

Russian Hide and Seek

K. Amis

August 28 - September 6, 2017

As a teenager I read 'One Fat Englishmen' by Amis. I do not remember very much, the topic of adultery was not very hot for a young man as of yet innocent of any romantic involvement. Sixteen years later, while visiting Sofia in 1984, I read 'Lucky Jim' with great enjoyment. Some years later, I read 'Stanley and the women' which did not make any impression on me except the fact that it appeared tired and written out of duty. Now I found 'Russian Hide and Seek' in my library, encountering maybe the worst and most inept novel I have ever encountered. Had it not been for the reputation of the author I cannot see how it could ever have appeared in print. It gives the impression of a first tentative novel produced by a hopeful author to be. Flat characters, unengaging and contrived plot, lots of dead-end writings. One may suspect that this is the way ones own efforts would appear to a disinterested judge.

The novel is set in the future around the year 2035. England is occupied by the Russians, and we are to follow a young dashing officer who gets around on a horse (cars seem more or less banned). He gets entangled with the young horny wife of a security officer. The aggressive woman with an impressive pair of breasts, we are told, but never induced to visualize, engages in all kinds of kinky practices which are only hinted at including involving her daughter. The main protagonist takes it in stride though. The set up invites some prurient pornographic interest in the reader, but the desire never comes alive, not that the author is prudish, rather that his imagination is impotent, and all he can produce are intentions which have no substance beyond that of daydreams. There is a plot about overthrowing the Russian government and returning to the British their original culture and traditions, some of which are being revived, attempts of which are not particular successful. This is an old trick of so called 'alienation', namely to present what is very familiar to the reader from a very strange perspective, and thus to give him new eyes, and the excitement and amusement such stratagems provide. In the end the protagonist is shot and killed by his underling when he, in the process of the attempted coup-d'etat. is to shoot his own father. No one seems to care, not the father, and definitely not the reader. The whole plot unravels giving the author a chance to present some prison scenes. But do we care? The idea of the plot is good, but any plot may do in a work of fiction, it is the presentation that matters, not the ideas.

The book was published in 1980, when the Cold War was still very much on the mind of people providing many a apocalyptic scenario, and is as such rather dated, but this is of course the least of its problems. Amis wrote a few quite good books giving us a taste of the 50's and 60's in England, of which he had first hand knowledge, but then he tired and entered into a long and slow decline, and already at the end of the 70's he appears washed out, at least as a writer.

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