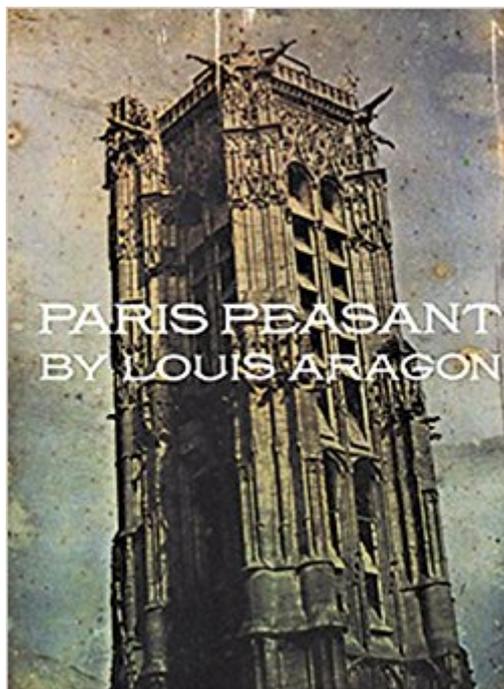


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Paris Peasant



Synopsis

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: caf  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. Andr  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. . . ."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Louis Aragon, Paris Peasant (Gallimard, 1926) Aragon, one of the people at the core of the dada, and later the surrealist, movements in France, is a fantastic poet, like most of them were. However, I'm finding, as I move out to explore the prose of the movements after twenty years of enjoying (and being influenced by) the poetry, that most of them were far better poets than they were novelists. There are exceptions, of course (Rene Daumal's unfinished Mount Analogue and Breton/Eluard's Les Champs Magnetiques both made my best-reads-of-the-year list in the early nineties), but Paris Peasant isn't one of them. The book's not bad, for what it is, but it could have been so much more. It

encompasses three prose works of Aragon's, two of which seem to be that curious mixture of fiction and nonfiction which has become so popular in recent years, and the third of which is indescribable by normal means other than to say it's prose. The first is a travelogue of sorts, a kind of gutter-level guidebook to an area of Paris that most tourists likely stayed well away from. At a hundred twelve pages, it's by far the longest piece in the book. It's also written in almost stream-of-consciousness style, with no real attempt at coherence or flow, making it a more difficult read than it needed to be. The second details an evening Aragon spent with Breton and Marcel Noll strolling through Paris; it's the strongest of the three, the only one where Aragon's long diversions (which are likely to put one in mind of James or Joyce, though Aragon lacks the command of language of either; that, however, could easily be the fault of the translator rather than Aragon himself) really seem as if they're contributing to the piece, rather than distracting.

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