

Burning Paris by Nicholas Blincoe.
Sceptre/Hodder and Stoughton 2004. £16.99.

It is hard to decide what the principle point of this intriguing novel is, which is one of the reasons why it is a generally satisfying read.

This is the story of a single father, a journalist and writer, writing a novel about a revolutionary General in 19th century Paris at the time of the Franco-Prussian war. Based by chance in Paris for six months he comes into the ambit of a circle of friends of the ambiguous Flavie, with whom he falls in love.

The twists and turns in the author's life echo and match in some instances that of Brunel, his hero, and the love of his life, a famous Parisian chef called Babette. But in the closing chapters the author's infatuation with Flavie takes him to the West Bank where he becomes embroiled as a volunteer helping Palestinians in their struggle against the Israeli occupation.

For me the telling of General Brunel's life, and his love for Babette, was more rewarding than the contemporary affaire with Flavie, but there are sufficient twists in Burning Paris to keep the reader engaged to the end.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh