



Voice Over

Céline Curiol

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A lonely young woman works as an announcer in Paris's Gare du Nord, surrounded by people yet separate from them. Obsessed with a man who loves another, she suffers alone as she waits for him. In her solitude, she wanders the streets of the modern city, playing on the edge of danger, seeking connection. Her interactions with strangers create a confrontation between the intimate and the anonymous, revealing to her man's most human desires.

Just thirty, debut literary novelist Céline Curiol has the ability to write, with great psychological tension, about the innermost depth of her characters, with all their contradictions, impulses, and humanity. She captures an existential and witty vision of our contemporary world.

Voice Over was recently published in the author's native France to great acclaim, and rights have been sold in fourteen countries. The novel appears now for the first time in English.

Voice Over Details

Date : Published October 9th 2007 by McClelland & Stewart (first published 2005)

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Author : Céline Curiol

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From Reader Review Voice Over for online ebook

Deonne Kahler says

I read this after I read Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, and it was a good followup. Both books feature lost characters, reckless acts, and lots of booze, but unlike Hemingway's book, Curiol's was far less depressing. Not that it's any cheerier but, unlike in Sun, there was a sort of redemption for the protagonist in her quest for love and finding her place in the world. Plus the prose is gorgeous (translated from the French). Highly recommended.

Sharlene says

“They have known each other for a long time. She has never quite been able to recall the moment when they met, the place, the precise day, whether she shook his hand or they kissed on the cheek. Nor has she ever thought to ask him. She does have a first memory, though. As she was climbing into her coat in the narrow hallway of an unkempt apartment, she had caught his look of distress. The woman he had flirted with all evening was refusing to leave with him. He was trying to persuade her with an insistent barrage of words, which fell to pieces in the face of the majestic creature. She thought the idea of being suddenly deprived of the object of his affections must have been more than he could bear just then. And seeing him this way, in love, had moved her. She had slipped between the two of them and said, I’m off. But he had not replied.”

Sigh.

One of the more difficult books I read this month. I was torn between feeling sorry for and being just so irritated by the nameless main character.

Somehow I ended up reading yet another story about a lonely love stuck woman. In love, foolishly oh foolishly so, with another woman’s man.

And she feels it so.

As I suppose does anyone in an unrequited kind of love. It hurts so much yet she cannot let him go.

There is a wistful kind of romance to this story. She is that voice you hear announcing the trains at the Gare du Nord. She has hardly any friends. And seems to be a magnet for weird men. She pretends to be a prostitute, she shoplifts, she is locked into the apartment of a man she had met in a cafe. And there is that hint of a childhood trauma, which is only detailed at the end. She is obviously desperate for attention. Yet she does get people’s attention everyday when she makes her announcements. But hers is a disembodied voice. One that will never be recognized. She makes all these announcements for people departing and arriving, yet she has never left France. It is a rather claustrophobic world that she lives in. I can hardly get a breath in.

So I pity her and yet I cannot stand her. She makes all these infuriating decisions. And I keep wondering, what? What is she doing? Why is she so naive? So foolish? And so I struggle to make my way through this book. I start and stop reading it, because I want also to read more of Curiol’s Parisian world and of her way

of noticing the everyday things. And who doesn't love Paris – or at least the thought of it. Although in the nameless woman's Paris, there seems to be a predator lurking around every corner (!).

“The Jardin du Luxembourg and its hodge-podge of tourists. Rings of chairs arranged as if for the conversations of invisible characters. It's up to anyone out for a walk to imagine, according to the layout of these metals remains, what went on here before his arrival.”

So while I didn't quite enjoy reading it. No that doesn't sound right. Maybe it's more like that it was such a challenge reading *Voice Over* that I am surprised, glad that I managed to finish it.

It was a relief when *Voice Over* finally came to an end, but voice is vibrant, authentic, exacting. Paul Auster says it so much better in the foreword:

“Curiol's eye for detail is so sharp, so exact in its renderings of the world beyond her character's skin, that even as the narrative concentrates on the actions of a single individual, we are simultaneously given a crystal-clear picture of French society at large – the new France, the France of the early twenty-first century.”

Jill says

The long, winding interior monologue of a depressed, unstable thirty-something white girl haunted by her past. Obsessed with a man she doesn't really know, desperate for something she knows she doesn't really want. Inexplicable encounters, uncertain motivations, a permeating sense of dread and darkness. Am I selling it? Does it sound original? Do you want to read it? No?

Yes you do. Yes you do, yes you do.

If you appreciate stunning writing, grammatically and stylistically. If you appreciate phenomenal pacing and exceptional mood. If you appreciate individual, layered portrayals of mental illness -- with all the ups and downs it can incur; the mania that can cause our protagonist's regular chaotic encounters. If if if. Shame, fear, love, shrinking back, pressing inexorably forward. Scavenging for emotional scraps. Replaying and reinterpreting moments. Saying yes to things you should decline, declining what could change your life. Hope, hope, hope, and then the pure shattering of every anchor -- and, weightless, there is only one way to go, and it is completely out of your control.

And if you appreciate the possibility that there are relationships you cannot define, people who strike into your life like flame but cannot be explained to a casual observer. If you have ever questioned the value or necessity of emotional reciprocity ----- but shoved that questioning far, far down, because *oh no oh no love only exists when BOTH feel it* but oh, come on: love isn't it at all. We do our inner landscapes a disservice trying to call any of this *love*. There must be another word. There must be something else.

Voice Over is, richly and unapologetically, *else*.

I had this at 4 stars, down from the 4.5 it absolutely deserves -- but I kept looking at it in mild pain. Because -- while this wasn't perfect, I read it at the perfect fucking time. Wait for yours and then: just be honest about what you find, if only to yourself.

Al Gellene says

A drunken, almost accidental kiss gives life to the obsession of the heroine of this engaging, intense novel. She is unnamed and the story, like a voice over to a film, is told, in the third person, from her point of view. She had been obsessed with this man for some time, and the kiss is just what she needs to bring hope to her fantasies. He is involved in a serious relationship with another woman who is a foil for the central character, everything she is not, self assured, glibly interacting with others, sure of her self on the social scene. The heroine is at sea when it comes to relationships with other people. Her assignations, mostly with strangers, are as if she is in a dreamlike state and is compelled to submit to the others' desires, although she draws the line when one of them wants to tie her up.

The atmosphere of the novel is tense as you wait for the heroine to be driven over the edge. She works as an announcer at Gar de Nord, a Paris train station, a disembodied voice, blandly relating to the travelers the time and track of departure of their trains, a voice over for them. It is the perfect job for her, detached, unemotional, distant, somewhere where she can be safe.

The heroine hides a traumatic event from her childhood. One gets the sense that this incident has driven her entire life. It is so shameful and embarrassing for her that the one time she told someone about it, her best friend, it spelled the end of their relationship. She could not bear to have contact with her any more.

Her isolation from the world around her becomes extreme by the end of the book. Nonetheless, she achieves a resolution of her conflicts that allows her to continue on with a spark of hope.

Experiencing the heroine's trials and tribulations is at times disturbing, but the author has built a compelling character, more than one dimensional despite her obsession. She is able to convey the heroine's intense compulsion for her 'lover' without making her seem distastefully manic. I recommend this novel highly, although readers who are looking for something light and airy will be sorely disappointed.

qtasha says

I like this book is spite of not knowing what the hell is about. I like to read it again because I like surreal literature.

Andrew Smith says

I'm told that this book reads better in its native French, but as I learnt little from studying the language for five years I had to settle for the (dodgy) translation. A first person narrative - with no dialogue at all - set in Paris, this book tracks a young woman's obsession with the male partner of a friend. As the story progresses her behaviour becomes more and more unpredictable as she gradually descends into madness. Not quite as dark as it sounds, this book is hardly going to have you laughing out loud but it's very well written and surprisingly addictive.

Karel-Willem Delrue says

Sehnsucht en melancholie in Parijs

"Deze week is een tijd van optimisme en positieve gevoelens", leest het naamloze hoofdpersonage terloops in een verlopen horoscoop. De huidige stand van de sterren is de personages van Curiol echter minder gunstig gezind. *Parijse stemmen* is het grauwe portret van een jonge vrouw die alle treinen die ertoe doen in haar leven heeft gemist.

In haar dans der eenzaamheid is het hoofdpersonage blind voor de schoonheid van de stad om zich heen. Parijs lijkt in deze roman leeggelopen. De enigen die zijn achtergebleven, zijn de toeristendrommen die "als opwindpoppetjes een bepaalde richting ingestuurd worden" en een handvol personages dat kampt met een fundamentele eenzaamheid en een diepgeworteld onvermogen om te communiceren met elkaar. Niet toevallig werkt *Zij* (het vrouwelijke hoofdpersonage wiens naam nooit wordt genoemd) als omroepster in Gare du Nord: ze richt zich dagelijks tot een enorme groep toehoorders, maar ontvangt nooit antwoord en wordt nooit herkend. Curiol heeft haar protagonist helemaal ontdaan van een eigen identiteit: niet alleen vervliegt haar stem onbeantwoord door de stationshallen en wordt haar naam nooit vermeld, ze moet die naam die haar uniek had kunnen maken blijkbaar ook nog delen met een actrice. Op het moment van hun ontmoeting zit die laatste in haar loge gebogen over een stuk spiegel: een gefragmenteerd beeld van een aan diggelen gevallen identiteit.

Met hetzelfde cynisme en fatalisme als de Franse grootmeester Emile Zola laat Curiol haar personages wroeten op deze aardkluit en worstelen tegen hogere machten. Dat ze het onderspit zullen moeten delven, dat staat in de sterren geschreven. De debutante gunt haar personages geen rust of geluk. Zelfs de gezinnetjes die met hun kroost willen genieten van een onvergetelijk ogenblik aan een Parijse carroussel eindigen ruziënd en machtelos omwille van hun huilende kinderen. Ook een reeks schijnbaar toevallige ontmoetingen biedt geen soelaas. Met een welhaast masochistisch plezier laat Curiol hen tegen elkaar opboksen en kijkt ze toe hoe ze elkaar in hun onhandigheid steeds verder wegduwen in de vergetelheid en de tristesse. Ook in de sloten koffie en de glimmende, boterige croissants vinden haar personages geen troost.

De manier waarop Curiol een jeugdtrauma in deze roman opvoert is wat klef en haalt de beklemmende sfeer van de getergde personages in een desolaat Parijs wat onderuit. Toch is *Parijse stemmen* een sterk debuut van een jonge schrijfster die de psyche van een door eenzaamheid verteerd hoofdpersonage blootlegt in de traditie van de Franse naturalisten.

Jerry Levy says

I'm partial to French novels that harken back to the type of existential themes that Camus and Sartre used to write. It's about a woman who has a crappy job at a train station working as an announcer. She so wants to connect with others and because she wants to escape her loneliness, finds herself in murky, dangerous situations. It's probably better in the original French but still a good read in English

Christopher says

Voice Over, by Céline Curiol, translated from the French by Sam Richard.

Deeply dark, at times tragic, *Voice Over* is an extremely well-written debut novel. Curiol manages to create what seems like a trance-like 255 page sequence. My heart ached for the deeply troubled protagonist.

Best Translated Book of 2008 Shortlist by Three Percent, University of Rochester.

Vivone Os says

BOOK CLUB (za lipanj 2016)

Knjigu sam ?itala kao zadatak za book club, s tim što je zadatak bio malo druga?iji nego ina?e. Imali smo blind date with a book. Svatko je odabrao jednu svoju knjigu, umotao ju da se ne vidi koja je i svaki ?lan kluba je izvukao nasumice. Ja sam dobila ovu. Nisam znala ništa ni o knjizi ni o autorici. Knjiga mi je bila strašno teška, izdeprimirala me je, izbedirala, ubila u pojam. U po?etku mi se još i svidjela i imala sam neka o?ekivanja od radnje, ali kako se primicala kraju bili mi je sve teže uzeti ju u ruke i nastaviti ?itati.

Glavna junakinja je naivna, nepromišljena, nesigurna, nema samopouzdanja, teško joj je pri?ati s ljudima. Uvijek upada u neke glupe i neugodne situacije jer ili ne zna odbiti, ili je morbidno znatiželjna što ?e se dogoditi (a na kraju samo shvati da je bila glupava jer je uop?e išla to isprobati). Uo?ava kako bi se možda mogla promijeniti što se ti?e odnosa s drugim ljudima, ali ništa ne poduzima da bi to stvarno i promijenila. Knjiga me baš izmorila i nadam se da bar neko vrijeme ne?u ?itati nešto tako teško.

Marca says

Mulle meeldis selle raamatu stiil, kuid ma ei osanud kuidagi sellele naisele kaasa elada, nii võõrad olid tema probleemid ja käitumine mulle. Mulle meeldib ka erinevaid rolle välja mõelda, aga mitte sellepärist, et ma enda elu üldse ei elaks. Ma ei tea, kas oli see lugu ehk posttraumaatilise stressi kirjeldus. Peategelane ei olnud mulle sümpaatne, loo lõpp oli etteaimatav klišee. Aga igav seda raamatut lugeda ei olnud.

Lisa says

Hmm, not very excited about this one.

I don't think *Voice Over* is an apt translation of the original French title *Voix sans issue*. The literal meaning is 'voice without issue'. And while I can see how clunky that would be as a title, it has meanings that aren't implicit in *Voice Over*.

The un-named central character is an anonymous young woman in Paris. Her job is to announce train departures and arrivals at Gare du Nord, one of six terminus stations in Paris – and it is huge. It serves the urban Metro and regional train services in Northern France, and is also the international train station for UK, German and Belgium destinations. It's where you arrive if you take the Eurostar from London, and – even if

you are a seasoned traveller – the sheer size, the noise, and the frenetic movement around you can seem quite overwhelming. It's the busiest train station in Europe. Wikipedia says it serves 190 million travellers each year, second only to Japan.

This young woman's voice is broadcast over the hustle and bustle, both part of the noise which travellers ignore, yet also listened to intently when it's their platform details they need to hear. (A bit like the safety demo on planes, only the newbies are listening, everyone else goes on playing with their iPads.) My recollection is that all announcements at Gare du Nord are in French – another reason for me to practice my numbers en français – but many international travellers don't speak French so they're not even listening to hear if they need to listen. So hers is a voice that travels over the hubbub without much impact, without issue. And work is the only place that anyone listens to her at all.

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2015/03/30/vo...>

Hima says

Extremely well written but the main character in this novel is difficult to like. I felt a mixture of frustration and pity while reading this. The protagonist is a woman who loves a man who loves another woman. She wanders aimlessly through life in pursuit of his affections without any secure or confident thought in her head. Again, very well written so I would have rated it higher if I wasn't so frustrated by the protagonist.

Christy says

One of my new favourites! I spotted this in the fiction section one afternoon - we have only one copy (still in hardcover). Chris was drawn to it because Paul Auster had written a blurb on the front, and an introduction to the work inside. I checked it out of the library.

Translated from the French. An unnamed woman who works as an announcer for the metro at the Gare du Nord station in Paris. She drifts through the city, yearning for a man who is already taken, unable to resist chance and her own weaknesses. Not a plot-driven book, but in the way of parts of Bolano, an homage to the ordinary moments in life. To the moments we think we've lost our keys, or sit at home wondering whether or not to do the dishes while waiting for "him" to call. She is what James Wood would call a Flaubertian "flaneur," a loafer who acts almost as a human camera who "walks the streets with no great urgencies, seeing, looking, reflecting" (How Fiction Works).

This woman is buffeted by the actions of others, she reinvents herself and tells lies for no good reason. She is overwhelmed by the whirrings and activities of every day life. She is taken advantage of. Her character is unformed, trying to get to the bottom of who she is, in the light of the past, in the light of her relationships and of her unrequited love. It is only when reading the announcements and scheduling over the loudspeaker that she becomes certain, speaks clearly and succinctly, and feels no wavering or self-doubt. (I've never thought about the people who do this job. I always thought it was mechanized, somehow. But now I will pay attention in metros and undergrounds and bus terminals and airports and think about the voices.)

She is an "everywoman," and she gives me great comfort. Reading this book caused me to sit up, pay attention and realize that the little desolations and humiliations of life are not isolated but universal.

Read it, please. I want more people to know about this book.

Jana says

I don't know her name, I think she is 28, works in Paris' Gare du Nord. It is a job where she sits for hours, reads announcements from the computer, job without a personal touch, without a need for personal opinion, she likes her life in a shadow and doesn't mind when people call her weird, behind her back.

She loves Him - her friend, and will love him for the rest of her life. Her friend, who is in love with Angela, an angel with wings (you can as well have angels without wings) how she calls her.

She is attractive enough to attract enough men with whom she has one night stands. Most of those one nights are disaster. She in a way is a magnet for disasters, as loneliness is huge part of her personality.

She is completely from contemporary world. Having battles with basic human desires. Having childhood traumas. She is too much introspective. In dissection. Living alone in Paris, without family, true bonds, friends... She forgets her food, drinks coffee like water, occasional kleptomaniac. She is spending much of her time in her own company, as she doesn't have many social skills to be attracted to many people in a group. Even if she has, she is the shy one, with blunts that are not true.

She is self-destructing. But really likeable. I was practically crying during some parts. You just want to see her happy, but this is not a happy book. She is too real, so you know that things will not be ok for her.

I enjoyed their affair, and during those few concrete splendors that they've had, you could see a basic woman that she is. Who deserves all of that, has so much in her, she deserves to be taken care of, and that she is just confused and lost, and with the right man, she could bridge all of her worries, as she can't bridge them by herself.

But splendors are like glimpses of sun. They vanish quickly.
