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BOOKS

## "Koba the Dread," by Martin Amis

Martin Amis calls out Christopher Hitchens and other friends on the left for not giving full weight to the 20 million of Stalin's terror.

**By Charles Taylor**

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Anti-communism has, in some essential way, never been accepted as the moral equivalent of anti-fascism. When Paul Mazursky's film "Moscow on the Hudson" came out in 1984, a friend of mine, a Canadian who has lived in the United States for years, praised it in print only to have friends back in Canada ask him, "What's happened there?" -- "there" being Reagan's America. His acceptance of even Mazursky's general portrait of a USSR with all sorts of shortages and the KGB menacing citizens who toe the party line was seen as succumbing to grotesque capitalist propaganda.

Amis comes close to explaining the enduring allure of communism in the letter to his father that ends the book. Quoting his father's essay "Why Lucky Jim Turned Right," Amis finds this sentence about the elder Amis' goodbye to the faith. "The ideal of the brotherhood of man, the building of the Just City, is one that cannot be discarded without lifelong feelings of disappointment and loss."

As Amis the younger points out, that sentence embodies the naiveté that leads to communism in the first place. "Just what this Just City?" he asks. "What would it be like? What would its citizens be saying to each other and doing all day? What would the laughter be like, in the Just City? (And what would you find to write about in it?)" Amis is saying that the desire for an "ideal" society is, of course, a desire for the totalitarian. And that desire is the first step toward a willingness to put ends before means.

"Don't fall for moral equivalence," Hitchens warns his friend when Amis tells him he is wondering about the distance between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia. Inevitably, Amis' attempt to put the latter on a moral par with the former comes up against the question of "Which was worse?" Too often, the answer has been decided by tallying the dead. By that measure, Stalin's 20 million wins handily over Hitler's 6 million

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(the number rises significantly if you add in the rest of the Nazi's victims). But no game.

It wasn't so long ago that the loaded number of 6 million was used to argue that the Yugoslavia wasn't as bad as it could have been and therefore didn't merit America enough, and beyond a certain point, scale is irrelevant. Amis quotes Robert Conquest interview if he thought the crimes of the Holocaust were worse than the crimes of when the interviewer asked why, I could only answer honestly with 'I feel so.'" Am answer the question why, one enters an area saturated with qualms."

After some unsatisfying (though not irrelevant) preliminaries (Marxism appealed tabloidal, of the gutter," appealed to "the reptile brain"), Amis comes up with as g simplified, his answer is that Stalin's ends -- collectivization, industrialization, ev power -- were at least comprehensible (which is not to say right, desirable or even means he used to achieve them were barbaric. Hitler employed rational, industria them "neat," and therein lies part of the offense) toward an irrational end: the phy

It seems insane, given two nearly incomprehensible events, events that take place of what it is to be human, to say which is worse. Instead, Amis attempts to get at t terror. It was easier, for example, in Nazi Germany to know who the enemy was. I interrogations recorded in "Journey Into the Whirlwind," Eugenia Ginzburg write Gestapo -- I would have known exactly how to behave. But here? Here I had to det who kept me imprisoned. Were they fascists in disguise? Or victims of some supe: fantastic hoax? And how should a communist behave 'in prison in his own country

"Nazism," Amis writes, "did not destroy civil society. Bolshevism did destroy civil Bear Witness, " Victor Klemperer's diary of being a Jew in Nazi Germany, you're s degradation of everyday life, but there is still some vestigial sense of normal life. T are best summed up by the slogans of "1984" -- "WAR IS PEACE," "FREEDOM IS STRENGTH" -- representing as they do the complete eradication of meaning.

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