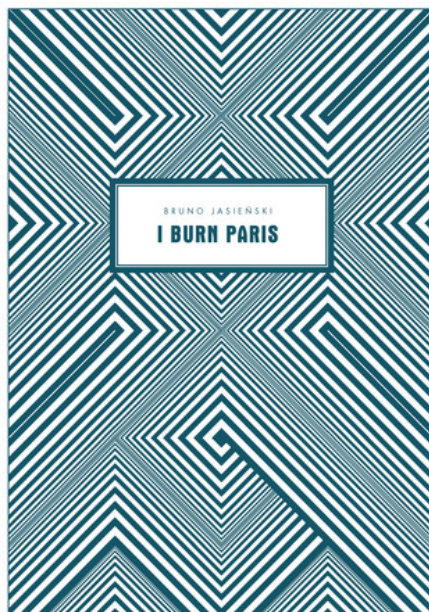




I Burn Paris

Bruno Jasiński , Cristian Opris (Illustrator) , Soren Gauger (Translator) , Marcin Piekoszewski (Translator)

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"This is a superb text of astonishing modernity, a veritable manifesto of the wretched of the earth ..."

— *Marianne*

Bruno Jasienski's *I Burn Paris* has remained one of Poland's most uncomfortable masterstrokes of literature since its initial and controversial serialization in 1928 in the French magazine *L'Humanité* (for which Jasienski was deported). It tells the story of a disgruntled factory worker who, finding himself on the streets, takes the opportunity to poison Paris's water supply with a deadly virus. With the deaths piling up, we encounter Chinese communists, rabbis, disillusioned scientists, American millionaires and a host of others as the city sections off into ethnic enclaves and everyone plots their route of escape. At the heart of the cosmopolitan city is a deep-rooted xenophobia and hatred — the one thread that binds all these groups together. As Paris lies in ruin, Jasienski issues a rallying cry to the downtrodden of the world while mixing "The Internationale" with a broadcast of popular music.

With its montage strategies reminiscent of early avant-garde cinema and fist-to-the-gut metaphors, *I Burn Paris* has lost none of its vitality and vigor. Ruthlessly dissecting various utopian fantasies, Jasienski is out to disorient, and he has a seemingly limitless ability to transform the Parisian landscape into the product of disease-addled minds. An exquisite example of literary Futurism and Catastrophism, the novel presents a filthy, degenerated world where factories and machines have replaced the human, but rather than cliché and simplistic propaganda, these features are given an immediacy that depicts the modern metropolis as only superficially cosmopolitan, as hostile and animalistic to its core.

I Burn Paris Details

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From Reader Review I Burn Paris for online ebook

KR says

I Burn Paris was a great read, if confusing at times. Profoundly ambiguous in viewpoint, in my opinion. It was only later that I read about Jasiński that things started to make sense: a Polish Futurist, a poet, a communist, and a later prisoner of Stalin's gulag. But (perhaps shockingly for a futurist) this book is possessed of a deep class hatred, mocking the liberals of Paris, while the proletariat and political underclass are nearly heroic. Of course I was a huge fan of this part in particular.

The novel opens with a story that's pretty standard fare, I guess I would call it romantic. Pierre loses his girlfriend, his job, and his sanity in quick order. After that, the story explodes, killing Pierre in a bizarre way (nearly off-camera) after he introduces some type of hyper-bubonic plague to Paris' water reservoir. As Paris disintegrates under the plague, factions form and intrigue begins: here's the Soviet of Belleville, here's the White Army Emigres, here's the Parisian bourgeoisie, here's the Jewish quarter, here's the Maoist Latin Quarter. As often with books from a more politicized time period, the starkness of the political affiliations on display jumped out at me—imagine a post-apocalyptic (if you can call it that) novel that so explicitly represents political schools like this written in the last like 20 years. Maybe this is too Mark Fisher of me but I couldn't help but compare it to contemporary things like The Hunger Games with its laughable caricature of politics and insurrection.

Anyway, the book ends with a series of feints and botched heroism. Not going to spoil the end, but it's strangely uplifting what happens inside a diseased Paris within the military cordon.

Kobe Bryant says

The first part was cool and I dont really know what happened in the other parts

John Christy says

jasienski is lazy and smart. the book is driven by strong passions and prejudices. doesnt apologize for outright glorification of proletarians and, more strikingly, the villification of decadent and rotting liberals & bourgeois

he got banned from france for writing it

Eadweard says

I Burn Paris has characters, but like Andrei Bely's Petersburg, the real protagonist is the city itself, that was one of the first things I thought as I read the first 30 or so pages, it reminded me quite a bit of Petersburg, the scale of it, the pace, the poem-like vibe. I simply loved this book. An ode to the proletariat? A rail against capitalism? Both.

"Back in the factory Pierre had heard long and monotonous stories about this new world, a world with neither rich nor oppressed, where the factories would be owned by the workers, and labor would change from a form of slavery to a hymn, to hygiene for the liberated body. He didn't believe them. No one would budge the diabolical machine, not one inch! It had grown deep into the Earth. It had been running since time immemorial, ever since it had been set in motion. Seize the cogs with your bare hands? It wouldn't stop, it would just rip off your hands. He saw blood on soiled bandages, hands bound in bloody rags, and he thought: another exercise in futility. The battered bodies were flung off the transmission belt and onto the sidelines, behind the wall, with a flick of the wrist.

Sometimes at night, a white-hot word of hatred would fly out from the huddled group, fall like a spark upon the soft sawdust of his dreams and then blaze up with a red flame: Go! Stand arm in arm with them! Storm! Smash! Take revenge!"

"The following day was the 14th of July.

Paris's intrepid shopkeepers, those who had stormed the Bastille to erect in its place an ugly hollow column "with a view of the city," twelve bistros, and three brothels for average citizens and one for homosexuals, were throwing a party in their own honor, as they did every year, with a traditional, republican dance.

Decorated from head to toe in sashes of tricolor ribbons, Paris looked like an aging actress dressed up like a country bumpkin to star in some folksy piece of trash at the church fair.

The squares, illuminated with tens of thousands of paper lanterns and light bulbs, slowly filled with the strolling crowd.

With the coming of dusk an unseen switch was flicked, and the gaudy footlights of the streets exploded in a gala show.

On platforms cobbled together from planks, drowsy, grotesque musicians – rightly assuming that a holiday meant a day of communal rest – blew a few bars of a fashionable dance tune out of their strangely warped trumpets every half-hour or so and then rested long and extravagantly."

"“Tell me,” the professor finally said, wiping the misted lenses of his glasses with a handkerchief, “tell me if you’d be so kind ... I simply don’t understand. Why is it exactly that you despise us so implacably when you owe us so much, when you are endlessly taking from us. I think about this constantly, and I can’t find an answer. If I killed you, I’d never know. Please explain why, if it makes no difference to you ...”

Under the arcades of the bridge with their feminine curves, black, sparkling water babbled with a million mouths in prayer.

Leaning on the stone balustrade, P’an Tsiang-kuei spoke in a measured and passionless voice:

“Asian-European antagonism, a subject on which your scholars have scribbled whole volumes, searching for its origins in the depths of racial and religious differences, plays itself out entirely on the surface of everyday economics and class struggle. Your science, of which you are so proud and which we travel here to study, is not a system of tools to help man conquer nature, but rather to help Europe conquer non-Europe, to exploit weaker continents. This is why we despise your Europe and why we come here to study you so fervently. Only by mastering the achievements of your science will we be able to shed the yoke of your oppression.

Your bourgeois Europe, expatiating far and wide on your cultural self-sufficiency, is no more than a small parasite latched onto the western flank of Asia's gigantic body, sucking its juices dry. It is we, planting our rice and growing cotton and tea, who are – along with your own proletariat – the real, though indirect, creators of your culture. Its complex aroma, spreading the sweat of your workers and peasants all around the world, mingles with the smell of the Chinese coolie's sweat." "

"Bells rang from Sacré-Coeur.

From Saint-Pierre, from Sainte-Clotilde, from Saint-Louis, from the small, scattered churches of the Saint-Germain district, Catholic Paris replied with a rueful clanging of bells.

The dull, weepy bells fought it out over the city with their fists of lead in their hollow bronze chests, and the church interiors responded with the din of hands convulsively wringing and a bitter, pious murmur. The adoration of the Sacrament continued incessantly, administered by waxen priests swaying from exhaustion.

In the Orthodox church of the Passy district, the metropolitan in gilded robes read from the Gospels in a rich, sonorous voice, and all the bells rang like it was Easter Sunday.

Paris again burst open along the wide seam of the Seine, where it had once been hastily stitched with the white threads of bridges.

On either side of the Passy Bridge flags fluttered from a lamppost: the tricolor flag of the Russian Empire and the flag of the Bourbons, white with gold lilies – the provisional border between two monarchies."

"Left to their own devices, the police found themselves for the first time in a troublesome quandary. Suddenly stripped of the compass of the law, unable to decide which of the emergent governments should be considered lawful, and realizing the fictitiousness of any government outside the ring of the cordon, the unemployed blue people swiftly came to realize that they were less real creatures with every passing day, becoming metaphysical fiction, pure nonsense, insubstantial, like the very concept of "police for police's sake."

On the third day, Île de la Cité bore witness to the first demonstration of unemployed policemen in the history of the world.

The crowd of jobless blue people spread all across the island, flowing into the square below the prefecture. At the head of the procession demonstrators carried placards with slogans: "The Republic is dead – Long live the Republic!" "We demand some form of government!" "The police without a government is like an electric tram without a power plant!" and so forth.

An impressive meeting was held in the square before the prefecture. After long discussions on how to save the police as such, it was decided to turn to the various governments of the new states one at a time, offering law enforcement services.

"This is not about the color, or even the national status of a government," claimed the man who devised the

idea. “In order to win back their *raison d’être*, to return from the land of fiction and onto the lists of real institutions, the police have to immediately support a government of any sort, even the idea of government. Without the notion of law and order, we are but shadows.””

Anton Relin says

Brash, unabashed prose. Written incredibly vividly, I recommend this to any fan of futurism, of vorticism, or literature in general. Among my favorite, if not my all time favorite.

Dwight says

My review

Please see my introductory post on *I Burn Paris* which has some good links, including the Afterword by Soren Gauger.

The story starts with Pierre, an assembly-line worker in an automobile manufacturer, fired from his job due to “France’s lousy economic condition”. Pierre, out of frustration at his inability to find a job and the infidelity of his girlfriend, poisons the water supply of Paris with a super strain of bubonic plague. Pierre sees pre-plague Paris as a debauched place, full of prostitution (used often as a metaphor for decadent capitalism, along with jazz) and other vices—it is the system he rages against, not any individual. As the plague unfolds the city reacts with a mixture of denial with continued drinking and dancing, then a turn toward religion. As the city is cordoned off to prevent any escape by inhabitants, communes are established along ethnic, political, and racial lines.

It’s at this point that Jasie?ski steps back to look at notable characters trapped in the city and the role they play as the plague wipes out the populace. Jasie?ski provides a long history of P’an Tsiang-kuei, his path to Communism in China, and his involvement in the political movement. The Jewish community rallies around Rabbi Eliezer be Zvi as he carries out a plan for some members to escape to America. Businessman David Lingslay, a wealthy capitalists trapped in the city, goes along with the rabbi’s plans after he believes he will contract the plague. Capt. Solomin and comrade Laval represent the White and Red side of Russia.

As Jasie?ski puts it, the plague “leveled social stratification” by indiscriminately killing rich and poor alike while the partitioning of Paris reflects one bad side of human behavior—the tendency to fragment instead of working together. During the crisis some people perform great acts or represent a better side of human nature. P’an’s education and personal drive place him at the head of the Communist coup in the Chinese district. Laval executes a daring plan to feed the Soviet quarter. David Lingslay ultimately does the right thing. A professor works tirelessly in the Chinese sector to find an antidote even though he saw P’an murder his son.

Prisons survive untouched thanks to having a separate water supply and no movement of people in or out of the fortresses. After the last death in Paris from the plague, the prisoners (mostly political in nature) escape and found their own colony safe from the outside world. While the whole novel is political in nature, the end section after the establishment of this communist utopia provides the most idealistic language. Meanwhile, France has set up a new capital in Lyon after writing off Paris and Jasie?ski tantalizes the reader with the implication that what happened in Paris will be repeated there and in other major “capitalist” cities.

I wish I could discuss *I Burn Paris* avoiding some of the messages underlying it but it’s not possible since Jasie?ski’s message is the political. Fortunately he’s not a one-note author and there’s more to the novel than politics. I’ll focus on translator Soren Gauger’s excellent Afterword since it turns out much of my response to the book is similar to his although I want to delve into a few areas where I diverge from his conclusions. Gauger divides his essay into Objective, Quasi-objective, and Non-objective sections. From the Quasi-objective section:

I Burn Paris remains a reluctantly acknowledged masterpiece in part because of all the ambiguities. The effect comes from following moral impulses so obsessively that they sometimes become their own opposites.

Gauger details some of the ambiguities, but I’m not sure I would label all of them with that title. There are several cross-currents moving above and beneath the surface of the novel, the biggest of which is the noted spread of Communism at the same time as the spread of a “deadly and unstoppable plague.” Jasie?ski provides a catastrophe as necessary in order to implement a successful communist society, one that will soon repeat in Lyon. Deeper than the subtle message that death and communism spread together is his implied (intended or not) verdict that communism has to be separated from the rest of the world in order to thrive. A deeper ambiguity appears in Pierre’s judgment about the communists around him in prison from a statement that could be read in two different ways depending on the identity of “They” starting the second sentence:

No, these people [political prisoners] don’t know how to hate! They have heaps of plans for replacing one machine with another. Replace this one with that, and again they spin circles, cogs mesh with cogs, they pull, drag, carry the defenseless human splinters and again they’ll bloody their hands on the black spokes of the wheels, these terror-crazed Pierres, incapable of stopping the wheels, or stalling them for even a second.

Meet the new boss? Or replace the system since fighting against the machinery will be futile? Even with that uncertainty, what isn’t ambiguous is Jasie?ski’s belief that communism should prevail and that society would be...well, I’ll let you read (and I will resist further, obvious comments):

Where once the Place de la Concorde had stretched with a measureless sheet of polished asphalt, from La Madeleine to the Chambre des Députés, from Champs-Élysées to the Tuileries, a meadow of ripe grain now rippled in the gentle southerly wind. This grain was being gathered by mechanized harvesters driven by brawny, tanned men in white undershirts. Men and women dressed in the same light harvesting clothes were nimbly piling the ready sheaves onto a waiting truck. At the edges of the field on all sides, women rested and breast-fed their infants.

Outside of the communist propaganda, Jasie?ski proves to be very sympathetic to individuals as he explores their humanity and ability to do the right thing regardless of ideology. He also emphasizes the ties of brotherhood, heavy-handed at times such as the case of Boris and Sergai, Russian brothers from the Red and White sides. In addition, Jasie?ski isn’t afraid to detail human failings without regard to ideology. The anti-Semitism Jasie?ski highlights isn’t limited to Capt. Solomin (which Gauger points out) but occurs in the

Soviet and American camps as well.

I Burn Paris book may not be the masterpiece claimed but it has a lot to recommend. Jasie?ski's language can be hypnotic at times as the reader has to decipher familiar things described in an absurd or bizarre manner as details in a world where the individual is of no concern to those in power. Fortunately not everything depends on propaganda and Jasie?ski can provide layers of meaning, sometimes clear but often ambiguous. Pierre's descent into madness are, as Gauger notes, a compelling section. Jasie?ski also focuses on the difference that brief moments can make in a life, whether through actions taken or images retained, both of which can propel an individual to greater achievements. The fantastic and bizarre that Jasie?ski describes, both in subject and description, makes for a thoughtful, disturbing read.

Sam says

You can hear an in-depth discussion of Jasie?ski's 'I Burn Paris' on Sherds Podcast:
<http://www.holdfastnetwork.com/sherds...>

Tonymess says

Outside of Poland, Bruno Jasie?ski is a little known name, and I can imagine that inside of Poland he's probably an obscure name, although he has a street named after him, and an annual "Brunonalia" literary festival is named after him, both in Klimontów. But when you read his biography, let alone his works, it is amazing that he is not more well known.

A Polish-Jew, he is considered one of the founders of the Polish futurist movement and moved to Paris in 1925, listing three reasons for leaving Poland; (1) he had graduated from university and was due to serve twenty months of compulsory military service, (2) he was being sued for alleged blasphemy during one of his poetry readings, which could have resulted in a year or two in prison, and (3) he was an unemployed literary graduate whose scandalous reputation scarcely promised him work as a high-school teacher. Whilst there his novel *Pal? Pary?* was serialised by the leftist *L'Humanité* newspaper in French as "*Je Brûel Paris*" ("I Burn Paris"), the title reportedly being a rebuttable to Paul Morand's pamphlet "*Je Brûel Moscow*", ("bruler" having the idiomatic meaning, to "travel through quickly"). Paul Monard's (who would later collaborate with the Nazis) pamphlet was a short anti-Semitic and anti-Soviet's satire. The novel was quickly translated into Russian, where the first edition of 140,000 copies sold out in a matter of days, prompting a second edition of 220,000 copies. In 1929 the original Polish text was published in Warsaw, but Jasie?ski was expelled from France for the novel and importation of the book was forbidden on the grounds it "exuded blind and stupid hatred for Western European culture". Unable to be admitted to Belgium or Luxembourg, Jasie?ski stayed in Frankfurt Germany until the extradition order was withdrawn, only to return to France and be expelled again for communist agitation.

Settling in Leningrad in the USSR in 1929 he accepted Soviet citizenship, moving to Moscow in 1932. As a strong supporter of Genrikh Yagoda's political purges within the writers' community, Jasie?ski lost support when the Stalin appointed director of the Soviet's security and intelligence agency was himself arrested, charged with the crimes of wrecking, espionage, Trotskyism and conspiracy, found guilty and shot. Jasie?ski's first wife, Klara Arem, who had had an affair with Yagoda, was also arrested, sentenced to death

and executed, as a result Jasie?ski was expelled from the All-Union Communist Party (the Bolsheviks). He was fighting accusations of being a Polish spy and an enemy of the people and was arrested on 31 July 1937, and after being sentenced to 15 years in a labour camp he was instead executed on 17 September 1938. Surviving letters from his time in prison still remain, they are written directly to Stalin, begging for clemency, and listing torture such as fingernails being pulled out, teeth kicked in. Jasie?ski's second wife, Anna Berin, was arrested in 1939 and spent seventeen years in various Soveit gulags, and his son was stripped of his identity and sent to an orphanage, but managed to escape during World War II. After the war he went on to become a prominent figure in Russia's criminal underworld. Eventually discovering his true heritage, he took a Polish name and became active in various illegal organizations in opposition to the Communist regime. He was killed in the 1970s.

This all reads like a film script and although a lengthy introduction to a review of "I Burn Paris" it is valuable information to understand the political and historical motivations of the author.

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

Malcolm says

When Jeanette told Pierre she needed some new slippers, Pierre was thrown into a state of crisis. They were not far from the factory where she worked, and not far from the factory where he worked, until lunch time that is when the foreman told him he was no longer needed. Pierre's new found poverty quickly led to his side-lining in their group – as his lack of money quickly marked him as a being without social worth, social networks, social relations, without value.

From this one moment, with its profound critique of the worker in a capitalist social order, Jasie?ski launches a rich, slightly surreal history of the world in a Paris that resembles the commune-under-siege (or perhaps it's just Paris-under-siege, and I am over-reading it.....) as Pierre's dehumanisation becomes generalised and as the dehumanised fight back. But it is a revolution without (much) coherence, quickly splintering into factions where the communists, socialists and anarchists hate each other about as much as they hate the conservatives, the nationalists and spiritualist factions while the national military surround, besiege and isolate the city. Deals are done while 'somewhere else' offers hope.

Jasie?ski's city is a mere façade, a chimera of gentility, where the human and the humane have been replaced by the factory, by machines and with them by technocratic rationality, where human and humane relationships have been pushed aside by the logic of economic rationality and where any and everything is for sale. Against this he paints a picture of a city eventually demarcated by zones of control and difference that it is hard not to read as arrondissement, but then that is my map of Paris no doubt imposed on Jasie?ski's Futurist psychogeography of his character's urban and political utopian fantasies that finish up shimmering in a seam-zone between utopian and dystopian, both depicted as addled.

Yet, unlike many of the Italian Futurists, Jasie?ski was on and of the Left making this a dystopia of hope – but then such was a key trope of the inter-war avant-garde. For all its bleakness, its focus on the dehumanised, its scepticism about the potential of utopian thinking there is an optimism here that enlivens and invigorates. Notably, it's not just about the politics: the novel sparkles, the language pulls us in and along so that despite the labels 'Futurist' and 'Avant-garde' that often serve of markers of over-done inaccessibility *I Burn Paris* remains engaging and very enjoyable.

It may be an obscure novel published by a small, very literary Czech-based press, but it should be a classic of 20th century literature: once again Twisted Spoon Press has done us a service.

Tomasz says

Powie?? bardzo zaskakuj?ca. Nie jest to mo?e "wielkie" dzie?o ale z pewno?ci? jedna z niespodzianek polskiej literatury, która mimo up?ywu czasu nadal warta jest czytania. Niby powie?? socjalistyczna, z te? i znanymi motywami, ale jeszcze przed ustaleniem si? socrealizmu. S? postacie uciemi??onego proletariatu, silnych robotników i ideowych komunistów, jest apoteoza pracy i krytyka zachodniej zgnilizny, ale styl, j?zyk i fabu?a s? dalekie od ortodoksji. Przede wszystkim ogromna pasja niszczenia. Komunistyczna utopia powstaje dopiero na ugorze Europy. Sam pomys? zarazy, uwolnionej przez cz?owieka, a która nie zostaje opanowana, lecz wypala si? wraz z wymarciem Pary?a jest zupe?nie wyj?tkowa.

Bardzo dobrym pomys?em jest wydanie jej wraz z opowiadaniem Moranda, które wbrew temu co napisano we wst?pie, jest rzeczywicie mocn? krytyk? warunków ?ycia w radzieckiej Moskwie.

Kevin says

Absolutely spectacular! Startlingly plausible, razor-sharp prose (even in translation); amid the shifting perspectives, utterly engrossing. Best novel I've read this year.

Vincent says

5 stars for audacity alone. And it is a fun book, a catastrophic vision of Western Europe crumbling, giving way for a new system (it was written between the two World Wars, so guess which). And you know, as bizarre as the book is, there are some touching moments among the plague and hubris. Mostly I wanted to see what was so bad that the French felt the need to kick Jasienski out of Europe.

Kulturozpyt Prumerny says

"There survive a few of his letters written from captivity directly to Stalin, begging for clemency. In his last letter of many pages, written in self defense, he lists the shocking tortures to which he was subjected (fingernails pulled out, teeth kicked in)"

It is an irony. Author wrote a book about socialism and USSR. Then he died because of stalinism in USSR. I have only one message to the leftist audience:

STALIN, LENIN, PUTIN, all of you, go fuck yourself... .

[P] says

Her name is Laure. And the place is Paris. Her name, which she dislikes because of its ubiquity in that city, was given to her by her parents precisely for that reason: so that she would fit in. I met her in Le Piano

Vache, a bar on Rue Laplace. With a typical male predatory instinct, I waited until her friend had gone to the toilet before approaching her. When I introduced myself she laughed at l'englishman ivre. Her voice was like the tinkling of small bells; when I heard it I felt as though I was being called to worship. I told her she was beautiful; she told me she was Algerian. I did not understand.

In Paris, she said, there is no solidarity. You would not love me; and I could not love you. I am not French here; not Parisian. Only to you I am. She sounded gay; I suspected that she could not sound anything but gay. They are obsessed and now I am obsessed too, and it is because we are all scared. The way she told it there was no Paris at all, only a number of independent communities or small states eyeing each other suspiciously, each convinced that the others are intent on killing them. She made it sound like a large-scale Mexican stand-off, one that would inevitably descend into bloody chaos when the strain of inaction became too much to bear.

I took Laure out only once. She was right, we were destined not to love each other; but not for the reason she had envisioned. I had to return to England, of course; and, although we stayed in touch for a while, eventually she became just another in a series of my life's small, but still painful endings. However, what she said to me that first night still plays on my mind; it troubled me that someone could feel that way, could live feeling despised and dispossessed in the city that they ought to be able to call home. Motivated by a desire to explore, or indulge, these thoughts and feelings, I initially picked up Philippe Soupault's *Last Nights of Paris*, but, for all its virtues, its light and airy tone was like eating candyfloss; it upset my stomach with its sugary sweetness.

Yet with literature, much like with music, there is, if you look long enough, or know where to look, always something out there to suit your mood; whatever your feelings, whatever your ideas, someone else will have had them before you and fixed them on paper. It was, therefore, only a matter of time before I came upon Bruno Jasie'ski's *I Burn Paris*. First published in 1928, the novel, which was apparently met with a fair amount of controversy when it saw the light of day, ostensibly deals with an outbreak of plague in the French capital. As one would expect, the spread of the disease results in Paris being essentially quarantined by the authorities. But more interesting than this is the effect it has on the general population, not physically but psychologically.

We are, of course, all aware that one day we will cease to exist, but for many of us this knowledge is stored away in one of the least accessible corners of our minds as we carry on with our mundane lives. A tragedy such as a plague epidemic, however, makes this impossible, and Jasie'ski's novel includes some impressive writing about what it is like to make sustained eye contact with almost certain death. My favourite passage in this regard involves the rich American David Lingslay who is said to safeguard the 'wretched formulation of hope, that one percent chance of salvation, somewhere deep inside him, like a nestling cuddled in his bosom.' There is, moreover, also the suggestion that some of the inhabitants of Paris consider themselves to be, in a sense, superior to the disease. The Jews, for example, believe it to be a punishment that has 'descended upon Aryan Paris for their centuries of oppressing the Jewish nation', and, as such, they – the Jews – will naturally be 'spared'.

While for the Jews the catastrophe is arrogantly deemed to be a sign of favour, others actively seek to use it to their advantage. Indeed, according to the author, the plague 'levelled social stratification,' such that Lingslay cannot, despite the 'gravity of his surname', arrange to leave the city. As a consequence of this levelling, this shuffling of the cards, men like Captain Solomin, an emigre Russian, who had been working as a taxi driver prior to the outbreak, are able to gain power and prestige. Similarly, the communists view the plague, not necessarily as a punishment for certain groups, but as a convenient, welcome, event that will eradicate, or at least weaken, their enemies – the bourgeoisie – and give them a chance to create a proletarian, communist Paris.

What ought to be clear at this point is that Jasie'ski's vision, his take on humanity and its impulses and

behaviour, has much in common with Laure's. When faced with this hardship, these difficulties, the people of Paris, in both the novel and the experience of my friend, do not come together, they move even further apart. In fact, in *I Burn Paris* there is an organised division, i.e recognised independent city-states are created, some along racial or national lines – Jewish, Chinese, Russian, Anglo-American, etc – and others social. Once this separation takes place, these groups indulge their prejudices or biases; the opposing city-states become other and therefore something to be feared, denigrated, ridiculed and ultimately eradicated. 'Russians are savages', one character thinks to himself, and one cannot but see in this the similarly absolute, and similarly misguided, belief that 'Muslims are terrorists.'

In the small number of reviews of that I have encountered there seemed to be an emphasis upon the important role of socialist politics in the book, even to the point of suggesting that it is a kind of [sometimes morally dubious] anti-capitalist manifesto. However, I find it difficult to reconcile this view with what I read. Certainly, there is discussion of socialist politics and concerns, and Pierre, who sets the story in motion, is made redundant as a result of France's 'lousy economic condition.' Yet while you might argue that unemployment is responsible for the plague, that it motivates Pierre to act, Jasie?ski makes it clear that, to quote his own first line, things that are 'private in nature' are equally or more significant. For me, the first section of *I Burn Paris* is, at heart, about jealousy. Yes, Pierre loses his job, but he also loses Jeanette, and, for the remainder of his life, sees her, or imagines her, in the company of other men everywhere he goes.

To his credit, the author avoids lazy moralising by giving depth to, or breathing some life into, his characters. For example, the adult P'an Tsiang-kuei is a psychopathic communist, who thinks nothing of killing for 'the greater good' [where have we heard that before?]; but we are also allowed access to his backstory, his history, as a mistreated orphan. We come to see how he became what he is, and it felt kosher to me. I believed it, and I believed in P'an. In Jasie?ski's world, as in the real world, there are no absolute villains [or heroes]. People frequently do bad things, but in most cases one understands their motivations, even if one does not agree with the resulting act or behaviour. Another example of this is when a Japanese deliberately infects the man who ordered the death of his wife. Indeed, *I Burn Paris* is full of wonderful, often moving, minor portraits; and this is, I believe, its greatest strength. 'You cannot feel concern for everyone,' Jasie?ski writes at one point, and yet his own work goes some way to disproving this statement.

!Tæmbu?u says

KOBOBOOKS

Reviewed by The Complete Review

Braden says

Very bleak, ironic and funny.

The whole thing works as this impressive machine for Jasienski's metaphors. If you can't come to any conclusion about the viability of Communism, if one can avoid feeling drowned as a proletariat within a Capitalist machine, what's obvious is this is a pretty incredibly crafted novel.

Since this was written in 1928 and only published in English in 2012 this is likely the case of a significant novel being given late-dues.

Jayden gonzalez says

this book is really good i think.

Adrian Fulneczek says

Roz-cza-ro-wa-nie.

Paul says

I'm not sure quite what to think of this, it came across as disjointed and too short that none of the characters bar P'an are fleshed out at all. The three parts of the novel (Part 1, P'an's history, and what happens to Paris) could almost be written by different people.

Part 1 felt far too short, just as it was getting started it was over. Not to mention what was there was so unnecessarily overloaded with description and imagery that it seemed more like a poem than a novel (understandable given the author is also a poet I guess).

Then suddenly without explanation we are taken away from Paris to P'an for a significant part of the novel. Frankly this was the most interesting and fleshed out content in the entire book. What came after P'an was barely more than summary of events, none of the imagery of part 1, but instead a whole lot of derogatory cultural stereotyping.

It seems to me the entire book was just an outlet for the author's own political/sociopathic fantasies.

Daniel T says

very cool book. last part is kinda weird. first part was awesome. middle was very sad
