

old men wise and weary after the event. This is a fine stroke; it makes the reader's sense of historical distance and uncertainty an accomplice to illusion.

*Julian* is not, I think, as strong a book as *I, Claudius*; Graves is a master poet and a man possessed by classic values and habits of speech. But Vidal has written a novel full of wit and energy. «»

## Lots of Yaks In Oxbridge

ROBERT SKLAR

ONE FAT ENGLISHMAN, by Kingsley Amis. Harcourt, Brace & World. \$3.95.

Ten years ago Amis's first novel, *Lucky Jim*, made him a celebrity. The hero of *Lucky Jim*, a history teacher named Jim Dixon, was the funniest of the angry young men who sprouted on the English stage and in English fiction after the war. Everyone now agrees that "angry" was the wrong word for these hotbloods, fuming at the stuffed-shirted males and flat-chested females of the Establishment. Jim Dixon's motives were hardly pure enough to justify anger, but he was sorely exasperated.

Amis's admirers do not consider *Lucky Jim* his best novel. They prefer his second, *That Uncertain Feeling*, or his fourth, *Take a Girl Like You*; the third, *I Like It Here*, was an embarrassing disaster. They find the social criticism in the later books more subtle and profound. Yet, to my mind only *Lucky Jim* has the energy and the comic power to bring its readers back a second time. Jim Dixon's impatience, his audacity, his banality, his virtue, give the novel a tone and tempo that have gradually disappeared from Amis's later work.

The heroes of his later novels grow away from Jim Dixon in two respects: they become more and more obsessed with sex and more and more complacent with their lot. If *Lucky Jim* asks, "Is there in England a place for the likes of me?" the later novels ask merely, "How can I get all the sex I want with as little

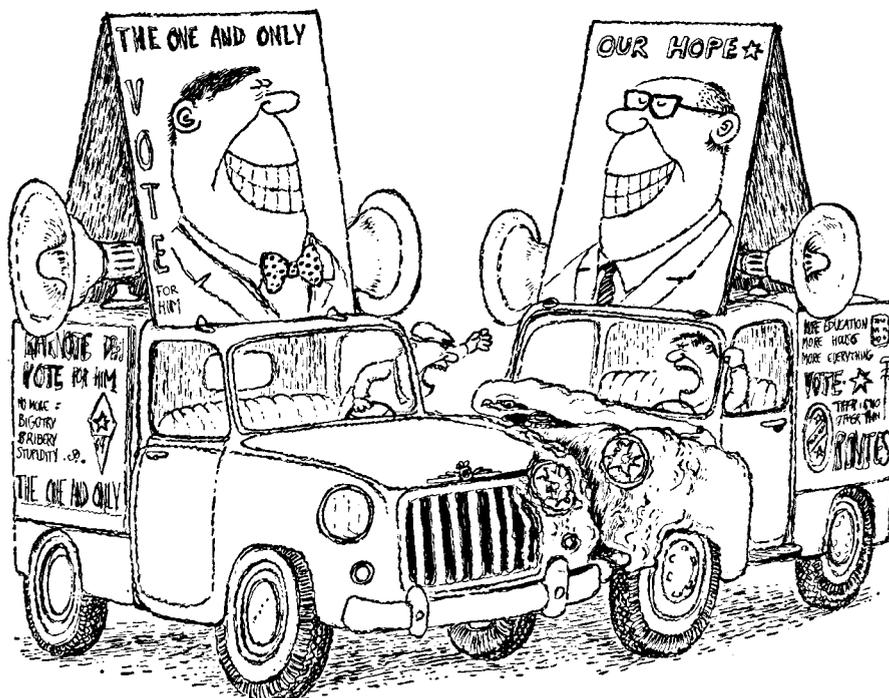
trouble as possible?" The question reveals quite clearly the juvenile cast of mind among Amis's heroes; if Amis has drawn them truly from life, they indicate, as perhaps the principals in the Profumo scandal did in their own way, that the post-Victorian English male approaches the most glamorous sexual encounter with the emotions of a spoiled teenager.

*One Fat Englishman* carries this trend to an extreme, and one is relieved to feel—at least to hope—that Amis has nothing further to say on the subject. For this is another disaster, a novel without qualities. Its sole intrinsic interest lies in the fact that it is a novel set in the United States by England's funniest novelist—with a reputation as a subtle observer of English social life. Amis has had his year as a visiting novelist in residence, and this is the result. The nature of his subtlety, his humor, and his care in writing about American life can be deduced from an example. The setting of the novel is obvious: classes at Amis's fictional school are called preceptorials; Princeton is the only university in the country that has preceptorials. Yet Amis has named his college Budweiser and its rivals Schlitz, Pabst,

etc. Presumably this will make them all yak in Oxbridge.

THE one fat Englishman is Roger Micheldene, a wealthy London publisher. Except in his sexual obsession, he is very unlike every previous Amis hero. A member in good standing of the Establishment, he is reactionary, anti-Semitic, obese, surly. He hates jazz, another juvenile touchstone of value in previous Amis novels. He hates the United States. He is a villain. But the girls, especially the married ones, put out for him. And we learn, after the climactic copulation, that Roger's vices are all caused by his father's having inherited wealth instead of earning it.

Amis gives his readers a biscuit to eat and one to carry home, too. They can hate Roger Micheldene as a sex maniac and an aristocrat while they thrill vicariously to his sexual conquests and his marvelous chance to make fools and cuckolds out of Americans. Amis's previous disaster, *I Like It Here*, was also a book set abroad, in Portugal, but the "here" in the title meant England—in other words, "I want to stay home." Bloody old England is not so bad a place after all, so if you want to stay angry, young man, visit the States.



Deadlocked by Fernando Krahn

## BOOK NOTES

**N**EW YORK: TRUE NORTH, by Gilbert Millstein and Sam Falk, photographer. *Doubleday. \$7.95.*

New Yorkers as a breed bring to mind Lord Byron, who could live neither with nor without women. Confronted chronically with the evidence of violence, loneliness, humidity, crises (where else could Forty-second Street cave in the day the Fair opened?), and the kind of suspiciousness and tension that generate the city, many New Yorkers concede that it is an appalling place; at the same time, they are certain that, rootless though they may feel, they could not survive transplanting. "What Dante's hell was all about—the last circle," according to one of Gilbert Millstein's witnesses, "is Scarsdale."

Mr. Millstein and fifty-six highly assorted acquaintances present fifty-seven varieties of reaction, all of them interesting. Here the bookie, the madam, the priest, the doctor, the lawyer talk about how the city beguiles or bedevils them, enchants or exasperates them. Some are naïve, like the real-estate man who has never given a thought to what New York means to him, although he has put up many of its buildings; some are depressed, like the playwright who suffered claustrophobia from the pressure of "all these thick lives" around him; some are adaptable, like the blind girl who still enjoys the subway squash. Some thrive on competition; some are diminished by it. Some develop curious specialties like the ability to classify patrons geographically at a glance. (New Yorkers' "teeth are like their clothes—worked on. They have Brooks Brothers teeth.") Mr. Millstein contributes a number of small essays and some bitter captions. Beside a zoo picture, he comments that in Central Park the tiger is safer than the child.

**E**ARL WILSON'S NEW YORK. *Simon and Schuster. \$4.95.*

Mr. Wilson is folksy, fond of flibbertigibbet non sequiturs, and very, very inside. The new level of the George Washington Bridge, he says, is known to one and all as the Martha. Washington Mews is worth in-

specting not because it's attractive or historic, but because Suzy Parker lives there. He also offers some off-beat tourist suggestions: "You can view the very doorway where Frank Costello was shot by a man he never squealed on"; look on Riverside Drive as that part of town most millionaires abandoned "long before they died"; crash the yacht-club set—"everyone with a scintilla of curiosity will." Chapters on how to pick up a boy or girl; where to people-watch (come see the unshaven drunk, the "pitiful-looking toothless old beggar"); reassurance that it's not beyond the pale to eat economically, and that the egghead, committed though he may be to knowing the "differences between *entrecôte* and *entrechat*," can have as much joy on the town as the belly-dance aficionado. Recommended for the egghead, besides the predictable museums: the Institutes for Hand Knitting and Gracious Living.

**N**EW YORK: PEOPLE AND PLACES, by Victor Laredo and Percy Seitlin. *Reinhold. \$12.50.*

A photographic study of times gone by, when architects practiced ornamentation and people practiced togetherness. This in contrast to the ephemeral present, in which housing and employment are granted on a kind of loan basis, and the possibility exists of going for days without speaking. And yet this is a very contemporary New York book, in that it not only speaks of that "sense of New Yorkishness, perverse, unclassifiable, yet desirable," but makes the parochial assumption that everyone everywhere has but one aim—to live in New York. There is a small crusade here—to save not Penn Station but the Jewish-type cafeteria. And lively chapters on the coffee break and the free load.

**N**EW YORK CITY AND THE FAIR, by Lucretia Lopez. *Charles Frank. \$3.50; paperback \$1.95.*

A small, useful guide that includes a brief history of the city with accent on its immediacy—how very recently skyscrapers and the Broadway entertainment strip came to be, how relatively new even the venerable buildings are. The virtue of the book is that it divides Manhattan into logical, encompassable chunks, starting

at the Battery and working north. For each area there are smudgy, incomplete maps, specific public-transit directions, a list of entertainments for children as well as for adults, of places to eat, a description of monuments and who built them—an explanation, for instance, of that terrible Seward statue in Madison Square. Also lots of typos, unless we are to take Miss Lopez seriously and order lamp shanks.

**N**EW YORK: PLACES & PLEASURES, by Kate Simon. *Meridian. \$1.95.*

This splendid and original guidebook, already a classic, has been updated for its third edition, and Miss Simon has done her homework well. The Fair section, written prior to the opening, is sketchy and already—she warns of this—partially obsolete; but her restaurant listings have been scrupulously checked and revised. Some have disappeared altogether, some have moved, some are new; changes in management or menu or price have been noted. She also seems the only writer in existence to know that an adult no longer requires a child to enter the Children's Zoo in Central Park.

**N**EW YORK. Photographs by Andreas Feininger. Text by Kate Simon. *Viking. \$10.*

Here again is Miss Simon the celebrant, who looks with love yet sees with clarity. Sharp eyes and a sharp tongue save her from sentimentality. She is able to laugh at the periodic crusades to save the old, which in New York is rarely very old and which frequently is a dirty eyesore, a bastard version of something else somewhere else. As she says, "We have the gift of misting over an amiable late-Victorian Gothic monstrosity, and seeing it as the Taj Mahal, and pasta statuary looks like Ghiberti doors to us when it is threatened." Hers is the definitive examination of the subway phenomenon—of the frantic assault when everyone knows full well that in a minute or so there will be another train. A man can stand in front of the mob and be knocked to the tracks, or he can stand back, "so that his is the face on which the door closes, leaving him teetering on the precarious edge, anyhow."

—NORA MAGID