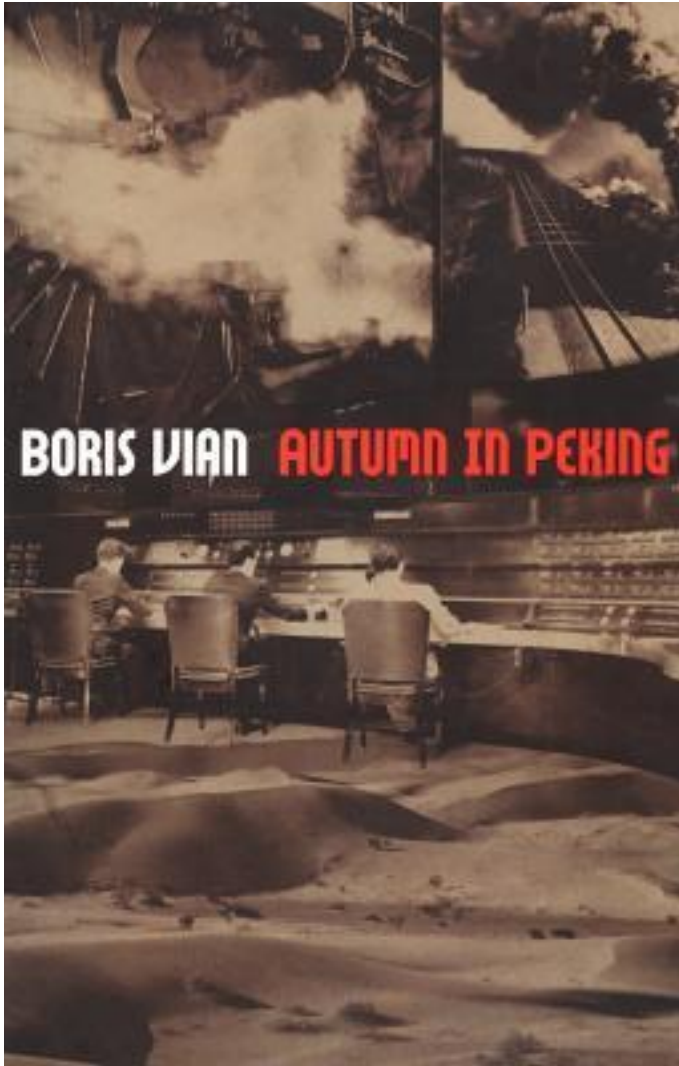

Boris Vian

Autumn in Peking



Title: Autumn in Peking

Author: Boris Vian

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Description

Boris Vian was a jack of all trades - although unfortunately his name was Boris and "Boris of all trades" never took off as a turn of phrase. But nevertheless Vian was a great songwriter, playwright, singer, jazz critic and, of course novelist so it should have been Boris instead of Jack. Vian's 1947 novel *Autumn in Peking* (*L'Automne à Pékin*) is perhaps Vian's most slapstick work, with an added amount of despair in its exotic recipe for a violent cocktail drink.

The story takes place in the imaginary desert called Exopotamie where all the leading characters take part in the building of a train station with tracks that go nowhere. Houses and buildings are destroyed to build this unnecessary structure - and in Vian's world waste not, make not.

In Alistair Rolls' pioneering study of Vian's novels, "The Flight of the Angels," he expresses that Exopotamie is a thinly disguised version of Paris, where after the war the city started changing its previous centuries of architecture to something more modern. Yes, something dull to take the place of what was exciting and mysterious.

Vian, in a mixture of great humor and unequal amount of disgust, introduces various 'eccentric' characters in this 'desert' adventure, such as Anne and Angel who are best friends; and Rochelle who is in love and sleeps with Anne, while Angel is madly in love with her.

Besides the trio there is also Doctor Mangemanche; the archeologist Athanagore Porphyroginite, his aide, Cuivre; and Pipo - all of them in a locality similar to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, where there is a tinge of darkness and anything is possible, except for happiness.

Insightful reviews

Nathaniel: Boris Vian is not a predictable author. I loved "Heartsnatcher," barely tolerated "Foam of the Daze" and "I Spit on Your Graves" was not intended to be a vehicle for his talents. For the first sixty odd pages of "Autumn in Peking" (a title with absolutely no bearing on the contents of the book), I was fairly convinced that I'd embarked on another nonsense festival that probably holds together better when all of the (supposedly brilliant) wordplay of the author has not been killed or made wooden by translation.

I was sustained at first (and rewarded throughout) by the way that Vian animates things in playful and unexpected ways: "She was wearing a short skirt and Angel's gaze made its way over her shiny, golden knees and insinuated itself between her two long and streamlined thighs. It was hot there, and refusing to listen to Angel, who wanted to pull back, the gaze decided to do its own thing and move further on up. Angel became increasingly embarrassed and regretfully closed his eyes, leaving his look to die on the young girl's skirt. Its cadaver remained there until the girl ran her hand over her skirt and unknowingly knocked it to the ground when she stood up several minutes later." This is Vian at his irreverent best. He is not content with a clever comparison or a frisky metaphor; he grounds his flights of fancy in narrative reality and bends every rule of physics and style to accommodate them. Sometimes, this can be annoying; as can

the vaguely Futurist obsession with technical and mechanical terms. But it is often refreshing, comic and memorable.

After the first sixty pages of the book, all of the characters to whom we have been introduced are en route to Exopotamie, the convenient referent-free, desert backdrop of "Autumn in Peking." In this non-place, a grab bag of satirical characters (the doctor, the priest, the blue collar worker, the playboy, the detestable manager, etc.) pursue their obsessions, set about trying to build a useless and destructive railroad or attempt to excavate a vaguely pharonic set of ruins. All of these pursuits have elements of absurd comedy; but the plot advances, primarily, around the question of who will sleep with whom.

Late in the scheme of things, Vian deepens his focus on Angel (male) who pines for Rochelle (female) who is constantly and obviously fornicating with Anne, a playboy who does not feel any deep loyalty to Rochelle. Angel is made to represent the over-precious, emotionally wrecked, obsessive suitor, out of touch with the realities of a sexual relationship, while Anne occupies the diametrically opposed, all too calloused self-serving position. Other characters of note attempt to bridge the gap between them and propose a more balanced way of being in the world.

The drama around the love triangle advances the book's central argument that things are ruined when they are treated as nothing more than objects—whether of obsession or of use. (Vian's writing style itself is busy proving the same thing with its irreverence towards concepts and expectations.) Living, breathing, chairs die when they are not appreciated as objects and women fall apart and spoil when they are simply used and in the broader world, work, for its own sake, is a doomed and shameful joke.

Anne will close the curtains, lovably: "For just about every living man, there exists one of these office types, a parasite man. That's the justification of the parasite man, this letter that'll straighten out the business of the living man. So he drags it out to prolong his existence, and the living man doesn't know about it . . . If every living man got up, searched the offices for his own personal parasite, and killed him . . ."

Rosa Ramôa: "Outono em Pequim" é uma espécie de manifesto criativo contra o racionalismo!!!

É a definição de surrealismo*

É o desprezo pela lógica e pelos padrões estabelecidos...

É irreal...

É imaginação sem limites...

É arte e poesia...

É anarquia?

É o homem e a natureza interpretados à não luz da razão!

É o sonho, o inconsciente e a imaginação!

É corrosão...cheia e vazia!

É sobre coisas tão importantes que não servem para nada*

Frank Dedge: (French version, titled *L'Automne à Pékin*)

The fact that Boris Vian wrote this book the same year he wrote *L'Écume de Jours* probably didn't help in its promotion. Which is a shame really as it is equally well-written and interesting in its literary madness.

Beginning with its misleading title (nowhere is Peking nor autumn mentioned in the book), the story continues in the spirit of *L'Écume* (or is it preceding it?), combining apparent naivety or simplicity of the characters with a layer of psychological insights. The tone is equally somber and depressing, despite an abundance of colorful scenery, and is entwined in a seemingly carelessness in the face of terrible actions, often resulting in the death of major characters.

I read the french version and I have to wonder how this book can be properly translated, as it is layered with constant plays of words and cultural references that must be impossible to translate. As such, I believe the foreign versions of any Vian's book to be less entertaining.

Sandra: E' il secondo Vian che leggo. Appena lette le best pagine l'atmosfera, il linguaggio, le tematiche "vianesche" sono emerse e mi hanno catturato ancora una volta. Sembrava che nulla fosse cambiato. Ci sono i temi cari allo scrittore: l'amore, Los Angeles, morte, l. a. uniqueness critica sociale e religiosa, affrontati nella solita maniera "surreale" di Vian. Invece, procedendo nella lettura, tutto è diverso rispetto a "la schiuma dei giorni". Là l'amore tra Chloè e Colin è un amore totalizzante e profondo che riempie l. a. vita (seppur caduco, come tutto). Qua, invece, percepisci un'atmosfera di inutilità e di negatività che non salva i personaggi nè i sentimenti. A partire dall'inutilità del titolo del libro, che nulla ha a che spartire con l'autunno nè con Pechino; poi l. a. trama: si parte in line with costruire una ferrovia in Exopotamia, un luogo desertico dove non vive nessuno. A che serve? Nessun personaggio della storia emerge positivamente. A partire dai personaggi femminili, che in "la schiuma dei giorni" sono delineati con dolcezza. Le donne sono rappresentate da Rochelle, donna "amata" da due uomini, Anne e Angel. Rochelle ha scelto Anne, ma non è una scelta felice. Rochelle è sciupata, giorno dopo giorno, dal sesso con Anne. Lui "la sfascia. l. a. demolisce". Rochelle "ama" Anne, o meglio, "fa l'amore" con lui, ma andrebbe a letto anche con Angel. Anne "ama" Rochelle, ma ritiene che le donne non sono indispensabili, nè fisicamente nè intellettualmente, perchè sono troppo limitate. E, dopo averla sciupata, se ne vuole liberare. Angel "ama" Rochelle, ma sostiene che "le donne non hanno nient'altro in keeping with attirare un uomo. Solo il loro corpo." Non si salva nessuno. L'unico personaggio che mi ha fatto simpatia è l'abate Petitjean, un buffo prete che recita "singolari" preghiere e non dimentica Los Angeles sua umanità. Il sapore che rimane al termine del libro è quello della sconfitta e dell'inutilità del vivere. Gli dò tre stelle solo perchè è Vian.

André Benjamim: Comprei *O Outono em Pequim* (a minha edição não é a que está na imagem)

quando nunca tinha ouvido falar do autor. É uma das coisas que me dá mais prazer: comprar livros ao acaso, de autores que não conheço; coisa que faço cada vez menos, porque por cada descoberta magnífica, maravilhosa, deslumbrante, e outros adjetivos elogiosos, pelo menos meia dúzia de volumes servem para ficar a encher as estantes de pó. Comecei a lê-lo numa noite, nos tempos agora tão distantes da faculdade, em que insistiram para sair, e ficar em casa sozinho não me agradava. Nos bancos de um café primeiro, e nas escadas de uma igreja depois, os meus semi-ébrios colegas não entenderam porque me ria tanto, até que os efeitos do álcool os elucidou. A escrita de Boris Vian embriaga-nos - e como Charles Baudelaire aconselha, devemos andar sempre embriagados - com whiskey, amor, ou literatura. Pois, não é de cerveja, sexo, e pasquins de província que Baudelaire fala, mas as maravilhosas nuvens não deixam de passear pelo profundo azul do mar por causa disso.

Maxime: Boris Vian prouve une fois de plus qu'il est maître de l'absurde, du fantastique, de l'usage des expressions au sens propre du terme. De l. a. development d'un chemin de fer au milieu du désert, à los angeles prise de température d'une chaise, il écrit sans complexe comme à son habitude.

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