



Le Sang noir

Louis Guilloux

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Le Sang noir est l'histoire d'une journée de 1917, dans une ville provinciale de l'arrière. C'est à travers le calvaire du professeur de philosophie Merlin, dit Cripure (à cause de la critique de la raison pure), le tableau d'une société de pharisiens, de grotesques, de haïssables, en face de gentils, de révoltés, de victimes. Cripure, lui, s'il a été un révolté, ne l'est plus guère. Il est la caricature d'un homme extrêmement pitoyable. Moqué par ses élèves, vivant avec une gothon, sachant qu'une révolution se lève à l'Est, trop tard pour lui, haï par tous les patriotes de l'arrière, il veut se battre en duel, dans un dernier sursaut. Et, comme on le prive de ce duel et de son honneur, il ne lui reste plus que le suicide. Cripure qui, la nuit, dans son sommeil, entend une voix de femme lui demander : " Pourquoi as-tu envie de pleurer ? " , est une de ces figures les plus présentes qu'un romancier ait jamais créées. Il a beau sortir du roman, grotesquement vautré dans une troïka lamentable, agonisant, lentement escorté à travers la ville, jusqu'à l'hôpital, par deux agents cyclistes, il ne sera jamais oublié. Bien que retentissant des problèmes de 1917, Le Sang noir est un roman métaphysique, plus que politique. Cette dimension métaphysique et le foisonnement des personnages : Cripure, Maïa, Nabucet, Moka, Lucien... font du Sang noir le roman le plus dostoïevskien de la littérature française.

Le Sang noir Details

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From Reader Review Le Sang noir for online ebook

Chuck LoPresti says

Compelled to review. Sort of reads like The Book of Ebenezer Le Page in that it details WWI with easy lucidity. At times very funny but always tragic - Cripure now resides in my brain along side Peredonov and Pere Ubu. Not so much because they share characteristics but moreso in that they are characteristics. I'll edit my shitty writing later but I want to get my impressions out before they become tainted as most thoughts are when they transmogrify into ideas (in my head at least). What's a great read but a connection? There's a powerful mind behind this work and part of the strength is in Guilloux's honesty in asking questions instead of giving answers. I've spent the last few hours of reading this book not so much reading as observing a narrative. Only the names are fictive because you'll have no doubt this is exactly how things unfolded over a 24 hour period in France. Rezzori, Khrzhizhanovsky and Kosztolanyi come to mind as points of comparison. Rich with human understanding and depth all tempered by an appreciated respect for the reader. Rarely have I enjoyed reading something as much as this. There are few things more worth my time and coin than the NYRB classics and this one rates among their best offerings.

Béatrice says

L'écriture est riche, originale. Mais c'est dur d'entrer dedans!

Jason says

Though it was originally published in 1935, there is a pristine justness in the appearance of Laura Marris's translation of BLOOD DARK (the English title a crafty rendering of LE SANG NOIR) in 2017, as said year marked the centenary of the year in which the novel is set. 1917 was late in the First World War and moral exhaustion had long begun to set in, though the outcome was still far from a sure thing. Mutineers were legion, popular opinion was wavering, and the culture at large was riven w/ contention(s). Louis Guilloux's novel takes place on the home front, in a mid-size town on the north coast of Brittany (based on the town of Saint-Brieuc where Guilloux himself grew up); it is a place where all the aforementioned factors are demonstratively in play. BLOOD DARK appears only a couple years after Céline's great modernist game-changer JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE NIGHT. Both novels are caustic. Both novels are cynical about both the First World War and the hypocritical culture that fostered it. Céline expresses a kind of nihilism, Guilloux grapples w/ nihilism, apparently trying to remain something of a moral ... adult. Whereas Céline was a confrontational pathfinder wielding a metaphorical machete, Guilloux was a writer of extraordinary dexterity committed to a kind of virile classicism. Though perhaps as adept a clinician as Céline in assessing the cruelty, mendacity, and stupidity of a culture and the variegated individuals who populate it, Guilloux is nonetheless ultimately far more sympathetic to his flawed and often comically misdirected characters. Guilloux is a novelist in the mode of the 19th century greats. I think especially of Dostoevsky and Dickens. BLOOD DARK is, simply put, a tragicomic masterpiece, sometimes very funny indeed, often maliciously so, but ultimately sad and very powerful. (Worth noting that it profoundly impacted the French literary intelligentsia of the time, perhaps especially those on the left.) It is a novel that uses one character as a fulcrum around whom is mobilized a multitude of interconnected narrative regimes, all of it beholden to a coherence of time and space in service to rising action. It is indeed like the more populated greater works of Dostoevsky, and if it is a little less feverish and declamatory than ol' DEMONS, it is not tremendously less so. Individual characters are extremely well conceived and meticulously established, but ultimately what

wows is the psychological profile of a broader social body. Did I say wows? I would just like to end by saying that the final sentence of BLOOD DARK provoked me to actually, alone in my condo, loudly exclaim "WHOOOOOOOA, WOOOOOOOOOW!"

Ana says

I didn't really like the way it was written, but I enjoyed the story. A strange visit into a professor's mind, a ride in which you find some of the boundaries that we, as humans, can reach.

Dirk says

At various turns very bitter and brutally tragic, this novel's clarity of thought and unremitting honesty present a view into the human soul through an open wound.

Bettie? says

Albert Camus thought "Blood Dark" rivalled the great Russian epics, but it is little known in English.

David says

I really liked this one. A sprawling, apocalyptic novel that weaves proto-existential ideas with wartime malaise. Its characters and themes are often ugly, but there's tenderness buried within.

Rhoddi says

I'm sad I've finished this book. It had such a life to it, in its joys and tragedies, in its multitude of endearing characters, in its philosophical conversations. I really fell like I've read something special here.

Ian says

This really is an astonishing book, the introduction says that Camus compared it to Dostoevsky and I wouldn't disagree.

It takes place in 24 hours with a fairly large cast of 20 or so characters in a small French provincial town in 1917 close to the Western Front. The backdrop is the First World War which permeates much of the action

indirectly, but Guilloux is adept at getting inside each characters thoughts and motivations, the psychology that he portrays is as Dostoevsky. It's a complex canvas and I think will definitely benefit from re-reading to appreciate the full subtleties.

Fabulous book - well done to NYRB for publishing (and did they commission this new translation which makes it so readable ?)

Daniel Polansky says

Extraordinary. A WWI novel without combat, a very early absurdist text, existentialism before existentialism, *Blood Dark* is another one of those novels that a couple of hundred words isn't really going to do justice to. The story of a faded, miserable, deformed academic, whose existence is dominated by a pointless and vague but still in some sense admirable crusade against – what, exactly? His fellow man, the circumstances enforced upon them by a cruel circumstance or a still more terrible deity. The surrounding cast of hypocrites, sadistic false patriots, weak saints, elderly lovers and corrupt bourgeoisie offer a scathing comment on the state of the French nation in the last year of WWI, but our pseudo-hero's crusade, indifferently and pointlessly pursued, is at the heart of this masterpiece. This is bitter black by not nihilistic, and in contrast to a lot of his successors, NAME works to mine some value out of the ludicrous awfulness of the human condition, rather than wallowing pointlessly in it. Very strong recommendation, assuming, you know, you have the energy and time to spare.

Brooke Salaz says

Set in 1917 France it tells of a single two day period in a small town coping with WWI. It is not just the tragic loss of young life but the suspicions that some community members are not fully supportive of the war effort that pits people against one another to varying degrees. Cripure is the nickname given to a philosophy professor at the lycee who has a deformity of the feet which both hampers his mobility and makes him a figure of ridicule, while simultaneously being admired by many former students having been influenced by his uncompromising intellect. Nabucet, another teacher there, is the pretentious antithesis of Cripure, all style and no substance. The two come into conflict during a demonstration at the railway station where the public is being prevented from boarding. It turns into a melee with a faction taking it up as a sort of anti-war protest and Cripure ends up slapping Nabucet. A fascinating portrayal of the many eccentric characters inhabiting this village with a great deal of humor interspersed with the tragic.
