



Once Upon the River Love

Andrei Makine, Geoffrey Strachan (Translator)

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In this brilliant, affecting novel, acclaimed Russian novelist Andrei Makine takes readers to the vast, remote forests of eastern Siberia to tell the story of Alyosha, Utkin, and Samurai, three boys on the verge of manhood. Isolated by history as well as geography, with only the passing lights of the Transsiberian train to assure them of an outside world, the three friends yearn for experiences their small village cannot provide. But after trekking by snowshoe to a cinema in the neighboring city, their whole world is changed forever as they watch the gorgeous spectacle of a motion picture starring the French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo and a cast of beautiful women. Written from the perspective of twenty years later, Once Upon the River Love follows the destinies of these three young idealists up to the present day, to the boardwalks of Brighton Beach and the jungles of Central America. Once Upon the River Love is a beautifully rendered novel that demonstrates Andrei Makine's remarkable ability to recreate the past with such precision that the present becomes all the more poignant.

Once Upon the River Love Details

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Author : Andreï Makine , Geoffrey Strachan (Translator)

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From Reader Review Once Upon the River Love for online ebook

Pete says

I savoured every page. Sometimes I had to stop and let the words sink in a little deeper.

Francisco Seguin says

A novel of such mystical beauty with subtleties so rich, each word melts in your mouth like honey. A credit to Geoffrey Strachan's wonderful translation of a tale steeped in abandonment one can't help but be moved by the prose. Once Upon The River Love is a once in a lifetime treasure. Don't deny yourself the pleasure and read it now!

Devin says

This is one book that has stayed with me over the years since I finished it. The details have faded away, but the beautiful feeling I experienced from Makine's prose still revisits me from time to time.

Igor Guzun says

Andreï Makine a fost ales, la 3 martie 2016, în Academia Franceză, iar una dintre cărările lui impresionante este „Pe vremea fluviului Amur”.

Pentru cititorii francezi ai romanului „Pe vremea fluviului Amur”, de Andrei Makine, Amour înseamnă, în primul rând, dragoste și apoi numele celui mai lung râu din Rusia. Cei trei eroi ai romanului se aruncă în ambele: în valurile râului Amur ... și în valurile dragostei – amour, cum zice Belmondo, care este cea de-a patra prezență constantă din carte... continuarea recenziei este aici: <http://goo.gl/vGfJ69>

Jamie says

“[Nostalgia:] of the most terrible kind: for places and faces one has never seen. Which one mourns as being lost forever. Young savage that I was, I could not know that this was simply love that had not found its object.”

Txe Polon says

El estilo de Makine me gusta. Ya me gustó cuando leí hace años *Le testament français*, y me ha vuelto a gustar ahora en esta segunda lectura. Y me gusta la ambientación, la atmósfera que crea, los personajes que dibuja. Pero en este caso me ha parecido un tanto vacuo, como si detrás de esa historia de fascinación por Occidente no hubiera nada, con lo que muchos pasajes se me aparecían como meros ejercicios estéticos. Sin embargo, he disfrutado de la lectura y seguro que volveré a Makine en el futuro.

Kseniya Melnik says

Makine is one of my favorite contemporary authors, someone whose writing is so close to my soul and my heart. This is my second time reading this one, and I love it even more than the first time. I love the way he describes the setting (such fantastic imagery); the dreams, yearnings and desires of the boys. The language is so poetic and, aside from a couple of places, it doesn't go over the top. Of course, this story is written from the point of looking twenty years back by our narrator, and it's no wonder that there is such harmony of themes and motifs, such tenderness in description of even the ugliest parts of life in that forsaken Eastern Siberian town. It is a meditation of youth, on East and West, and on dreaming.

Friederike Knabe says

East meets West through images and imagination. For most readers in North America and western Europe it will be difficult, if not impossible, to visualize the utter remoteness of a Siberian village lost in the vast plains of the taiga. Life is completely controlled by nature - winters last seven months or more. Before allowing the land and the people to recover in a short spring, winter hits with another vicious snowstorm. Only the houses' chimneys are seen protruding in the expanse of white. Digging out a path is like hollowing out a deep tunnel back to the surface. Makine's intricate portrayal of the land's extraordinary beauty, whether under snow or during the spring thaw, reveals his deep connection to nature and his Siberian past. It is a backdrop and, almost, a participant in this engaging story.

First of all, though, this is a growing-up story of three local boys: Dmitri, the narrator, and his friends Utkin and Samurai. For them "the beauty of the land was the least of the preoccupations in the land where we were born..." It was taken for granted. The reader senses the equilibrium between the boys and their natural environment. A vivid account of their thrill at swimming in the icy cold current of the Olyei River and being confronted with unwelcome onlookers. Taking a steam sauna in a remote bath hut in the forest reflects their intimacy and happiness at being friends.

Daily life is also controlled by the political powers: the story is anchored in the early 1970s and Soviet rule dominates all aspects of it. Their village, having played an important role in the past and during the war, it is now only a shadow of itself: controlled by "gold, the gulag, and the taiga". The boys accept their reality while dreaming of a different world beyond their community on the shores of the Amour River and inhospitable Siberia. The Trans-Siberian train speeding by in the night symbolizes the wider world, the link between Occident and Orient...

For the three teenage friends, growing up also includes an increasing awareness of sexuality and curiosity for women and love. Eroticism and sensuality, let alone "love", had never been part of the local people's vocabulary, going back to the village's founding some 300 years ago by Cossacks. Carving out an existence has always been rough and challenging. Now, any sense of reality or knowledge of the outside world was

filtered through Soviet-style propaganda: reaching or surpassing the monthly quotas; winning whatever battle was being fought. Women and men were, above all, socialist partners with a mission to fulfill the expectations of the system. For boys, eager to explore their blossoming feelings, this was not a good introduction.

Into this bleak and harsh reality "strolls" Jean-Paul Belmondo, charming, easy-going and successful ... and the boys and the villagers are changed forever: Belmondo appears on screen in "Red October". The impact could not have been more dramatic if he had come in person. The political slogan banners at the Politburo pale in comparison to his big poster in the main village square. He represents a life in the "Occident" that is fantastic as it is alien, stirring the boys' imagination. There, people have an easy time, life is rich, and the hero usually wins the girl. For the villagers, it is impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality. Through many repeat visits Dmitri and his friends slowly understand the story line. Each scene, every small item is analyzed and interpreted as authentic reflection of life in the West. The boys increasingly live an alternative reality - they visualize Paris, Venice and more. The West has met the East.

Makine's portrayal of the boys, their emotions and experiences of growing up is beautifully presented. There is Olga, Samurai's Francophile older friend, who introduces the boys to French literature and culture; there is Utkin's grandfather and Dmitri's aunt. They all come to life and round off the picture. Humour and irony balance the serious exploration of the challenges faced by young people living in remote places like Siberia and with ambitions to change their lives. They feel torn between Occident and Orient, between the unknown and the familiar worlds. Despite their different personalities and ambitions, they each have to choose their future direction.

Similarly to other Makine books, the story is embedded in a short narrative set decades later in a far away place. It sets a frame and also allows for reflection of the lives lived. *Once Upon the River Love* is very rich novel. It is specific in its captivating detail of land and people while at the same time raising pertinent general issues of fiction versus fact, imagination versus action and the role of these in forming young people's minds everywhere. I read the novel in the original French and was captivated by the exquisite style and richness of language. The emotional depth of the story reveals the Russian roots of the author. Read it slowly and savour its beauty.

Runa says

Light and beautiful, haunted by the idea of growing suddenly and forcefully, but actually growing slowly and effortlessly, like a hesitant wild animal. A book about children growing up, about the land of the desolate taiga growing into the luxuriant forests of sexual desire, about a very Eastern Russia gradually growing more and more Western.

And yet its subtle self-subversion at the end (if the narrator lied about the woman in the opening passage, how much of what he said can we consider true? did Samurai ever really go to South America? etc) gently halts all the growth we had witnessed. Is the West true? Is living in New York worth anything when you eat in a Russian restaurant anyway? Are youthful dreams useless and ridiculous? None of these are asked explicitly, but they simmer under the final episodes of the novel, again like a small wild animal that traces its steps back to its burrow.

Erika says

Wonderfully poetic description of a Siberian childhood and adolescence. Mysterious and affecting. I want more.

David Butler says

The title put me off - it's dreadful! I all but gave up after the opening chapter. I'm delighted I didn't. This is a remarkable account of the gulf between adolescent longing and harsh reality, an unpredictable, evocative and highly original coming-of-age story which sheds a light on the Siberia of the USSR.

Sara says

Having loved Dreams of My Russian Summers, I was very disappointed in this book. Either it was intellectually above me or too confusing to follow. I did not become involved with the characters nor was I sorry to finally reach the story's end.

MihaElla says

... "si, pentru prima oara, am surprins acea sclipire chinuita, intrebatoare: incercarea de a intelege mozaicul frumusetii, de a-i patrunde sensul..."

Kate says

The other Makine novels I've read made me twitch, yet I kept coming back for more. At last my faith has been rewarded.

Maria Nicoleta says

Great bildungsroman, the narrative voice has an amazing sensitivity to environment.
