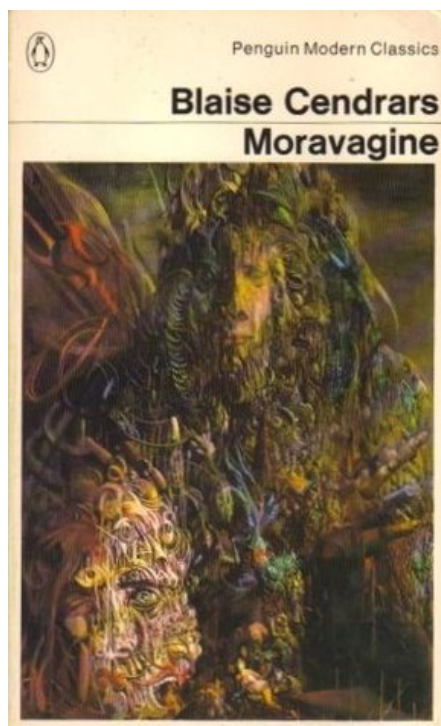




## Moravagine

*Blaise Cendrars , Alan Brown (Translator)*

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# Moravagine

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**Moravagine** Blaise Cendrars , Alan Brown (Translator)

'How can I convince the sceptic that I was ravished by Cendrars's *Moravagine*? How does one know immediately that a thing is after one's own heart? . . . some men compel you to accept them, compel you to understand, and finally, to adore' – Henry Miller

Since its first publication in France in 1926 this ferocious and fantastic masterpiece has established itself as a classic of twentieth-century fiction.

The semi-autobiographical story is narrated by a young French doctor who encounters *Moravagine* in a Swiss lunatic asylum and promptly helps him to escape. Together they travel the world – rally to support the Russian Revolution, narrowly escape being eaten by American Blue Indians and fight in the First World War.

Full of tenderness, horror and savage humour, *Moravagine* is a dazzling piece of writing by one of the founders of the modern movement in literature.

The cover shows a detail from 'Lucifer' by Thomas Häfner, in the artists collection

## Moravagine Details

Date : Published 1979 by Penguin Books (first published 1926)

ISBN : 9780140039658

Author : Blaise Cendrars , Alan Brown (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Moravagine for online ebook

### Paul says

What to say about this. I know it is highly rated as a modernist classic; and make no mistake it is very inventive with some fantastical scenes and stories. Many reviews I have seen rave about it and compare it to Burroughs' Naked Lunch. Even Henry Miller loved it. I can understand all that and I know it careers through the early twentieth century taking apart many sacred cows and exposing much hypocrisy.

However I did not like it. The title sets the tone; Moravagine means Death to (or by) vagina and the books tone is mercilessly misogynistic. It is about a young psychiatrist when discovers a prisoner in an institution (Moravagine) who has various deformities who is there because he murdered his fiancée. He decides it would be a good idea to let him free so they could have adventures together because the fellow is interesting (and a son of the King of Hungary). They then travel together for the rest of the book moving through Europe, Russia (where they attempt to organise a revolution in 1905 as part of what appears to be an anarchist grouping), the US, South America and back to Europe. The novel concludes in the First World War.

Periodically during their travels Moravagine rapes and murders women (no vivid descriptions, it is all very matter of fact and part of his condition) and the female characters are treated abominably. The author appears to have no opinion on this aspect of his character. Maybe he is making a point, maybe there is a deeper meaning which I am missing. Actually it is just unpleasant and pointless. It is as though the victims (mostly unnamed and undescribed) have no importance or significance; they do not matter. Moravagine is portrayed as the next stage in human evolution and is above normal considerations (I've heard that sort of superiority argument before; Master Race!!).

I know it is only a novel and I am not as a rule squeamish about what I read, but there is such a deep level of unpleasantness here, especially towards women that, for me there was just no point of it.

Rant over.

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### Tony says

This seemed to me to be the right (if not logical) next book after just completing Fear: A Novel of World War I. Take the horrors of war and paint them allegorically in the form of a human monster. I was promised it would be "At once appalling and appallingly funny..." I found it neither, and as Sgt. Hulka once said, "I got a helluva sense of humor."

There are plenty of positive to gushing reviews, so don't go by me.

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### Mark Broadhead says

Not my thing: picaresque (in the style of Candide), angry (in the style of Celine), characterless (in the style of too many second-rate authors), etc.

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### Jon Cone says

Here is Henry Miller: "There were times when reading Cendrars -- and this is something which happens to

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me rarely -- that I put the book down in order to wring my hands with joy or despair, with anguish or with desperation."

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## Amorfna says

Za po?etak, imam problem – ne znam odakle krenuti i kako sve upakovati.

**Moravagine** je bizarna, surealna, road trip na steroidima Pandorina kutija književnosti. Pri?a o Moravagineu ( smrt vagini i smrt od vagine,srž glavnog lika sažeta u sopstvenom imenu) , psihopati, li?nosti koja je spoj svih vaših strahova, i njegovom psihijatru ( na neki na?in)koji mu u jednom trenutku, fasciniran njime, pomaže da pobjegne iz mentalne ustanove u kojoj je smešten te zajedno kre?u u pokor sveta. To bi bilo to ukratko. Zar Vam treba više?

Po?e?u od jedine kritike koje imam na ovu knjigu – i u pitanju je vrlo subjektivan stav naravno.

Volela bih da je knjiga konzistentnija te da je autor održao atmosferu romana na istom nivou od po?etka do kraja.

Prvih 60ak strana knjige ( sve do dolaska u Moskvu) kao i poglavlje *Plavi indijanci* su najblaže re?eno remek delo, kako literarno, kako stilski pa usudi?u se re?i i vizuelno – iako nije sasvim ispravno.

U ovim delovima,knjiga zahteva sporo i pažljivo ?itanje. Ne zbog svoje težine ve? iz jednog prostog razloga – svako brzanje je vaš gubitak.

Turobna atmosfera moralne praznine, nehajnost dekadencije i ubistva, mirisi i opora zagušljiva slatko?a bolesti i smrti u dolini Orinoka, izvitopereni tok Moravagineovih deluzionih misli u zatvoru ( ovo mi je li?no najdraži deo...stopiti se vizuelno sa njegovim mislima je uzbudljivo, koliko lepo toliko i strašno iskustvo). Jedna misao koja me je poprili?no zabavljala tokom ?itanja nekih delova knjige ( a posebice Plavih indijanaca) jeste da ako je ikada , u književnom smislu, Žil Vern imao sadisti?ki nastrojenog mra?nog brata blizanca , to mora da je bio Sandrar! A ta misao, osim što me je zabavila, podsetila me je koliko volim Verna i kako bih trebala da mu se vratim ponekad.

A sada dolazimo do problema. U odnosu na ova dva dela-ostatak knjige je u senci.

Nakon dolaska u Moskvu, knjiga prosto nije dovoljno mra?na i devijantna za moj ukus, ne ispunjava o?ekivanja. Manifest ludila i sadizma kao sila koja kreiraju naš svet,pretvara se u jednu ludu, brzu, potpuno over the top avanturu ( sa ponovnom reanimacijom u Plavim indijancima) što nije loše i zabavno je ali nije na nivou ostatka i pomalo je pretenciozno. Nije mi legla Moskva , nije mi legla revolucija, a još manje I svetski rat ,zaista nije.

Ovo nije knjiga za svakoga, nikako. I šteta je što je ,u odnosu na neka manje vredna dela, potpuno zanemarena.

Uprkos mojoj kritici – preporuka – sve i da ?itate samo ova dva poglavlja, isplati se !

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## David says

If you only read one book this year about a diminutive gimp who enjoys disemboweling women, make it this one. It will at least save you the bother of having to find another one. And there's certainly no book quite like Blaise Cendrars' *Moravagine*, a tonally irregular, provocative artifact of the 1920s French avant garde. But don't be scared off by the phrase 'French avant garde' and its omens of obfuscation and aesthetic prickliness. *Moravagine* is, without qualification, a very readable book. Its style is mostly conventional, with a strong

narrative momentum, but its substance suggests an author whose powers of concentration or fortitude were limited. The novel starts out (apparently) as a discourse on madness and disease, delivered by an iconoclastic young psychiatrist, who decides to release the criminally aberrant Moravagine from his confinement and accompany him on various escapades, including a stint in Russian terrorism, a quest for mythic treasure in the American Southwest, a delirious ride down the Amazon, and an apprenticeship with a drunken inventor. There's not much cohesion or balance to be found here, and to search for 'a point' to all this is certainly to invite accusations of being a spoilsport, but all in all, *Moravagine* was enjoyable enough—for a book about a diminutive gimp who enjoys disemboweling women. And Blaise Cendrars has the rare good sense to know when enough is enough.

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## Tosh says

Blaise Cendrars is one of those characters that one can't believe that they actually exist. His novel reads like a demented Sam Fuller film with a script by Luis Bunuel. Well, that how it reads to me!

Nevertheless this early 20th Century classic is sort of the door that leads to the madness of that Century. It's a feverish adventure tale that goes beyond reason into a form of madness. And Cendrars was, this one-arm manic, was one of the greats. No doubt about that!

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## Adam says

A dark, comic journey through the early 20th century and across Europe and the Americas that is part Verne and part Celine (except this ends instead of starts with World War One). The main characters are pretty horrible and disturbing and their adventures range from whimsical to pretty dark as they encounter a scary version of Russia during the 1905 revolt, trouble with Indians in America, hanging out with a monkey on an ocean liner, and finally a strangely heartbreaking ending in the aftermath of the world war. A travelogue, nihilist philosophy, black farce, and historical novel. Quite unlike much of anything else.

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## Eddie Watkins says

Let's just say the title translates as both death TO and death BY vagina. It's part pulp adventure tale, part embodied manifesto whose main message is that madness and disease are the guiding forces on earth, and all Greatest Dada Novel ever.

The early parts are a Rabelaisian misogynistic fever dream across Europe and into Russia where Moravagine, a dadaist writ GIGANTIC, spearheads a revolution. But then, after fleeing to the United States, the narrative kind of settles down (after the death of the vicious vagina and her foetus), Moravagine becomes more guiding spirit than main character, and we get a proto-magical realist (real deal magical realist) novel coursing through the Americas, meeting larger-than-life swindlers, Blue Indians, and a dapper orangutan, but all bedded in naturalistic detail and local arcana.

Then back to Europe for the outbreak of WWI where Moravagine disappears then reappears totally bonkers thinking he's an inhabitant of Mars; a claim not discounted by the narrator.

Though I've never read B. Traven, this book (and Cendrars himself for that matter) reminds me of him.

Mystery man and self-mythologizer, Indiana Jones-type adventurer, and like one man compounded of a dozen men, bewilderingly human, composed of nothing but *élan vital*.

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### Amy says

The story starts out so promising. We meet Moravagine in a mental institute, all of 4'11", monstrous, born of a dead womb, and jacking off into a fish bowl. He's gruesome, yet somehow likable despite his misogyny, sexual assaults, murders, and impregnation of one woman that leads to her suicide.

I was fine with all of that.

What bothered me was the pacing. The story gets far too plot-driven and I found myself wishing that the main characters would just stay put instead of bouncing around the far corners of the earth. The ending takes a welcome postmodern turn...While Moravagine as a character may prove to be quite memorable, for me, the adventures certainly are not.

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### Nate D says

You are lovely as a stovepipe, smooth and rounded into yourself, elbowed. Your body is like an egg on the seashore. You are concentrated as rock salt and transparent as rock crystal. You are a prodigious blossoming, a motionless whirlpool. The abyss of light. You are like a sounding line that sinks to incalculable depths. You are like a blade of grass magnified a thousand times.

The words of a madman who, deprived of the object of his desire, becomes so obsessed with mundane objects that these are the only terms left to him when at last he sees her again. The words of our protagonist, Moravagine, anarchist and murderer, whose name translates as either "death by vagina" or "death to vagina", and whose madness and objectifications are only beginning. A uniquely French embodiment of the prevailing madness of his era, monstrous and magnetic, Moravagine seems to be the spawn of Mirbeau, Fantomas, and dada, and a contemporary of Celine. His story, recounted by the doctor who frees him from a ward for the criminally insane in order to better observe him, is a kind of travelogue owing its energetically erratic prose equally to adventure yarns, surrealist fantasia, and pitch-dripping nihilism. The bilious philosophy bubbling forth from the latter can be somewhat problematic in its over-generalization and sexism, but that may be partly because it can be difficult to extract Cendrars' actual views from those of his protagonists. And, as with Celine, whatever my reservations, when he's spot on, he's absolutely spot on:

Is there a more monstrous thought, a more convincing spectacle, a more patent affirmation of the impotence and madness of the brain? War. All our philosophies, religions, arts, techniques and trades lead to nothing but this. The finest flowers of civilization. The purest constructions of thought. The most generous and altruistic passions of the heart. The most heroic gestures of man. War. Now and a thousand years ago. Tomorrow and a hundred thousand years ago. No it's not a question of your country, by German or French friend, or yours, whether you're black or white or Papuan or a Borneo monkey. It's a question of your life. If you want to live, kill. Kill so you can be free, or eat, or shit. The shameful thing is to kill in masses, at a predetermined hour, on a predetermined day, in honor of certain principles, under cover of a

flag, with old men nodding approval, to kill in a disinterested or passive fashion. Stand alone against them all young man, kill, kill, you are unique, you are the only man alive, kill until the others cut you short with the guillotine or the cord or the rope, with or without ceremony, in the name of the Community or the King.

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## Vit Babenco says

*In the beginning was the rhythm and only eventually the rhythm gained corporeality...*

**Blaise Cendrars** boldly bases his novel on the concept of Alfred Jarry's pataphysics.

Hysteria... Freud had taken up the problem, had gone into it more amply, more profoundly, had lifted it, extracted it from its purely experimental and clinical domain to make of it a kind of pataphysics of social, religious and artistic pathology...

**Blaise Cendrars** doesn't write, he literally crochets a morbidly pathological lace of maleficent words.

Diseases are. We do not make or unmake them at will. We are not their masters. They make us, they form us. They may even have created us. They belong to that state of activity which we call life. They may be its main activity.

Moravagine is a quintessence of villainy, he is an incarnation of mental pathology, he becomes a metaphor of evil... Evil is indestructible and sinister pataphysics reigns...

And what about metaphysics? "Metaphysics should be placed in the museum of folklore."

*Reductio ad absurdum* is a part of human nature.

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## AC says

I couldn't decide whether to give this 3 stars or 4 stars (not that anyone would care either way). Cendrars seems to have hated this book..., having begun it in 1917, he was still trying to finish it as he crossed the Equator on a boat to Rio in 1924. He simply couldn't stand the "turgid, pretentious style" to which he had committed himself. I don't disagree.... It made him vomit, this book.... 3 stars..., bah!

The problem may, of course, rather be that I don't understand Surrealism. The extravagant expressions of a diseased or troubled or excessive mind -- it's all well and good. But as imaginings -- they don't have much meaning -- and so after awhile..., it's hard to tell one lunatic's ravings from another. And tedium sets in... But, of course, this is rather subjective.... so perhaps more reading of it will cure me of my limitations.

Cendrars loved this book. He conceived of it while talking to a diminutive Jew in a bar on the Boul' Mich' in 1912 -- The Jew's name was Starckmann. Moravagine then accompanied him, Cendrars, throughout his many travails for the next 10 years or more. The Jew admired Cendrars enormously; he was devoted. And when Cendrars joined the War, the Jew followed him. Cendrars lost his right arm. The Jew lost his life.

Cendrars seems to have been a man of excesses -- and yet capable of guilt. He knew everyone, but in his autobiography spoke mainly about all the nobodies he knew. In his "found documents", printed at the rear of

this volume, he speaks about his deep friendship for Satie..., "dear Satie...." Here's how he sounds when he's not being turgid and pretentious....:

"Moravagine. I've tried several times to go back to it since giving it up in Nice. Today, if it's back on the table, it's because Cocteau set things in motion again - that's what I hear. Cocteau brings it up with Edmond Jaloux; Jaloux, who edits a collection of novels, mentions it to his publisher; he writes to me. I don't want to know about it. I don't know Jean Cocteau and I don't want to hear about Jaloux. So I'm hunted down -- by Paul Laffitte, by young people who come to my house to discuss the standards of high literature. (What a joke, they've never written a thing! maybe never a read a thing! but they're charming, well-dressed, likable; you'd think they were Cocteau's young nephews! and Jean, sprung from the loins of Catulle Mendès, is himself a great-nephew of Proust's!) Finally the publisher sends his delegate, Brun, the director of the house. Louis Brun, former surveillance photographer, delivers his pitch. He goes about it informally. He's on the level and above board in his business dealings, he says. He asks my price. I ask for a fat sum. He knocks it down by a fifth. We sign. He calls me 'tu'. We part good friends. We're thick as thieves...."

Ahh.... He must have been quite a character and a charming rogue, Cendrars. And I can see how Miller must have loved him and stole so much from him.... Definitely, 4 stars!

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## **Troy says**

Another favorite I read in 2008. Moravagine is based on Fantomas, which is yet another favorite I read in 2008. It follows a sociopathic cripple and his enabler who is the author of book (and named Cendrars). It's a crazed romp throughout Europe, Mexico and Russia - all the 'hot spots' of the turn of the century - all the spots filled with blood and change. Not only is a fun and bloody romp, but it's a smart commentary of the state of the world and it's blood drenched recent past.

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## **knig says**

Moravagine is one huge masturbatory celebration, Cendrars' personal exorcism into born-again apogee.

I think Cendrars woke up one morning and he decided he'd had enough of dichotomy, duality and double structure. With one fell swoop of the literary sword, he cut himself in two, separating out the unacceptable face of humanity like so much egg white oozing away from the yolk, and ~~infested~~ invested Moravagine rankest of them all, thus allowing himself to phoenix whole, purged and as pure as a pair of newborn baby's buttocks.

This is a roman a clef. Raymond, a young psychoanalyst, rescues the abominable (in thought, and word, and deed, and indeed, physique) Moravagine from an insane asylum, and the two of them go on a world wide rampage of anarchy and murder: well Moravagine does, with Raymond mostly a spectator.

Their travels follow Cendrars' personal life travails: Russia, The United States and finally Paris. In a clever twist towards the end, Raymond encounters Cendrars who has lost an arm in WWI and asks him to write up Moravagine's manuscripts. I like it when authors pop up in their books for a tete a tete with their characters. Oh, and Cendrars did lose his right arm in the Great War.

Moravagine, then, is Raymond aka Cendrars doppelganger: that ugly, nasty, evil, unPC part of ourselves we always have to keep in check, subdue, cut off at the collar. Except Cendrars doesn't do that: instead, he vests

it all in Moravagine, and lets him rip, whilst following behind, and sucking it all in vicariously. Moravagine means 'death by vagina'. Full throttle misogyny in hand, he disembowels women and children, embraces murder, anarchy and debauchery, feels empowered when he kills, laughs when the world cries, has no remorse but tons of energy for yet new and new escapade. Trailing behind is Raymond: a sexless, ennui-ed, eunuch-ed, disenchanted half shadow of Moravagine, enthralled and possessed by him.

Because Cendrars ultimately sees life as boring and empty once all the sin and strife has been stripped out. It doesn't ay to be 'too good'. Just as all sin and no Grace is equally unrewarding. Neither character is whole. Maybe we are meant to have a little of both.

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## **Paul says**

Courageous absurdity. Audacious luster. Unequivocal bloodlust. Dragging existentialism across the muddled battlefields at the heart of man's inextinguishable conflagration, this book bestows the chattering of the primal inescapably intertwined with the human spirit. Nihilism rants from the gutters of humanity speaking that inexcusable, uncomfortable & unapologetic truth. The mirror reflects a monstrosity but what else was there to view but man devouring its own flesh, shitting out ideals only to fertilize the destruction that lay ravaged heaping with steaming germination. Yes they rebuilt the milieu but with raw & inconsolable exteriors. Blood barely drying. This book unveils the animosity that harkens from our core as if the duality dominated our path of discovery. Cendrars is almost a victim. Moravagine is almost a hero. The reader is most assuredly an accomplice. The story begs the question, what is at the very base of man. The traveling of the two characters makes for great conflict. The adventures introduce many eccentric characters. His descriptive style generates energy. He invites you into the madness as an accomplice or as a hostage, you are not sure whether to have fun or fear for your life. This book seems like it is meant for heathens & perhaps this is why I enjoy it so much. Certain halves of man irreconcilable. Cendrars writes as if he is if to suffocate the reader in madness, the reader becomes a sadomasochist in the process, torturing the reader with its suppression of oxygen, almost on the point of death, until he releases your submerged head & finally allows you to breathe & oh the air is so sweet when escaping from such a dreary womb. The tale has extreme contours, wild & unforeseen twists of tone & plot. The variety is quite pleasing & puts on full display the author's flexibility & diverse tastes. There is mention of the Idiot, but what of the devil, the butcher, the mystic, the subversive, the baron, the lecher, the committed. The endless sides to the psyche of Moravagine make him an extraordinary character. The contrast between the two main characters only adds to the robust flavor of this recalling. This exotic flower singed by the bomb & sullied by the whore's lipstick impaled by the sounds of political nonsense. It pushes wisdom deep into the nether regions of your mind like a lobotomy incision. Compels you to leave your comfort to venture into the very pulse of a supreme virility. A potency exists, exclaims & wails with fright & sheer bliss. The psychotic cackle of someone truly free from societies' boundaries, from law, from conscience from judgment by god, beast or man truly resonates. A freedom that extinguishes itself with a fury. It brings to mind what society found vulgar then & what is found vulgar now, what is deemed obscene. It's an aborted fetus sprinkled with glitter. Indeed whimsical carnage bedazzled with the jewels of elegant words. A diamond covered in shit. The book is littered with amazing quotes & insight. I especially appreciated reading about his hardships in writing & finalizing the book. It makes me feel less guilty about my hardships in the same manner. The combination of all of this made it a very enjoyable read for me. Cheers to the mad!

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## **Justin Evans says**

A perfect "I'd rather talk about it than read it" book, which brings home to me once and for all how

impossible it is to remain 'shocking' as history pro/regresses--like Celine, in that respect. And once the shockingness is gone, there's not a whole lot left to keep this thing together, unfortunately.

It does have, however, the greatest title in literature, and really, really does make a great conversation topic. We have our 'hero,' Moravagine, and his Robin, 'Dr. Science.' Voila: the two main twentieth century paths to amorality, the nihilistic and the scientific. They travel the globe doing moderately shocking things. Moravagine causes the first Russian Revolution. He's a daring fighter pilot. He disembowels women.

More interesting by far is the apparatus Cendrars sets up around the picaresque: Moravagine's 'manuscripts,' the very hazy relationship between Blaise Cendrars and Dr. Science, Cendrars' reflections on writing the book. And some of the chapters are worth reading. "Our Rambles in America" is a kind of inverted "Education of Henry Adams," and the closing chapters (they take place after the world has, by creating the first world war, out moravagined Moravagine) are oddly moving.

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## Ryan says

What a book! Moments that are as ferocious and incandescent as any I've read. Framed as an elaborate literary hoax - the overlong preface to The Complete Works of Moravagine - which are, *zut alors*(!), lost. Stolen from their resting place in a French country cottage ... beside a steeple ... where they were kept ... in an attic ... under lock and key. Pilfered by Nazis, ground into the muck by hobnailed boots. Thankfully this slender tome was rescued (conniving wink, sharp-elbowed nudge). Here's a passage that captures the delirium:

"All is palpitating. My prison disappears. The walls are struck down, there is a beating of wings. Life lifts me into the air like a gigantic vulture. At this height the earth is rounded like a breast. One can see through it's transparent crust the veins of the core with their scudding, red pulsations. On another side the rivers run, blue like arterial blood, and in the billions upon billions of creatures are hatching. Above, like dusky lungs, the oceans swell and fall in turn. The two glaciers eyes are close together and roll slowly in their sockets. Now see the double sphere of a forehead, the sudden crest of a nose, its flinty ledges, its steep walls. I fly across Mont Dore, hoarier than the head of Charlemagne, and land on the rim of the ear which yawns like a lunar crater. This is my eyrie. My hunting ground"

In these moments, it comes across as a treatise, or a *sui generis* example, of synaesthesia, an unfolding and infolding of sense experience, example of the brain's aptitude for transmuting base materials into viciously hard gems, the arational absorption of phenomena reverse engineering stars from heaps of dung. The paratextual quote by Remy De Gourmont speaks to this - " ... this nothing, contains everything ..." Universe in a grain of sand.

At other moments it's a bare-knuckle & rusty-shiv critique of "modern" culture:

"The finest flowers of civilization. The purest constructions of thought. The most generous and altruistic passions of the heart. The most heroic gestures of man. War. Now and a thousand years ago. [...] If you want to live, kill. Kill so that you can be free, or eat, or shit. The shameful thing is to kill in masses, at a predetermined hour on a predetermined day, in honour of certain principles, under cover of a flag, with old men nodding approval, to kill in a disinterested or passive way. stand alone against them all, young man, kill, kill, you are unique, you're the only man alive, kill until the others cut you short with the guillotine or the cord or the rope, with or without ceremony, in the name of the Community or the King."

Full stop.

## Richard Derus says

### Book Circle Reads 17

Rating: 3 sickened stars of five

**The Publisher Says:** At once truly appalling and appallingly funny, Blaise Cendrars's *Moravagine* bears comparison with *Naked Lunch*—except that it's a lot more entertaining to read. Heir to an immense aristocratic fortune, mental and physical mutant Moravagine is a monster, a man in pursuit of a theorem that will justify his every desire. Released from a hospital for the criminally insane by his starstruck psychiatrist (the narrator of the book), who foresees a companionship in crime that will also be an unprecedented scientific collaboration, Moravagine travels from Moscow to San Antonio to deepest Amazonia, engaged in schemes and scams as, among other things, terrorist, speculator, gold prospector, and pilot. He also enjoys a busy sideline in rape and murder. At last, the two friends return to Europe—just in time for World War I, when "the whole world was doing a Moravagine."

This new edition of Cendrars's underground classic is the first in English to include the author's afterword, "How I Wrote *Moravagine*."

**My Review:** Dr. Science, the eunuch-like shrink of mass-murdering rapist and all-around criminal Moravagine, relates this hideous tale of debauchery, rapine, pillage, murder, and general good times after springing the title character from the insane asylum where Science worked with him. Their world travels on the eve of the Great War involve blood, misery, and death for everyone but themselves.

Moravagine, literally "death by female genitalia," is not someone you want to meet. Hannibal Lecter was positively cuddlesome by Moravagine's standards. Science, in his neutral and neutered language, presents the facts of their horrible, horrible crime spree in a way that left me nauseated but curiously unmoved: "Which mother would not prefer to kill and devour her children if she could be sure in doing so of binding to her and keeping her male, of being permeated by him, absorbing him from below, digesting him, letting him be macerated within her in a state reduced to that of foetus, and carrying him thus her life long in womb?"

This is a slasher movie waiting to happen. I've heard others describe it as funny. Not to me. Distastefully misogynistic. Appallingly bloody. I enjoyed one thing about reading the book: The author's evident fury and outrage at a world that tacitly accepts the dehumanizing and belittling effects of Modernity without so much as a bleat of resistance. Resistance, you see, is futile.

Revolting. Fascinating. Deeply unclean.

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## Rhys says

This book has made a strong impression on me. At first I thought it was going to be another French surrealist black fantasy, like *Maldoror* or *The Torture Garden* or *Story of the Eye*. And partly this is true: it's an episodic account of a madman called Moravagine (his name is an indication of his misogynistic purpose in life) released from an insane asylum by the doctor who is treating him, as part of a bizarre and unorthodox experiment.

The amoral pair travel around the world getting into various scrapes. They are caught up in the Russian revolution, go prospecting for gold in the Arizona desert, escape on a ship and travel up the Orinoco, where Moravagine becomes a living god to a tribe of lost blue Indians. Then they return to France and Moravagine becomes a pilot before the outbreak of the First World War.

What makes this odd novel special is the quality of the writing. The descriptions of the fetid jungles of South America are remarkable and although the two main characters are rather despicable they are also fascinating. There's a pleasantly jarring effect near the end when the author, Blaise Cendrars, enters the novel. A nice metafictional touch, handled well.

Certainly I will now seek out other novels by Cendrars. Probably *To the End of the World* first, as my local library actually has that one in stock!

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