



Paris Peasant

Louis Aragon , Simon Watson Taylor (Introduction, Translator)

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Paris Peasant (1926) is one of the central works of Surrealism, yet Exact Change's edition is the first U.S. publication of Simon Watson Taylor's authoritative translation, completed after consultations with the author. Unconventional in form--Aragon consciously avoided recognizable narration or character development--*Paris Peasant* is, in the author's words, -a mythology of the modern.- The book uses the city of Paris as a stage or framework, and Aragon interweaves his text with images of related ephemera: cafe menus, maps, inscriptions on monuments and newspaper clippings. A detailed description of a Parisian arcade (nineteenth-century precursor to the mini-mall) and another of the Buttes-Chaumont park, are among the great set pieces within Aragon's swirling prose of philosophy, dream and satire. Andre Breton wrote of this work: -no one could have been a more astute detector of the unwonted in all its forms; no one else could have been carried away by such intoxicating reveries about a sort of secret life of the city. . . .-

Paris Peasant Details

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From Reader Review Paris Peasant for online ebook

Michael sinkofcabbages says

travelling with your mind as well as your feet. always carry your dead as they are the curtain of love to the world around you. experience.

Jennifer Coakley says

Well, that's about 8 hours of my life I'll never get back.

Eric says

Start at the last chapter, then move to the first. Camouflaged as an inch-by-inch inventory of certain favorite areas of Paris, Aragon has created a manifesto on the purpose of literature: As a means of personal and phenomenological exploration.

Pierre IL Vecchio says

Je me suis lassé de ce livre, qui avait pourtant bien commencé .
De longues descriptions concernant des sujets qui petit à petit ont fini par me lasser. Dommage !

aya says

I expected this to be much more difficult than it was. Often funny and light with stabs of darkness and brutality, Louis Aragon manages to be charming and intelligent even during the few eye-rolling moments. Almost cuttingly intelligent on the human "feeling for nature" and his inclination to religion via desire/need for order.

Richard Armstrong says

Very promising!

Debra says

A wonderful surrealist romp through Paris with much time spent in the unusual Parc des Buttes Chaumont near Pere-Lachaise in the 19th Arrondissement.

A Cubierta says

3,7

Bennett says

what did i think? it's fucking Paris Peasant, for chrissakes. does it matter?

Czarny Pies says

C'est à lire seulement si on le doit parce l'on suit un cours sur le surréalisme. Le Paysan de Paris fait un clin d'Oeil au Paysan Pervers de Restife de la Brétonne. Le roman de Restife de la Brétonne décrit une déchéance. Le roman d'Aragon décrit un trajectoire qui tourne en ronds.

Le surréalisme est un mouvement qui n'a pas produit une seule oeuvre d'intérêt dans la domaine de la littérature. Les résultats ont été carrément meilleurs dans les domaines de la peinture, de la sculpture et le cinéma.

D'autre part, le surréalisme discute bien ce qui explique sans doute pourquoi on continue a le garder au programme au premier cycle.

David Corvine says

Some beautiful passages of prose poetry interspersed with quasi-philosophical and theological opinion. Mixed bag.

Eileen says

Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* (*Le Paysan de Paris*, 1926) is, first and foremost, its author's attempt "to use the accepted novel-form as the basis for the production of a new kind of novel that would break all traditional rules governing the writing of fiction, one that would be neither a narrative (story) nor a character study (a portrait), a novel that the critics would be obliged to approach empty-handed . . . because in this instance the rules of the game would all have been swept aside." My original intent, Aragon would go on to say some forty years later, was to reverse the process of *myth* → *romance* that occurs when people have lost faith in the myth. *Paris Peasant* was to be a novel (roman) that would read as a mythology of the modern. "Then, without feeling reluctant any longer, I set about discovering the face of the infinite beneath the concrete forms which were escorting me, walking the length of the earth's avenues" (from page 115 of *Paris Peasant*). Tired of resorting to abstract fancies to understand the world, Aragon has resolved to trust in the

imaginative arrangement of his immediate sensory input. In his original introduction he argues that,

Humanity's stupid rationalism contains an unimaginably large element of materialism. This fear of error which everything recalls to me at every moment of the flight of my ideas, this mania for control, makes man prefer reason's imagination to the imagination of the senses. And yet it is always the imagination alone which is at work. Nothing, neither strict logic nor overwhelming impression, can convince me about reality, can convince me that I am not basing reality on a delirium of interpretation. But in the case of the senses, man, after absorbing the teachings of various traditional schools, has begun to have doubts about himself; one can imagine by what play of mirrors this has been at the expense of the opposite thought process, reasoning. And here we have man a prey to a mathematics. In trying to free himself of matter he has become the prisoner of the properties of matter.

In a nutshell: Aragon has taken two disparate spheres - that of the real world, as revealed through his senses, and that of the imagination - and now seeks to elucidate his vision of a city whose people and passages conceal a rich subconscious that can be glimpsed only by the most open-minded viewer.

Read more.

Andrew says

The back of this novel has Aragon stating: "I was seeking...a new kind of novel that would break all the traditional rules governing the writing of fiction, one that would be neither a narrative (a story) nor a character study (a portrait), a novel that the critics would be obliged to approach empty-handed."

In terms of achieving this objective, Aragon has succeeded. However his creation, because of its eschewing of plot and character, is - perhaps unsurprisingly - quite a difficult read. Our heads have to be re-wired against expectation - both of the 'what happens next' variety, but also of the expectation as to what we hope to gain by reading this book. Despite some excellent descriptive prose and occasional moments of surprise I remain to be convinced as to the relevance of such a book in today's age. Much as the impact of punk against the establishment created an uproar during its time that cannot be adequately appreciated unless you were there. Such, I imagine, was the impact of surrealism. Yet surrealism is now absolutely prevalent in society on a mainstream level, from children's cartoons through to film and advertising, and this work appears almost academic (in both senses of the word) when read amidst this backdrop.

This in itself wouldn't matter if the 'story' was engaging, but on its own terms whilst I found it an easy read in terms of the actual prose I couldn't get sufficiently interested in the book to enjoy it. Enjoyment - whilst maybe a trite expectation - is an essential 'in' to 'getting' a book, in my opinion. I couldn't really get in, in this case.

Although I did like: "The idea of God is nothing more than a sign of mental laziness".

Buck says

Surrealism's pretty childish when you think about it. It's as if, around 1924, a bunch of snotty French hipsters took a look at their society and said: 'Oh yeah? Well, we're going to do the opposite of everything you do, cuz yer stupid.' So they tossed out the civilized values of reason, hard work and common sense, and

set up their own private Bizarro world, a topsy-turvy kingdom ruled by dreams, play and imagination. It was a willed immaturity, a conscious regression to the infantile state, and I think the original Surrealists were deluding themselves about the extent to which their fabulous little slumber party was subsidized by the grown-up culture they'd spurned. You can, for instance, choose to view your city as a playground and trip out on its oneiric vistas, but it might be worthwhile to reflect on the poor working stiff who built it for you. Sure, the kids can get high in their funky jam space all night, but who's paying the bills?

As you might have gathered, I'm a little too old, and much too square, to have a whole lot of sympathy for the Surrealist project. It's ironic, then, that one of my favourite books ever is a monument of Surrealism, written by perhaps the biggest daddy-o of all those hep cats, Louis Aragon (and doubly ironic in that the middle-aged, Communist Aragon epitomizes a type of French intellectual I absolutely loathe). But who'd want to be totally consistent in their prejudices? Why on earth can't an anarcho-vegan punk listen to Spoon in his off-hours? (What? They're a good band. Shut up.)

Le Paysan de Paris is not quite a novel (*roman* was a swear word in the Surrealist vocabulary) and it's too documentary to be a prose poem. If you want to get hung up on genre, you could call it a travelogue, but it's a travelogue with a bad case of agoraphobia, never venturing far from a couple of tiny patches of downtown Paris. Aragon spends the first half of the book exploring every inch of the Passage de l'Opera, one of those covered arcades dating back to the 19th century that are now recognized as forerunners of the modern shopping mall (see Walter Benjamin's massive *Arcades Project*, or then again, don't.) By the time Aragon got around to writing about it, the place had already gone to seed and was about to be demolished to make way for yet another of Haussmann's boulevards. But for Aragon, the Passage's weird sex appeal is bound up with its very ephemerality. The place fascinates him as a repository of memories, desires, fashions – a whole hidden history of Paris mouldering away in a sleazy arrondissement. His obsessively detailed evocations of the arcade's cafes, hair salons and *louche* massage parlours are not so much surreal as hyperreal; he thinks nothing of devoting an entire delirious page to the unusual dress worn by a saleswoman in a handkerchief shop; hell, it takes him a paragraph just to figure out what colour it is:

The whole skirt has a garish half-tint (use your imagination): it's a sort of plum-brandy red, a vinaigrette-ish tone that looks as much like a living colour as costume spangles look like diamonds. It's reminiscent of dying gooseberry, of pecked-over cherry, it resembles those ribbons on Palmes Academiques that turn to acid in daylight...wait, I've got it, the dress is litmus paper tinted slightly pink by urine.

Now you might be thinking a hundred pages about some condemned shopping centre in old Paris would get to be a bit much. But the joy of reading *Le Paysan* is in watching a brilliantly inventive mind go to work on the faded texture of everyday life, bringing out the beauty and strangeness lying just below the dusty, fly-specked surface. This, I have to admit, is one of the nobler aspects of Surrealism: the determination to seek paradise, not in some other, ideal world, but right here, in the depths of the quotidian. A woman's glance, a moronic ad, a row of medical supplies in a display window: all are mundane, all are sacramental. Each has its meaning and its mystery, if we'd only look.

I'm almost farcically unqualified to be dispensing wisdom in any form, but I sometimes feel that our spiritual fortitude is tested less by outright disaster than by all the drab, pointless shit we rub up against every day. It can wear you down after a while, you know? 'Habit,' as Beckett said, 'is a great deadener.' I still have no idea what literature is for, but one thing I believe it can do is to break through the crust of habit, to restore the world, if that's not too portentous a phrase for what should be a humble task.

'I am already twenty-six years old,' Aragon tells us in his preface. 'Am I still privileged to take part in this miracle? How long shall I retain this sense of the marvellous suffusing everyday existence?'

The answer, it turned out, was: not long. But it was long enough to write a book as marvellous as the brief vision he was granted. I know my world would be a little poorer without it.

tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

I usually find Surrealist writers, at least in translation, to be dreadfully boring & wooden & forced. The best "Surrealist" writing is by people who were either never Surrealists or were only peripherally associated w/ Surrealism - like Raymond Roussel & Raymond Queneau. Of course, you have to be named Raymond to be a good Surrealist writer - except for Antonin Artaud.. However, I liked this Louis Aragon bk. On the other hand, contrary to what the back-cover blurb says, I wdn't call this bk Surrealist either, so..

Geoff says

As a placemaker for a review of this book, I invite you to enjoy this piece of modern minimalism:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLwhDI...>

and an even better cut off the same record:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As5_Q...

Sarah Léa says

S-U-B-L-I-M-E

(and sooo Paris)

Nate D says

A paean to the chance discoveries and revealings of error, a treatise on the peculiar magic and mystery of place, a vast theoretical framework for experiencing the world.

Aragon, despite his many novels and essay, was foremost a poet, I think, and this shows in his rich and unexpected use of language. Also in the tendency of his words to sometimes lift off, unmoored from the actual narrative context that inspired them. Not that this is really a narrative in its basic sense: Aragon's odd travelogues of Paris place (an arcade (in the pre-mall, covered pedestrian commercial passage sense), a park) are just jumping-off points, brief perches from which to fire off piercing observation and musing.

And his thoughts are very worth it. Particularly in the first and longest section. At one point he chides himself after a long tirade against the hazards of eminent domain abuse, calling himself out for assuming that the reader actually shared his positions and preoccupations. Except he had been right: I did and do share his obsessions and thoughts, even all this space and time across most of a century.

And as far as novels that are part memoir and part philosophic leaping-off point, this is far far better than *Nadja*.

