poetic power and essence. This may seem counterintuitive, but truth is not necessarily to be had in piling on more and explicit detail; and I would challenge anyone to do a side-by-side comparison of the two versions to prove my assertions. The earlier version had more heart and replicated the lover/narrator's non-linear internal thought processes which made the reader feel closer to the mind of the storyteller, of the teller's thoughts. I cared and felt when I read that. Not so much with this one.

The intrusion into the narrative of what seem to be instructions for filmmakers to follow in the filmed version of the story came off as a tad crass to me, as though I was reading a work of art one minute and a "property" the next.

One thing I did like about this version is that the child's family is treated more sympathetically, especially compared to the movie version where their pettiness is almost two-dimensional.

The question for me is: Which version comes closest to the aching sense of longing, the essence of wistful memory? For me, it is the first version.

I really wanted to like this and did, for about a hundred pages, but eventually found myself whittling it down from four stars to three stars to two stars.

In essence, I thought this was a case of more is less.

Lauren Highton says

wow, this book really is detestable in the way it tries makes sexual abuse and incest something half-beautiful and morally murky/complex simultaneously, it never really addresses anything. it is a book of strangled gasps and sighs, endlessly moving on, another cry, another unhappy fuck, with not even a hint of underlying meaning--it is so very self-conscious and tries so very hard to be shifting, meandering, strange, boundary-pushing. except, we are not meant to step away from these characters, these acts. we are meant to be swept up in it all. in the end it is the shallowest thing i have read in a long time, along with the most objectionable.

Theresa Andersen says

pædofili og incest er begge elementer, der optræder i denne historie. og lad mig gøre det klart: jeg er IKKE fan. Udover det (lol som om) er jeg imponeret over, hvordan personernes øjne i denne historie ikke er tørret ud endnu. De græder HELE TIDEN.

Jeg læser denne historie i en historisk kontekst med fokus på Indokina, men wow... jeg hader alle personerne i denne historie (Thanh virker okay, indtil han begynder at kysse 'barnet' (med fokus på BARN)). Jeg ved, at den er baseret på rigtige mennesker, men det gør det langt fra bedre. Faktisk gør det det hele værre.

Bogen er skrevet smukt og beskrivelserne af sceneriet er interessante, men udover det: 1/5. ville ikke genlæse, men jeg er sikkert stadig nødt til at lave min store opgave på den.

Alshia Moyez says

You know, I don't even want to give this book 3 stars, but I'm being generous and sticking to my rule (even though I had to break it with this author not too long ago) of never giving below a 3-star rating, except in extreme cases.

Maybe there's something wrong with me or perhaps my tastes have changed, but I used to be SUCH a hardcore fan of hers-truly, a fangirl. Especially of *The Lover* and this book (even though it's just *The Lover* with bigger font & more white space).

Today, though, it's like I'm taking a cold, hard look at her work-an "investigation" triggered by reading *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* (one of the worst 60 pages I've had to get through in my whole life). Now, I don't want to be a hater (because I had such a love affair with *The Lover* early on), I might give her another chance. But at the same time I wonder if all her work is erotica (not my choice genre to read), and more importantly, if all her work is erotica between 14 year old girls & 35 year old, grown men.

The man she was screwing in book 1 should've been with her mother since they were about the same age, instead of going with her little teeny bopper daughter. Sickening and silly. In hindsight I (the reader) was supposed to be so blown away by him because he was rich, had a nice car, nice clothes, and a decent place to live. So in exchange for all the material things the loser main character didn't have, I'm supposed to turn a blind eye to the fact that every passage I'm reading where he "ripped her clothes off", "couldn't even make it to the bed," and so on, is describing sex between a 14 year old child and an adult male.

So, I'm more upset with myself for embracing such work, paying for it. I don't want to support that kind of writing. And frankly, I wonder what the author sees in that kind of stuff. But anyway, enough. The review is over and I've talked for far too long on this. Thanks for reading.

Gracie says

I wasn't expecting much. I heard that it was basically a retelling of *The Lover* and wasn't nearly as good. Given all of the negative reviews, I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised. It has quickly become a favorite. I read *The Lover* about a year ago and saw the film adaptation shortly after. I didn't think that she could add much to the already rich story, but she really did.

The North China Lover is a simple story. It is semi-autobiographical and tells of an affair Duras had as a child with an older Chinese man while living in what is now Vietnam. I found this telling to be much more raw and honest than *The Lover*, but at the same time was more tender in many places. I love Duras' writing style. It is the type of writing that is so simple and bare, but sticks with you and resonates.

I would definitely recommend this book (but obviously for older audiences).

Emily says

Inspired by Richard's commitment to multi-lingual reading and blogging, I've decided to try to work on my languages as well, and read more novels in the original French. How many is "more"? Well, last year I read a grand total of one. So, in order to top that, this year I'll need to read...two. Maybe the year after that I'll read three. As you can tell, I'm practically signing up for *À la recherche du temps perdu* already.

Considering that last year's pick, J.M.G. Le Clézio's *Ourania*, was something of a struggle for me and took several months to complete, I'm startled to find that I've already finished my first French book of 2010: Marguerite Duras's *L'amant de la chine du nord* (available in English translation as *The North China Lover*). Duras's book is actually a re-working of her earlier novel *L'amant*; it re-envisioned the story as a film, and retells it from a more complete, possibly mature angle. Both *L'amant* and *L'amant de la chine du nord* are fictionalized memoirs dealing with Duras's sexual coming-of-age as a young - very young - Frenchwoman in 1920s Vietnam (then French Indochina). Well, let me be blunter: it tells the story of her first consummated affair, with a wealthy 28-year-old Chinese man, when she was fourteen.

Given that plot there's obviously a lot to talk about here vis-a-vis sexual and gender dynamics, but let's get some formalist stuff out of the way first: Duras's prose is vivid and lush, and the fact that she wrote this novel as if giving screen directions (including camera pans, fade-ins and fade-outs, etc.), makes the reading experience overwhelmingly visual. This kind of narration is often a turn-off for me; I tend to find it choppy or overly mannered. But in Duras's case I think it works perfectly for two reasons. In the first place, this is one of those books in which the setting is almost as much of a character as the characters themselves. The hot monsoon nights, the flooded rice fields, the night sounds of the young Vietnamese night guards singing outside the gates of the main character's colonial boarding school - presenting all this to the audience front-and-center brings it to the foreground, and persuades the reader to concentrate on it, to see it. And secondly, in a film all the viewer knows about a character's motivations is how she *sees* them acting - she has no direct access to their interior monologue. A cinematic approach, then, plays perfectly into one of Duras's main themes in this novel: the ambiguity of human actions.

Because *L'amant de la chine du nord* does not leave the reader with any clear answers about why the characters act as they do, or how we ought to feel about it. Compared to, say, *Lolita*, which argues pretty plainly for Humbert as a delusional, dirty old man and Delores Haze as his victim, Duras's moral universe is extremely murky. The main character, known only as "l'enfant" ("the child"), comes from a desperately poor family of French settlers in Indochina; we later learn that she has already had several offers of marriage/concubinage from men in their thirties, which her mother has pressed her to accept in order to alleviate the family's poverty, but which she has refused. In her boarding school, certain teachers and even students choose to prostitute themselves in the streets. In this light, her meeting with and choice to pursue her wealthy lover (known in the novel as le Chinois or The Chinaman) seems a clear economic decision, the best she can do in a bad situation.

But things are not so simple. There's no question that l'enfant lusts after le Chinois - that her psyche is, in fact, super-saturated with lust. She has incestuous thoughts about her younger brother, with whom she is extremely close. She is already involved in a semi-sexual relationship with one of her female school friends, and the two of them fantasize about taking the place of their prostitute teacher - the idea of forbidden sex being thrilling to them. From practically the moment she meets le Chinois, she is fascinated by his physicality - she is the aggressor in their relationship, and it seems as though she is acting from real feeling, not just aping the actions of adults in order to produce a desired effect.

At the same time, it's not completely positive for her, or comfortable to read; her experiences of actually having sex, especially at first, involve a lot more pain and suffering than pleasure, and she seems perplexed by the strength of Le Chinois's emotions when he falls in love with her. He is weeping about how his magnate father will disinherit him if he marries her, and she is teasing him and wanting him to tell her more about life in China. Duras does a creepily effectual job at blending L'enfant's precocious sensuality and sexuality with certain other, very kid-like, qualities in her. She kind of just wants to experiment and learn about the world, and also to have sex. Would she want to have sex if it weren't for her family's poverty, and the possibility of getting her hands on some of Le Chinois's money? Would she want to have sex if she hadn't been prematurely sexualized by the men who want to buy her from her mother, and by her feelings for her brother, and by the boarding school atmosphere? One can't help asking these questions, but at the same time they're a bit pointless: if those things had been different, she would have been a completely different person.

And here's another thing that's unusual in this type of story: L'enfant and Le Chinois enjoy each others' company. You never get the sense that Lolita and Humbert ever have fun together, but L'enfant and Le Chinois go out late at night to restaurants in the Chinese section of town, tell each other stories, laugh at each others' frankness. To be fair, there is also a lot of crying in the book, and overall it's somewhat melancholic, but unlike *Kristin Lavransdatter* it also has its fair share of mutual enjoyment of the present moment. And although the affair (inevitably) ends, and everyone feels sad about that for a while, L'enfant doesn't really suffer as a *punishment* for having sex, in the way that Lolita, Tess Durbyfield, and other literary sexual victims do (dying in childbirth, no less! Talk about sexual punishment). Duras's protagonist goes through a mixed emotional experience and then gets on with her life, but one never gets the sense that she is suffering, or enjoying herself, as a vehicle for the author to make a point about who is right and who is wrong. Duras's book is the most non-judgmental treatment - in either a positive or negative way - of sex between a very young person and an older person, I've ever come across. I wouldn't call it primarily a love story, but neither would I say it's primarily a tale of oppression. (And speaking of oppression: the racial dynamics among the transplanted white French, colonized Vietnamese, and wealthy landowning Chinese are another whole fascinating subject.)

The whole tale brings up interesting questions about the triangulation of love, lust, liking, and money. If L'enfant is more or less engaging in sex work, does that mean she doesn't love Le Chinois? Does it mean she doesn't like him? If her first feeling upon seeing him is one of lust, does that invalidate the money motive? To what extent are the desires for money and sex interwoven? And what should we, as readers, be hoping for as we read this story? Duras allows all of these elements to coexist in uneasy harmony, which in itself is an admirable feat.

Writerlibrarian says

If you haven't read the first book and seen the movie it's probably rubbish with pretty words. But I've read the original, I've seen the movie, I've read some about Duras' life so this remixing of the most important part of her life in reaction to the movie (which she did not approve of) in a time where she was battling alcohol addiction, was in and out of hospital is brutally raw. I like it. I like it even more than the original and it makes me want to read about the novel she wrote about her mother's life and the first time she wrote about the 'affair'.

Lots of stream of conscience type of writing. Repetitions of words, phrases. The main characters do not have names still, except for the brothers and others real life characters. The style is raw, like open wound raw. It

does give the story an urgency that original didn't have. Which makes it better for me as a reader.

Rad says

One of my favorite books, by my favorite writer. I first read Duras when I was 15 and i think, that has made all the difference. Her writing touched me where no other writer has been able to reach till date. The story, the plot, the characters - are all irrelevant in her book. You can't pickle it under fiction or non fiction. No flowery language, no melodrama. Reading her is just an experience, very intense, often tumultuous. This book is about her love affair with the rich North Chinese guy - you could say - but i could never call it a love story or say that it had romance. Impossible to contain her in such lame labels. In fact, each time i've picked up any of her books, i've just ached to pick up the pen and paper and start writing...about what? I don't know. It's just this overwhelming feeling to be with yourself and let the whirlpool inside flow out. Sometimes i'd be able to write and sometimes i'd just return to her book, admitting to myself that she knows best how i feel. Often i've felt my discovering her was not just a random event...she's almost like a planet squaring your moon....affecting your life choices, influencing your destiny, without you being able to crack the code of the scheme of things.

d says

—¿No trabajas?
—No. Nada.
—Nunca haces nada, nunca... nunca haces algo...
—Nunca.
Ella le sonríe. Dice:
—Dices «nunca» como si dijeras «siempre».
[...]

La historia de la niña y el chino. El quilombo más grande del mundo. No voy a escribir sobre el grueso de este libro, eso sería escribir demasiado sobre mi vida. Sólo algunas observaciones un poco offtopic: ¿por qué la madre es imbécil y ciega? La madre en *Orgullo y prejuicio* también es así. Marguerite Duras, Jane Austen. Minas inteligentes y escritoras brillantes que escriben sobre la idiotez y ceguera de las madres. Incluso en *Los juegos del hambre* la figura de la madre es similar. (view spoiler)

Acá se repite algo de *Hiroshima mon amour* (el guión suyo y la película de Resnais). Es la frase “no sabes nada”, dicha por el hombre que la protagonista desea. El japonés le recrimina a la francesa “no sabés nada, no conocés Hiroshima”. Acá, el chino le recrimina no saber sobre las erecciones. Es una frase cruel – las mujeres de Duras siempre quieren saber todo. Conocer Hiroshima (su historia y sus hombres), conocer Saigón/Vietnam (su historia y sus hombres) es también conocer el amor.

P.D/ En Duras el amor es una reflexión sobre el tiempo. Una de sus obsesiones es determinar cuando aparece. Punto vital: transmitir a la forma literaria la experiencia amorosa, el tiempo vivido por los cuerpos amantes, por los momentos de calentura, etc.

P.D. 2/ Mientras leía, un pensamiento entre los tantos que se me venían encima: “Esto es como un *In the*

mood for love literario”. Los que la hayan visto sabrán que es una película donde todo desborda, donde todo es lujoso, donde todo es digno para una visión del mundo erótica/amatoria. Lo mismo que en Duras. La obsesión de Duras es una de las obsesiones del cine y de la filosofía.

Marina Lawliett says

A ver, como lectura no está mal. No esperaba demasiado y así se ha quedado. He leído varias reviews diciendo que leer a la autora es como ver lienzos de su historia y bueno, es probable que haya perdido mucho por no haber leído antes la novela *El amante*, o incluso por no haber visto la adaptación cinematográfica, pero aún así me ha parecido una lectura más. Quizás la resaltaría un poco por lo incómoda que me ha parecido la narración (puede que se deba a una mala traducción, no digo que no) y la relación de los amantes.

Dina Batista says

As vezes um poema...

As vezes inocência...

As vezes repetitivo...

As vezes atração...

As vezes amor...

As vezes sofrimento...

Uma história que marca e surpreende. Não será o meu único Duras que irei ler.

Emi Bevacqua says

I disagree with the rave reviews for this "fascinating retelling of the dramatic experiences of Marguerite Duras's adolescence." The blurbs all over this book make it look like a tragic love story between a French person and a Chinese person in pre-war Indochina. But this is pedophilia. Granted, the main character lies and says she's 16 but the whole premise is prurient; she is actually referred to throughout the book as "the child". The exotic backdrop is hauntingly gorgeous but the "family of scum" in hysterics in the foreground is wracked by economic and moral poverty; I found their constant cries alternating with incessant laughter, the mother's mental state and the problems of the brothers (one a sadist and the other involved with her sexually) completely overwhelming.

Sofía (?????) says

Esta novela es un cuadro escrito. Con cortas y precisas pinceladas Marguerite Duras dibuja para nosotros una historia. Una historia de amor, de deseo, de pasión. Una historia franca y hermosa.

Ella. Él.

Una francesa. Un chino.

Una adolescente. Un hombre adulto.

Ella es de una familia adeudada. Él es uno de los hombres más ricos en China.

La personalidad de ella es increíble. Es franca, directa, curiosa, de carácter fuerte.
Él sorprende con su sensibilidad y generosidad.
La noche.
Un calor insoportable.
Dos cuerpos entrelazados.
Dos almas hechas una.
Será cierto que un verdadero amor siempre es imposible?
Ella tiene que volver con su familia a Francia. Él tiene que casarse con una china de su misma clase social.
Mientras tanto... "el espantoso dolor de aquel deseo".

Es uno de mis libros favoritos. Por su belleza, por su contenido explícito, por la investigación de lo que es el amor, por su lenguaje tan simple y mágico, por su poderoso erotismo, por reconocerse a mí en Ella.
Reconocer a esa "niña que transgrede el miedo. Ella es quien quiere saber, quien lo quiere todo, lo máximo, todo, vivir y morir a la vez."

Ogier says

Duras was hired by the director Jean-Jacques Annaud to write the screenplay for a film to be made from her *The Lover* but due to a disagreement with Annaud, quit the production. She then began another retelling of the early years of her life, the referenced novel. She began the novel as a screenplay but along the way in morphs into a novel.

Certainly one of the major differences between the two works comes at the end of *The North China Lover*, a description in explicit language of an incestuous episode with Paulo, the younger of her two brothers. One might speculate that Duras wanted to include something of that in the film by Annaud.

Duras has written three novels on the first 17 years of her life and the only comment by Annaud on the matter was a statement that he believed Duras could no longer distinguish between what was the truth of her early life and what were her fictionalized versions of it.

One thing we can know from various other writings, was that she loved Paulo dearly.

Fernando Endara says

“El Amante de la China del Norte” es una novela intensa e infausta, como la vida; escrita en una prosa poética y sensual, y adornada con las lluvias y el calor de las noches del lejano oriente. Marguerite Duras reescribió su propia novela “El Amante” adaptada al cine en 1992 por el director Jean-Jacques Annaud, como respuesta a esta violada adaptación y en recuerdo de su amante chino, recién fallecido. El escenario de esta magnífica novela con tintes autobiográficos, es la Colonia Indochina Francesa en 1928-1929, actual territorio de Vietnam.

La trama nos presenta a la Niña (la autora), una francesa pobre menor de 15 años que entabla una relación amorosa-erótica con un chino del norte, alto, rico y elegante de 27 años. El argumento se centra en las relaciones familiares de la niña y en ese amor; que se sabe es imposible, debido a las diferencias culturales y económicas. La familia de la niña es en extremo conflictiva, su hermano mayor Pierre es cruel y agresivo, su hermano menor Paulo, es “diferente” y débil, su madre está muerta en vida, desconsolada tras la muerte de su pareja, estafada por los colonos cayó en la ruina, y en la miseria. Than, es un niño que la familia recogió de las selvas del Siam y, aunque siervo, es el más fuerte y armonioso, el protector de todos. La niña siente en

sus poros el despertar sexual incontrolable, que, aunado al cariño por sus allegados, la hará querer fundirse en la piel de su hermano Paulo, de Than, de su amiga de internado Helen. Pierre descubrirá el futuro incesto y se lanzará a raudales con golpes sobre sus hermanos. Las fechorías del mayor incluyen deudas interminables en los fumaderos de opio.

No hay salida para la penuria, refugiarse en la carne, en los brazos del amante, traerá consigo más penuria. Pero hay salida de Indochina, de la colonia, de la pobreza. Los amantes se reúnen después del “liceo”, los encuentros son intensos, la risa y el llanto devora los rostros. El chino es rico y su familia de opulencia, por ende, juega, tiene mujeres y fuma opio. Para conservar su fortuna deberá guardar las tradiciones de la china, y respetar su alianza matrimonial establecida a edad temprana. El matrimonio está consumado y no tardará en efectuarse, la niña deberá retirarse de la escena, tomar el dinero que le ofrecen los acaudalados, y salvar a su madre y su familia de aquel destino miserable en las selvas Indochinas. ¿Acaso no se acercó por eso al chino desde un principio, por su dinero?, ¿O fueron sus manos, las que aferraron su cuerpo para no soltarlo jamás?

Un amor intenso que podría probar que solo el amor imposible es el verdadero. Una carga erótica que no viene únicamente de las acciones de los personajes, es el estilo de la autora el que seduce en cada párrafo. Un estilo sobrio de una mujer madura que reflexiona y se ve a sí misma en su despertar sexual, en la pérdida de su niñez, en las vicisitudes familiares. Un estilo franco y directo, de frases cortas y sencillas que engloban absolutas complejidades, un lenguaje sonoro y visual exótico que nos traslada a esos rincones prohibidos en donde tener sexo con jovencitas es lícito y delicioso. Una novela penetrante y encantadora.

Will says

Marguerite Duras must have led an extraordinary, emotionally complex, devastating childhood if any of the scenes of this work are real. Because my French is a work in progress, I read *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (The North China Lover) in short bursts over the summer when I was in the mood, but in the last few days I decided to devote a few hours to it every day, and I don't regret it at all.

Reading in other languages really is such a different experience, and that first moment when you go a whole page without looking up a single word is triumphant. Before Duras' work I could ramble about unemployment, politics, immigration, current events, etc., but the concept of love and loss in the language of love and loss had evaded me. Duras changed that.

Colonialism in South East Asia is possibly the most complicated version of Western colonialism: the Dutch in Indonesia, the British in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc., and the French in Indochina. None of it ended prettily or cleanly. Even today (especially today), SE Asia is a sometimes unfathomable mix of territory disputes, rebelling ethnic groups, human and drug trafficking, and shipping. In Duras' time of the 1930s, Vietnam was under French rule, and this novel is the story of her affair with an older, opium-addicted Chinese man.

Emotions break, tears flow, and anger sparks, the flow of the French creates an emotion of itself. The story flows with these emotions, as does the speed of the text. The atmosphere of Vietnam is so important for Duras, and the events of the novel haunt me and more importantly Duras, positively and negatively. I know I'll always remember why it happened, long after I forget what happened. The flow of the river, the buzz of the rice fields, and lying in a bed for hours, blankly staring, waiting for something to end.

Michael says

Initially conceived of as notes toward a screenplay for *The Lover*, *The North China Lover* instead became a more conventional retelling of the original novel. Much of what made the original so fascinating has vanished, from the novel's fragmented structure to its astute representation of the power dynamics between the French protagonist and her Chinese lover. In this recounting of her adolescence on the outskirts of Saigon, Duras strings together lush descriptions, self-reflexively framed as directions for the film adaptation of *The Lover*, with stretches of suggestive dialogue. The sensationalism of the novel overwhelms the meager attempts the author makes at formal experimentation and social analysis. Melodrama and exoticism replace detachment and critique. The book's best forgotten.
