



# Trois mille chevaux vapeur

*Antonin Varenne*

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## **Trois mille chevaux vapeur** Antonin Varenne

Le sergent Bowman appartient à cette race de héros crépusculaires qui traversent les livres de Conrad, Kipling, Stevenson... Ces soldats perdus qui ont plongé au cœur des ténèbres, massacrés, connu l'enfer, couru le monde à la recherche d'une vengeance impossible et d'une improbable rédemption.

De la jungle birmane aux bas-fonds de Londres, des rives de l'Irrawaddy à la conquête de l'Ouest, ce roman plein de bruit et de fureur nous mène sans répit au terme d'un voyage envoûtant, magnifique et sombre.

Antonin Varenne, l'auteur de *Fakirs*, renoue avec la lignée disparue des grands écrivains d'aventures et d'action. Une réussite qui marquera.

## **Trois mille chevaux vapeur Details**

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Author : Antonin Varenne

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# From Reader Review *Trois mille chevaux vapeur* for online ebook

## Thebooktrail says

Visit the locations in the novel *Retribution Road*

Almost three books for the price of one – a historical read, plus a political one on the horrors of the Burma wars and a western story. Yes that surprised me too, but as you read and see the threads coming together it all blends and works very well together.

It is a long read and at times the descriptions of warfare and torture can be heavy going at times but overall it's a rewarding read. It's really in a genre of its own I would say as it 's much more than a sum of its parts.

I loved the historical premise with the mystery of the East India Company and the types of missions which went on at that time, the type of war which originated in the Burmese jungle and the conditions and minds of the men who played a role. As Bowman follows the trail, he encounters many events in American and world history which populate the pages, creating a veritable journey in every sense of the word.

It's an impressive and epic novel although I do think it could have been shorter and yet still as effective if not more. A little less detail and more breathing space would have made this more powerful in many ways but you can't deny that the author has more than done his homework and for that I applaud him

Special mention has to go to the translator as it's a smooth and impressive story in English too. This would not have been an easy job and to keep the threads in order, the tension up then down, the haunting story of the past coming to the fore....the nuances of the time and place.

An epic and impressive read that brings its own rewards.

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## Netta says

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## Wal.li says

Loneliness, Happiness

Auf Jahre verpflichtete sich Arthur Bowman bei der Ostindienkompanie. In Afrika und Asien verdingte er sich als Söldner, ein harter Hund, der beinahe mit Blicken töten konnte. Von seinen Vorgesetzten wird er auf eine Mission geschickt, die nur ein Todesurteil bedeuten kann. Eine Möglichkeit dieses hoffnungslose Unterfange abzulehnen besteht nicht und so begibt sich Bowman mit dreißig Männern auf eine Dschunke,

die den Fluss Irrawaddy hinauf fahren soll. Es geht schief, was schief gehen kann und später im Jahr 1859 als Bowman bei der Londoner Polizei als Streifenpolizist tätig ist, ist er nur noch ein kriegsgeschädigtes drogen- und alkoholsüchtiges Wrack. Gerade Bowman jedoch findet eine schwer verstümmelte Leiche und er selbst gerät in Verdacht, den Mord begangen zu haben.

Was für eine Achterbahnfahrt bietet dieser Roman, man ist gezwungen in die gestörte Psyche eines abgehalfterten Soldaten einzutauchen, der doch in entscheidenden Momenten so etwas wie Mitleid zeigt, der die Fähigkeit besitzt, Urteile nicht zu vollziehen, der für sich selbst auf die Suche nach einer Wahrheit ist. Er ist sich ziemlich sicher, dass er den Mord nicht begangen hat, doch er ist auch fast sicher, dass er den Mörder an der Art des Tötens einer bestimmten Gruppe, zu der er selbst gehört, zuordnen kann. Bowman folgt den Spuren, die diese Männer hinterlassen haben. Immer wieder seiner Sucht nachgebend, beinahe aufgebend und doch hartnäckig in dem Wunsch seine Unschuld zu beweisen. Einen kleinen Trost findet er in Thoreaus Walden, dessen Lektüre ihn zur Ruhe kommen lässt.

Aufrüttelnde Schilderungen des Soldatenalltags, der Unfähigkeit der Kriegsheimkehrer, das Erlebte zu bewältigen, wechseln sich mit fast zarten Beschreibungen der Landschaft ab. Grausamkeiten, in aller Deutlichkeit dargestellt, stehen einer flirrenden Schönheit gegenüber. Gegensätze, die die Lektüre nicht leicht erträglich werden lassen, die aber außerordentlich fesseln. Eine Geschichte, in die man eintauchen kann, die einen die Hitze des Dschungels ebenso spüren lässt, wie die Kühle der Wälder, die einen die weiten Ebenen der Prärie ebenso sehen lässt, wie die Enge der Städte. Arthur Bowman ist kein Held, dem man sich leicht nähert, mit widersprüchlichen Charaktereigenschaften ausgestattet zeigt er dem Leser seine wahre Größe erst nach einer Durchwanderung der halben Welt. Seine Härte birgt Liebe und Verzeihen in sich und das macht ihn zu einem Helden, der beeindruckt.

4,5 Sterne

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### **Clarabel says**

Ce roman ambitieux fascine, autant qu'il peut effrayer. En majeure partie, je l'ai trouvé très bon, entraînant, écrit sans complaisance, porté par un personnage central charismatique, un type bourru et brisé par les nombreuses désillusions. L'histoire prend vite la tournure d'un western, dévoilant des décors magnifiques, authentiques et bruts. Franchement, c'est bien fichu. Un emballage peaufiné, pour une histoire sombre et amère. Et pourtant, quel sacerdoce ! De longues descriptions, un récit qui s'enlise... c'est parfois trop lourd et accablant.

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### **Bogdan Hrib says**

Foarte tare.

Jules Verne, Paul Feval și Edgar Wallace... dar într-un stil modern.

Însă cu multe detalii despre epocă, locuri, obiective... Bineînțeles o documentare uria??.

O freacă a unei lumi în schimbare - deceniul 7 al secolului XIX în Marea Britanie și SUA.

Imagini descrise magnific.

Nu e o carte pentru cei care citesc un volum într-o noapte. Nu e cu urmărire de mami și nici salve de mitralieră. E o carte de gustat și degustat.

Încerca?i dac? v? place s? citi?i a?ezat, pe lung ?i pe lat.

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### **Raven says**

I have tried and failed to write a coherent review of *Retribution Road*, with several attempts, as it's impossible to do justice as an amateur reviewer to the sheer magnificence of this novel. Adopting the form of an allegoric odyssey, Antonin Varenne has produced a sprawling, magisterial novel that defies comparison to anything I have read before...

Structured as three interlinking parts, and traversing more than 700 pages, I could feel the influence of a quest serving as a plot device in mythology and fiction, with a difficult journey towards a goal, in the character of Arthur Bowman who inhabits, and influences, each stage of the novel. As he journeys from his military service in Burma, then on to Victorian London, and finally to the swathes of unconquered territory of America in the grip of the gold rush, each section of the book is wonderfully visual, with Varenne depicting each landscape with pinpoint precision. In his use of location the ordinary is made extraordinary, and the reader's sense of us being such a small inconsequential part of the natural world is continually brought to bear. Bowman is beautifully cast as both avenging angel and pioneer, weighted down by the brutal events in his personal history, and hence a man of changeable moods and impulses that wax and wane during the course of his mission to track down a killer.

The prose throughout is as tender and sensitive, as it is violent and vengeful, and our emotions and feelings are challenged and manipulated throughout, as Bowman navigates through both testing terrain, and human interaction. The book also poses some interesting theories on morality and immorality, particularly as a consequence of Bowman's actions, and those of the man he so ardently and doggedly pursues, at intense personal cost. I don't think it is any exaggeration to say that this is a true magnum opus, and held me utterly in its power along the long road to redemption and justice. It was just a completely wonderful emotional rollercoaster, suffused with historical detail, and a totally authentic evocation of place. It is a hugely complex and challenging novel, addressing themes of war, religion, revenge, human connection and emotional strife. As ever, Sam Taylor provides a perfect translation, that subtly captures the nuances of Varenne's intensity of emotion. I cannot praise *Retribution Road* enough, and would highly recommend it for fiction and crime fiction readers alike. *C'est vraiment magnifique!*

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### **John Wiltshire says**

I sometimes wish I didn't use a two-star system for reviewing books: 1-star crap; 5-star good. Occasionally a novel comes along which is so outstanding I'd like to give it more than 5 stars. I didn't want this novel to end. I lived it more than just read it. I cannot recommend it too highly. Long, complex, intriguing, enigmatic, beautifully written, it's cast a spell on me over the last few weeks. I've found myself relating everything in my life to Arthur Bowman and his hunt for a killer. I won't sum up the plot, suffice to say that it begins in Burma and spans over ten years of Bowman's life, and incorporates a time in London and then in the newly expanding America. I'm not entirely sure I understood the ending, but that's okay. I don't get real life most of the time either.

If you like being immersed in a story, give this one a go.

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## **Carolyn says**

This is a novel of epic proportions encompassing Asia, London and America. The massive amount of historical research is astounding. The descriptions of the settings are vividly cinematic. The plot is wide ranging and compelling with interesting characters.

Sergeant Arthur Bowman was a soldier who witnessed and committed atrocities in Africa and India; bad, half-mad and dangerous to know. A hard brutal man in brutal situations. He is a loner, brooding and mostly uncommunicative. He was sent by the East India Company in 1852 on a secret mission to Burma which ended in failure. The men were captured and imprisoned in a jungle location for several years. They were kept in separate cages, barely fed and underwent indescribable torture. Bowman's mantra to his fellow prisoners was. 'Survive'. Ten are finally released, broken in body, spirit and mind and bearing terrible scars. Afterwards the mission, according to the Company, never existed.

Bowman, newly returned from Asia is working as a policeman in London. It is 1858, the year of 'The Big Stink'. The temperatures were intense in July and August. The Thames nearly dried up leaving mounds of human and industrial waste piled up and the air thick with pollution and disease. One day Bowman is led by a frightened boy to observe a body in the London sewers. The body shows signs of the same type of torture inflicted in Burma and the word 'Survive' is written in blood. Bowman recognizes to his alarm that the killer must be one of ten men who survived captivity in Burma. The police chief doesn't believe this theory. He is fired and even under suspicion for the murder.

On learning that a similar murder has been committed in America, he embarks on an epic journey across the United States. He has investigated the present whereabouts of the surviving prisoners and learns most are said to be dead, dying or insane. It seems the locations of only two of the men are unknown. He becomes obsessed in tracking them down in America. Soon other bodies with the same signature and in the identical mutilations are being discovered in several towns in America and Bowman realizes he is on the trail of a serial killer. His journey takes him from New York, where he disembarked, through the Wild West. The frontier is just starting to be settled. A Black man and three Indians have been unjustly executed for the killings as it is believed that no white man could commit such horrific crimes. The gold rush is on, land is being opened up for farming, Lincoln is president and the Civil War is underway.

After much grueling travel, illnesses and injuries, Bowman finally tracks down the two survivors of Burma and suspects one must be responsible for the serial murders. The book is highly recommended for anyone interested in historical and complex mystery and adventure. What starts out by Bowman as a search for retribution becomes one of redemption.

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## **Frédéric says**

After one year of captivity in the Burma jungle former East India Company sergeant Bowman his released from active duty and is a beat cop along the Thames River in London. A loner to the core and opium addicted, Bowman is still haunted by the tortures he's endured in the jungle, by what he'd done to survive.

Then a mutilated corpse is found in London's sewers. Bowman knows these mutilations. His body is scarred with the same. They were ten coming out of the Burma jungle; the killer has to be one of the other nine.



impoverished and stinking London. Suspended after a man is killed, he then finds himself being led to an unimaginable murder with the word 'survival' at the scene. He knows it could only have been committed by his group of men. Prior to being disbanded, the East India Company deny such a mission occurred and Bowman becomes the chief suspect. He locates Captain Reeve who tracks down the current whereabouts of those men and gives Bowman a veritable fortune. Upon locating most of the men, Bowman finds nearly all are victim to misfortune, death, and madness. By coincidence, he comes across a New York Tribune article that relates a murder with the same MO in Reunion, Texas. Becoming aware that two of the group are in the USA, he travels there to find his man to stop him. His search takes him to the wild west, across many states and Mexico. He encounters pioneers, farmers, gold prospectors, soldiers, indians, slavery, the American Civil War and Alexandra Desmond. The journey tests him to his limits and puts him on the path of profound change as the ghosts around him multiply.

This is a complex and intricate story of its time, of how much the human spirit can suffer, endure and the slight possibility of hope. Bowman is a man who tries to put right the wrongs he encounters without fear because he has seen all the horror there is to see and done much he is not proud of. He is a man more sinned against than sinning. The writing is sublime, vivid and descriptive, with a compelling narrative that captures the countries in that specific historical period. The author has clearly done his research. This is a book I loved and which I highly recommend. Thanks to Quercus for an ARC.

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### **Abby Slater- Fairbrother says**

Firstly, let me say this paperback has a beautiful cover and perfectly sets the scene for the novel. It is brilliantly eye-catching!

The novel is historical crime fiction and very literary in parts. We follow protagonist Sgt Arthur Bowman in his quest for justice. A quest that will see him travel through various countries on his way.

The novel opens in 1852 Burma, when Lord Dalhousie governor-general of India declared war on the king of Burma. Major Cavendish summons Bowman and informs him he is to take on a secret mission under Cpt Wright. He must intercept the ambassador. The mission is foiled and many men are captured as POW's. Only ten men are ever liberated.

Edmund Peavish  
Peter Clements  
Edward Morgan  
Christian Bufford  
Erik Penders  
Fredrick Collins  
John Briggs  
Horace Grenshaw  
Norton Young &  
Sgt Arthur Bowman  
Are the liberated men.

The novel then jumps to London 1858, with Officer O'Reilly and Superintendent Andrews at the scene of a brutal murder. Bowman is tied to the case, due to his previous run-ins with men down at the docks. When he sees the body, he is in for an almighty shock. . .



'The corpse in the sewer. I've seen that before. In Burma. In the forest' – Bowman

Andrews becomes convinced Bowman is losing it, fearing he is headed for a nervous breakdown. Something we the reader learn, Bowman fears himself. As Bowman is under suspicion, he is placed under house arrest, until the case is solved. But Bowman is unlikely to just accept being a suspect in a gruesome murder on London's streets.

'London really was turning into hell'

Bowman acquires a list of the liberated men but is hindered further when the India company denies their existence and that such a mission took place. Is there a cover-up at the heart of this murder?

Bowman tracks down each man individually. What he uncovers shows the true nature of the psychological/physical impact of mental and violent torture. There are no graphic details of the POW's plight, but the readers comes to understand the depths of the soldiers despair. The trail of POW's lead all the way across the oceans to t America, Where Bowman is reunited with old comrades. . .

'You don't even know if you're seeking an honourable death or an honourable life, Mr Bowman. You'll have to choose in the end, but until you do. You will not belong here, or anywhere else on this earth'

The murders appear to be continuing on American soil. Where black men and native American's can be wrongly accused, leading to fatal consequences. Bowman becomes determined to correct this injustice and find the real killer.

'They say it's Indians. Because whites aren't that cruel' –  
Dr Vladislav Brezisky

Bowman meets an array of characters on his travels and they truly enhance the storytelling. The display of the 1860s American landscape is remarkable. I can see this novel drawing both British and American fans. There is a brilliant ending, with a twist in the tale. The depth and the detail regarding the era and British/US social and political climate is what makes it such a fascinating read. 4.5\*

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## **Andy Weston says**

Varenne's novel opens in London in 1858, the year of the Great Stink; hot and humid weather with a drought so dry that it was said it was possible to walk across the Thames in places. Sargeant Arthur Bowman is sent to lead a secret mission into the jungles of Burma in the second Anglo war. This opening of the book is savage and brutal as 19th century warfare in Asia was, but then the novel heads in a very different direction.

But this wonderfully researched story is about a lot more than the history of an ugly and brutal war. It soon turns 'murder mystery' as Bowman and his men return from the war. Bowman recognises some of the characteristics of a murder and knows straight away it is one of his men. Before long he is pursuing the perpetrator to America, where he hears of a second and similar murder. The historical interest continues as the story becomes an 1850s road trip through New Mexico and Texas to a Colorado in the midst of the gold rush, and on to San Francisco. Meanwhile the opening skirmishes of the Civil War take place.

This historical novel is a huge achievement for Varenne, but the real interest is in the character of Arthur Bowman, once the toughest and most uncompromising soldier, and why he dedicates his life to tracking down a murderer. Almost misleading is the word 'retribution' in the title. Perhaps better something like, the salvation of Sargeant Bowman.

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### **Lisa says**

I have tried to read this two times and I just cannot get on with it.

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