Darkness at noon by arthur koestler pdf file format pdf

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Authors: Arthur Koestler EPUB Download Embed This document was uploaded by our user. The uploader already confirmed that they had the permission to publish it. If you are author/publisher or own the copyright of this documents, please report to us by using this DMCA report form. Report DMCA Year: 1,984 Language: English Issue: 2011 12 30 Identifier: 0553265954,9780553265958 Org File Size: 248,387 Extension: epub Last updated on December 10, 2021 First published: 1940Type of work: NovelType of plot: Social realismTime of work: 1930’sPrison. Darkness at NoonSoviet detention center in which Rubashov is being held. With its dark corridors, closed off from the outside world and operating under its own logic, the suffocating prison is a physical manifestation of the communist dystopia and a metaphor for the communist rationale. Outside the prison, seasons change from cold, dismal winter to early spring. Inside its grim multistoried brick structure, prisoners are confined in cells behind thick doors with spy-holes. Barred windows overlook a snow-packed courtyard, where prisoners exercise. Armed guards patrol the ramparts. Down a dimly lit corridor is a barber shop and an unsanitary infirmary that reeks of carbolic and tobacco. The doctor’s desk is cluttered with bandages, swabs, and instruments. Beneath the prison is a room where beatings and near-boiling steam baths are used to force prisoners to confess to imaginary crimes against the state. Those found guilty are taken down a spiral staircase, stunned by blows to the head, and shot behind the ears with pistols.Rubashov’s own cell, number 404, has a basin, a cot, and a bucket for his bodily wastes. At first, he hears only muffled sounds and echoes in the prison building. Later, neighboring prisoners communicate by tapping messages on the walls in a simple code. From the window, Rubashov observes other prisoners exercising in the courtyard. Through the spy-hole, guards observe him writing in a diary or lying on a straw mattress. Rubashov gets a limited view of the corridor and cells across the gallery. He observes Bogrov, a naval hero, being dragged down the corridor toward his execution. Prisoners drum the death march on the walls.Rubashov is interrogated in the office of Warden Ivanov. Ivanov and his assistant, Gletkin, wear military uniforms with pistols in leather holsters; the desks are cluttered with files and reports. A photograph of party officials before Joseph Stalin became head of the Soviet Union is missing from the wall. During Rubashov’s seven-day interrogation, he sits on a hard-backed chair while Gletkin shines a spotlight into his red-rimmed eyes.Art museum. German museum in which Rubashov remembers being arrested by Gestapo officers while meeting with a fellow Communist Party leader to plan a reorganization of the German branch of the party, which the Nazi government has forced to go underground. They are surrounded by paintings of voluptuous nudes. These paintings, which represent worldly indulgence, contrast with a pen-and-ink drawing of the Madonna’s hands outstretched toward the needy of the world. After Rubashov was arrested, he was tortured. However, after Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact in 1939, Rubashov returned home to Russia a hero.Belgian port city. In another of Rubashov’s recollections, he meets with Belgian party members in a port city, where he noticed distinctive harbor smells, a town clock, and narrow streets where prostitutes hung out their laundry. The room in which the party met had walls covered with election posters and notices; its windows were smeared with paint, and planks on trestles served as tables for propaganda leaflets. Overhead, a naked light bulb and a strip of fly paper dangled. Five Russian ships, laden with supplies bound for Germany, lay at anchor in the harbor. When Rubashov ordered union members to unload the ships, the communist workers refused, and Rubashov had them expelled them from the party.Rubashov’s apartment. Shabby Moscow residence of Rubashov, into which armed Soviet soldiers burst when they arrested him. The building’s porter, Vassilij, watched silently as they escorted Rubashov to the creaky elevator. An American-made automobile then took them over littered and unpaved streets to the prison. After Rubashov’s execution, Vassilij and his daughter live in the apartment. The old man hides a picture of Comrade Rubashov, his hero, in his mattress and secretly reads the forbidden Bible.Koestler, Arthur. The Invisible Writing: The Second Volume of an Autobiography, 1932-1940. London: Hutchinson, 1969. Koestler discusses his activism in the Communist Party, his travels to the Soviet Union, his imprisonment in fascist Spain, and his denunciation of communism in Darkness at Noon.Levene, Mark. Arthur Koestler. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984. Overview of Koestler’s political writing, including a chapter on Darkness at Noon.Pearson, Sidney A. Arthur Koestler. Boston: Twayne, 1978. Includes a chapter on Darkness at Noon.Rothkopf, Carol Z. “Darkness at Noon”: A Critical Commentary. New York: American R.D.M., 1963. Scholarly, complete, and well-written discussion.Sperber, Murray A. ed. Arthur Koestler: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977. Includes essays by George Orwell and Saul Bellow. With an intellectually tortuous attack on Darkness at Noon by a French Marxist. In a biography of Koestler that I published in 2009, I had devoted a great deal of attention to this extraordinary novel, by far Koestler’s best work: how it was first published in 1941 and how it was the first book to lift the curtain on Stalin’s show trials of the 1930s and decode the repressive mechanisms of arrest, torture, and interrogation that lay behind them. Koestler had preceded Orwell, Huxley, and other authors of dystopian novels by several years, but Darkness at Noon had the misfortune to come out just as the Soviet Union was joining the Western allies in their war against fascism, making it an inopportune time for an anti-Soviet work to appear. Orwell, indifferent to such conventions, immediately praised it for its literary and political qualities and later borrowed from it in 1984. It was only after World War II ended and the Cold War was gathering steam that Darkness at Noon’s true value became apparent. It was translated into over thirty languages, became a global best-seller, and maintained that position until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Since then the novel has inevitably lost its immediacy and topicality, and some of its political force, too, though I would argue that there is a misunderstanding here. Meanwhile, it has lost none of its literary merit and is still regarded as a modern classic. In my biography, I noted that Darkness at Noon had another peculiarity that was extremely rare in modern literature: It existed only in translation. Koestler wrote the book in Paris on the eve of World War II, just before the Nazis invaded the city. He wrote in a great hurry and his girlfriend, Daphne Hardy, translated the book into her native English virtually as he wrote it in German. The finished English text was dispatched to London just days before they fled south to escape the invading army, and, in their haste, they lost the top copy of the original typescript and completely forgot about the carbon copy sent to Zurich. Hardy’s English translation was the only version of the novel that seemed to have survived, and it later entrenched itself so deeply in the English-language canon that the editors of the Modern Library ranked Darkness at Noon number eight in its list of the hundred best English-language novels of the twentieth century. Its uniqueness meant that it became the sole source of the thirty-odd translations that were made into other languages (including much of a back-translation by Koestler into his native German), which sealed the book’s authority as a work of English literature. In this context, the German newspaper article struck me as exciting, even sensational. A graduate student at the University of Kassel, Matthias Wessel was writing a doctoral dissertation on Koestler’s early works in German. He had checked the files of Koestler’s pre-Second World War Swiss publisher, Emil Oprecht, to look for a propaganda work about the Spanish Civil War, and come across an unknown title instead. It was a typescript labeled simply Rubaschow: Roman (“Rubashov: a Novel”) in German, which Wessel had never heard of. He knew that Rubashov was the name of the hero of Darkness at Noon and guessed that he was probably looking at the sole existing German copy of Darkness at Noon. I had imagined him opening a filing cabinet and pulling out a frayed folder with its flimsy carbon copy inside, but this was too twentieth century. When I wrote to Wessel to ask for details, he explained he had been sitting at his computer at the University of Kassel when he first came across the unknown title, and it was another week before he could hold a photocopy in his hand and read it. A French censor’s stamp appeared on every page, showing it had been sent to Zurich from wartime Paris, and Wessel realized he was probably the first person to set eyes on it since it had been stashed away by a Swiss editor, presumably after rejecting it. On reading it through, Wessel also realized that the text differed in many respects from the standard German edition back-translated from English. By the time I wrote to him, he had contacted Thomas Pago at Elsinor Verlag, the German publisher of the earlier back-translation, and suggested a completely new edition. Pago agreed to publish, with a foreword by me and an afterword by Wessel, and the new work made the German best-seller list for books issued by small publishers that year, surpassing all our expectations. By now I had acquired a copy for myself and noted several differences between the “old” and “new” versions of the novel. For example, Koestler had made late corrections to his carbon copy by hand that hadn’t appeared in the English translation, and had included words and passages in the German text that had been strangely omitted from the English one, including a sizable digression on the subject of masturbation in Soviet prisons. Other features that stood out were clearly the result of Hardy’s unfamiliarity with Soviet political and prison systems and their accompanying jargon and her habit of translating literally when her attention slipped. When I interviewed her, she confessed that part of the problem was being forced to work at such a high speed, and another that, at the tender age of twenty-one, with limited experience and no printed sources to draw on, she was often at the end of her tether in searching for the right words. For these reasons and in keeping with the adage that new generations of readers deserve new translations, I concluded that a new translation would be welcome. The publishers of Darkness at Noon, Scribner in the United States and Vintage in the United Kingdom, agreed with me and accepted my proposal that Philip Boehm do the work. Boehm is the talented translator of works by Ingeborg Bachmann, Franz Kafka, and several other writers in German and Polish, and a creative writer in his own right. He has also lived in Poland and experienced life behind the Iron Curtain, which gives him an advantage in interpreting the vocabulary and structure of the Soviet bureaucracy and its criminal justice system. I was confident he would strip the varnish from this old picture and restore it to its original clarity, and that is just what he did. Just over a year later, the deed was done and a few months later, almost identical American and British editions appeared on either sides of the Atlantic, with an introduction by me. I felt strongly that the project was worthwhile both for literary and political reasons, but two questions hovered in the back of my mind. Could the popularity of this famous novel, written eighty years beforehand, be rekindled by a new translation? And to what degree were its insights into dictatorial regimes of both left and right and their suppression of individual dissidents still relevant to modern readers? Neither the New York Times nor the Washington Post decided to review it (though the Times did include a brief mention in its “New and Noteworthy” column in the Book Review), but the New Yorker made up for these omissions by printing a lengthy essay on the book, and useful articles appeared in the Wall Street Journal, Foreign Policy, the British Guardian, and the online journal, Air Mail. Of these, the think piece by Adam Kirsch in the New Yorker was the longest and most substantial. He conceded that the novel felt dated in the sense that “an effort of imagination” was needed to enter into its time and place, but after reciting the novel’s history, he judged the effort worthwhile, because Darkness at Noon was undoubtedly one of the most important political novels of the twentieth century. In writing it, Koestler had confronted head on the idea that noble ends could justify evil means and then demolished it, which, together with his distrust of the tyrannical power of reason, made his novel subversive even now. Other articles more or less supported Kirsch’s view, but Nancy Updike, in Foreign Policy, came to a different conclusion. “Does this anti-totalitarian novel from almost 80 years ago have something insightful to tell us today?” she asked. “Is it resonant in 2019?” Her answer was, not really. While parts of Darkness at Noon did speak to her, and Rubashov’s relationship with his demagogic leader struck her as still relevant, the rest of the book had limited value. Rubashov was shown as caught in a mental trap, knowing his position was dangerous but unable to admit he was wrong, and this was of little use to readers confronted by modern leaders. As for the translation, Updike praised it and definitely preferred it to the old one, as did Aatish Taseer in Air Mail, who judged it not as stilted as the old one, but it was Andrew Stuttaford, in the Wall Street Journal, who dwelt on it in some detail. Stuttaford admired Boehm’s “long track record in literary translation” and found his apt word choices in the present novel to be particularly successful. Boehm’s version had captured the relationship between Rubashov and his interrogators “more precisely and with more nuance than its predecessor.” He had also shown great sensitivity to the book’s “unstated, if evident Russian backdrop” and its Soviet-style jargon and terminology. Though there were not as many reviews as I had hoped for, it was an old book in a new translation rather than a brand-new book altogether, and I felt the responses were more than enough to justify my efforts. The icing on the cake was a public roundtable discussion of the novel at Roosevelt House in New York, held soon after the reviews appeared. The hall was packed with readers of all ages—a couple hundred at least by my estimate. Adam Kirsch questioned Philip Boehm and myself about our goals and procedures and the significance of Darkness at Noon, and this was followed by a lively Q and A in which members of the audience showed how well they knew Koestler and Darkness at Noon. We had some difficulty, however, in agreeing on the exact nature of the novel’s contribution to political thought. Many doubted my suggestion that its message was just as relevant to today’s populist autocracies as it was to communist and Nazi regimes in the twentieth century. Others embraced the idea, but a sort of armistice was arrived at when a member of the audience in the back row stood up to speak. She had read Darkness at Noon while living in postwar France, she said, where the French translation broke all sales records and prevented the French Communist party from being elected to join the government in an impending general election. The novel was a cautionary tale and its message applied to all countries and regimes, whether of the left or the right. That message was simple: Beware of self-delusion. Her short speech brought the house down and seemed to settle the matter, at least for now, of the novel’s broader importance.

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