



The Grammar of Satire

Clive James: Postcard from Russia

"The cabin smelled of kerosene and was colder than a three-star freezer but not to worry"

This extract is taken from a travel article called "Postcard from Russia", written by Clive James on May 15, 1977

KEY FOCUS: Sentence structure - simple, compound and complex - and how it can be manipulated to deliver comic timing.

The most exciting way of getting into Russia is to cross Germany in a sealed train and arrive at the Finland Station in St Petersburg to be greeted by a cheering revolutionary mob who promptly rename the city after you. This approach being no longer possible, the next best method is to book a Sovereign package tour through British Airways, thereby ensuring that there will be none of that humdrum business about stepping on and off aircraft at the appointed time. It was an exciting few days our tiny band had of it, waiting to see which flight we would be rebooked on, if any. Finally it was Aeroflot that assumed the burden of taking us to our week of adventure behind the Iron Curtain.

Kicked by the 92,000 horses of its four Kuznetsov KN-8-4 turbofans, our half-empty Ilyushin 11-62 scrambled out of Heathrow like a MiG-21. The cabin smelled of kerosene and was colder than a three-star freezer but not to worry, because in less time than it took to recover from the meal provided (packaged in London, it was to be our last contact with the West) we were on Soviet soil at Sheremetsevo airport, Moscow. Valentina, our Intourist guide, had come to meet us. There were a dozen of us and only one of her, but she was the duck and we were the ducklings. Wherever she cruised, we paddled energetically in her wake.