



Bardo or Not Bardo

Antoine Volodine

J. T. Mahany, Translator

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According to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, souls wander for forty-nine days in a place called the “Bardo,” guided by readings from the sacred book, before finding their way either into the Clear Light or being reborn. But Antoine Volodine’s newly dead all manage to screw up their chances at enlightenment, and those still on Earth who are entrusted with reciting from the book to help them on their way might just as well be reading from a Tibetan cookbook for all the help that they provide.

The seven vignettes that make up *Bardo or Not Bardo* range from hysterical to pathetic as the wandering souls stumble their way through strange, dark landscapes, bumping into unseen obstacles, friends and acquaintances from their previous lives, and the contents of their own minds. Volodine shines a light on “the strange pointlessness of existence” as his quirky protagonists, ranging from failed revolutionaries to Buddhist monks to actors and clowns, prepare to meet, or look for ways to escape, the fate that awaits them in their next life.

Grappling with the topic we most want to avoid, the fact that we all will die makes everything, even what we consider most important, meaningless, Volodine puts us all—overachievers and slackers, religious and decidedly not—“in the same boat, balanced between the dreadful and the useless, obligated to pretend not to care.”

KRISTINE MORRIS (Summer 2016)

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