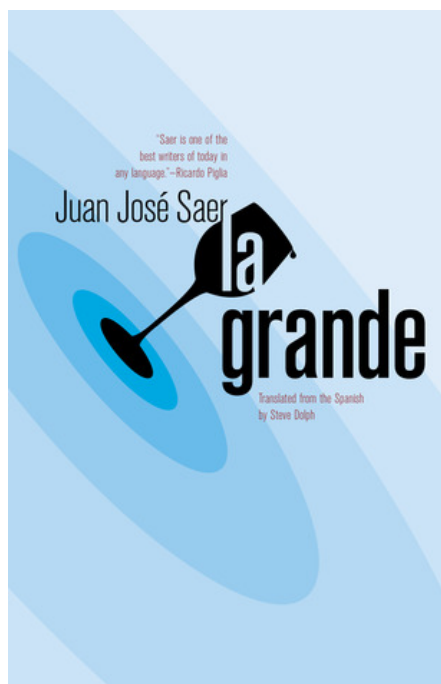




La Grande

Juan José Saer , Steve Dolph (Translator)

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Saer's final novel, *La Grande*, is the grand culmination of his life's work, bringing together themes and characters explored throughout his career, yet presenting them in a way that is beautifully unique, and a wonderful entry-point to his literary world.

Moving between past and present, *La Grande* centers around two related stories: that of Gutiérrez, his sudden departure from Argentina 30 years before, and his equally mysterious return; and that of "precisionism," a literary movement founded by a rather dangerous fraud. Dozens of characters populate these storylines, including Nula, the wine salesman, ladies' man, and part-time philosopher, Lucía, the woman he's lusted after for years, and Tomatis, a journalist whom Saer fans have encountered many times before.

Written in Saer's trademark style, this lyrically gorgeous book—which touches on politics, artistic beliefs, illicit love affairs, and everything else that makes up life—ends with one of the greatest lines in all of literature: "With the rain came the fall, and with the fall, the time of the wine."

La Grande Details

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Author : Juan José Saer , Steve Dolph (Translator)

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From Reader Review La Grande for online ebook

Julio César says

Hasta su último aliento estuvo Saer trabajando en esta obra maestra. No se puede creer la calidad de su prosa. Hay una descripción de un jardín en el que enumera las especies que había así "un manzano, una tipa, un limonero, pero también un cerezo", algo así (no exactamente); ese "pero también" me pareció excelente. Típico de Saer. *La zona* en su mejor expresión. Me encantó el personaje de Nula, es una franja etaria (mi edad: 29) que no se suele representar en las novelas argentinas, y menos en diálogo con los más grandes en esas amistades extrañas a las que nos tienen acostumbrados Tomatis y sus amigos.

Caroline says

[Note: I received this book as a Goodreads giveaway .]

He was among the men who thought they could change the world until they realized that the world changed on its own, and dizzyingly, but in the opposite direction toward which they'd worked, and even in unexpected and strange directions, at which point, neither innocently nor cynically, they started working for what was worth saving, even if that attitude sometimes made them seem antiquated or even conservative—at least compared to those that, while they unscrupulously cut the biggest slice of cheese for themselves, insisted on self-identifying as modern.

How odd to have finally finished within hours of each other two 500-page books in which an upper middle-class man who has nothing to do with the government (and is portrayed primarily amidst his coterie) is meant to stand in for a devastatingly disastrous leader of the country. In *Chin P'ing Mei* the man was Hsi-men Ch'ing representing the Emperor Wan-li; here it is the literary lion Mario Brando, who is gradually revealed to have been as evil as Pinochet, in his own arena.

But be assured that this is no rigid allegory. It is a subtle and beautiful novel that only gradually reveals this aspect of itself. At the same time it is an exploration of the power, minutiae and mutability of language, memory and perception.

The novel follows two interwoven groups of Argentinians over a week: two generations: older writers who experienced Pinochet as young adults, and those who are now in their twenties but were shaped by those years as well. The older ones were caught up in the Precisionist literary movement, which was controlled by the now-dead autocrat Brando. Among the younger ones is the main character, Nula, whose activist father was killed in an unexplained shooting many years ago. Several characters are 'missing', the literal or figurative victims of Pinochet or Brando. A few fled the city or the country and are returning or are voices from afar.

These are definitely not simple or 'good' people. They are complex and changeable. Saer's technique is to build his novel in pass after pass through his characters' memories. Gradually little pieces come together, refute or replace each other, add depth, evoke questions. This evolution happens in both his characters' own minds and in the reader's sense of the book. They are sexual, sophisticated, widely read, and politically astute, but they are human so they hurt and they soothe. They bear wounds but they carry on.

At first I was a bit asea and frustrated by the very dense text that sometimes focuses on the most quotidian tasks for pages on end. But about 150 pages in, I flipped back to look for a quote and began to perceive the

unifying images and themes that Saer has beautifully woven into his work. Water is everywhere, but particularly in the river and its delta that the characters criss-cross daily and into which they stare and reflect. Again and again Saer describes the surface of the river, both its visual impenetrability and its actual permeability. Contrasted with its delta soup is the clear swimming pool of the expatriot who has returned to ... no one is quite sure why he has returned. He has an enigmatic serenity that tugs at them, and the clarity of the water in his pool echoes his peace.

Saer also pays repeated attention to the slums of city and countryside, and to the consumerism of the hypermarket and the Western world. Weather is ever-present, as intense sunlight or storm. Wine serves as Nula's livelihood (since his philosophy avocation won't pay the bills) and lubricates every event. People think a lot in cars and buses. Real life, and yet somehow fragile, it is examined so closely.

I grew to care very much for these people over the course of the novel, even if I was irritated by their imperfections at times. Saer is masterful in portraying their individual ways of coping with the echoes of Pinochet, and yet one concludes that they have found a way to conquer that past, whether through laughter or surrender.

This is one of those books that would repay a second read in order to notice and enjoy in more detail the complexity of language (e.g. mid-sentence tense changes) and the way that Saer weaves the layers of so many individual memories into a work of art. While there were a few places where the weight of unnecessary details severely tested my willpower, the farther I read the more I understood what he was up to and was all in for the ride. Early in the book a character recalls a memory that describes Saer's method beautifully:

he and Tomatis were leaning over the railings of the suspension bridge, watching the water, and it occurred to Barco to ask, Carlitos, in your opinion, what is a novel? And without hesitating even for a second or looking up from the water swirling around the pillars of the bridge several meters below, Carlitos had answered, The decomposition of continuous movement.

Kudos to Three Percent and translator Steve Dolph, who brings the work to English elegantly.

Gary Homewood says

A wine salesman philosopher and a large, confusing cast of characters, some with multiple names, a thin plot over the course of a week, some politics, literary movements, parties, and occasionally some strong, vivid scenes. Not sure what it was driving at.

Nancy says

"With the rain, came the fall, and with the fall, the time of the wine." My favorite sentence in the book, and not just because it is the last. It's actually interesting to me. Not so the rest of the book. While the author does have some lyrical sentences, reading this book was not "like dancing inside the mind of someone who sees everything through the looking glass, always the skeptic," for me. For me it was like dancing with someone who has two left feet.

(translator's note)

PS My numerous updates will clue you into how I REALLY feel about this book. The cover shouldn't be blue...it should be gray.

Brooks says

It's gorgeous. So many of the scenes are dense and beautiful like a Tarakovsky film (the opening section with Nula and Gutierrez walking through the rain reminded me very powerfully of *Stalker*). So many involved seemingly mundane happenings, but still I enjoyed the characters and the book in general.

Matthew says

A brutalizing slog punctuated here and there by surprising brilliance, like life. The exquisite last section, and the insightful translator's note, left me feeling much more positive about this book than I might've otherwise. Happy I read it, but it was a lot of work.

Aaron (Typographical Era) says

...the decomposition of continuous movement...

Tonymess says

Juan José Saer passed away in 2005, in Paris. During his final days in the hospital he worked on the book "La Grande" which was published posthumously in October of the same year. In Amanda Hopkinson's obituary published in The Guardian, she says:

Born outside the literary nexus of the capital, to parents of siriolibanes (Middle Eastern) origin, his writing had nothing to do with the world of tango and extravagant baroque, nor with the streets of Buenos Aires and Latin American magical realism.

Instead he wrote, in a strikingly spare style, of what he knew personally. He wrote of his home town, the provincial city of Santa Fe and its cast of often strange characters, and of his adopted home, Paris, a place of tower blocks and back alleys, inhabited by incomers and sadistic criminals, and by his fictitious maverick, Chief Inspector Morvan.

With a dozen novels, four volumes of short stories and a collection of poetry he was a celebrated part of the Argentine literary scene, even though he lived "in exile" in France. This last work, published by Open Letter Books, apparently contains numerous characters from earlier works, and was shortlisted for the US based Best Translated Book Award for 2015.

Our story opens with two men crossing a field, Gutiérrez, who mysteriously disappeared from Argentina thirty years before and who has just as mysteriously reappeared, buying a mansion. He is accompanied by a "friend" (they've met only twice before this day), Nula, a young wine salesman.

Our novel takes place over the space of a single week, split into seven sections, commencing with "Tuesday

Water Sounds”, however it also takes place over thirty years, as our multi layered number of characters interact, question Gutiérrez’s disappearance and reflect on the literary movement “precisionism”.

Running at close to 500 pages there is plenty of room for our novelist to muse on a raft of themes, including the inner machinations of his main protagonists:

For my full review go to <http://messybooker.blogspot.com.au/20...>

Chad Post says

DISCLAIMER: I am the publisher of the book and thus spent approximately two years reading and editing and working on it. So take my review with a grain of salt, or the understanding that I am deeply invested in this text and know it quite well. Also, I would really appreciate it if you would purchase this book, since it would benefit Open Letter directly.

Manuel Fontana says

Solo voy a decir que es una obra maestra, que es inabarcable y que fue el libro cuyas reflexiones más me identificaron. Me gustaría transcribir algo, pero no puedo decidirme entre tantas líneas que me gustaron.

Veterini says

Un de ces romans argentins mélancoliques. Un riche exilé qui revient en Argentine et s’interroge sur sa vie passée, tout comme un marchand de vin philosophe qu’il rencontre et avec qui il partage une relation commune.

A noté que c’est le dernier roman de Saer et qu’il mourut avant de finir les derniers chapitre ; ce qui ne gêne pas spécialement vu l’absence d’intrigue principale. Ça reste agréable à lire, José Saer ayant un talent indéniable et certains passages sont même plutôt mémorable, mais l'ensemble n'est vraiment pas passionnant pour mon goût.

Lauli says

La última obra de Saer cumplió con mis expectativas y hasta las superó. No es una novela de acontecimientos. Casi todo lo que sucede, sucede a nivel del lenguaje. Saer hace con las palabras lo que los grandes maestros de la pintura hacen con óleos y pinceles: conjura imágenes poderosísimas, de una singular belleza, y transmite paisajes emocionales ricos y complejos. Algunas partes me resultaron algo tediosas, como toda la disquisición acerca del preciocismo. Pero el asado final es de una vividez inolvidable. Y tiene una de las mejores últimas frases de novela que recuerde haber leído.

Eric says

Terminé La grande.

Saer, ¿lo habrá terminado de escribir?

Esa densidad, ese final.

Mmm.

Vit Babenco says

“The exquisite corpse shall drink the new wine.” This epigraph to the novel is taken from the *Abbreviated Dictionary of Surrealism* and it may serve as a kind of clue to the book.

There is a literary technique or style called ‘ironic precision’ and using this style **Juan José Saer** managed to write his last novel with incredible meticulousness and preciseness...

I’m only interested in the world in general... Practicing the ontology of becoming is so simple: you just have to be aware of every part of everything and all the parts of the parts in all their synchronic and diachronic states.

The novel is a tale of relationships inside the clique of provincial bourgeois bohemians – however oxymoronic it may sound – and their interactions with the outside world.

The horizon, Nula thinks, paradigm of the external, is in fact the result of a human impossibility: the parallels do not meet at an infinitely distant point, but rather in our imaginations. A good portion of the world exists because I exist.

And the attitude to the modern society is often so bleak:

They refer to themselves as individualists and yet whenever they open their mouths all that comes out are clichés so fashionable that they end up being interchangeable with anything that their worst enemies, who pretend to be different, might have on hand.

Despite being unfinished *La Grande* demonstrates wondrous integrity and enviable completeness: the penultimate chapter, describing the festive gathering of all main personages, is a real culmination and the last, which is just a single sentence, is a perfect anticlimax.

The narration consists of the current events, memories of the past and contemplations on the nature of existence...

For now they move, healthy and careless, through the quiet of the evening, confusing their desires and their dreams with the unexamined reasons for their existence. They think they exist for themselves, but all they are is bait, tempting the thing that makes them exist. They think they’re displaying themselves, but what they don’t know is that they’re being displayed by the archaic design that brings them to the world, gives them an attractive shape, and then, without cruelty or compassion, casts them into the abyss.

Our memories of the past are the only link binding what we once were with what we have become...

