

but she may find this presentation "amusing" even. Reading it over I find these reflections coming to my mind.

First, Miss Stein's constant speaking in metaphors; Government, the accountant; Government, the janitor; Society, the house; revolution, "the publicity" of social change. Miss Stein was pleased with them, dilated upon them, mothered them and made them produce a numerous offspring of sub-metaphors. For me it is a significant illustration of her evasion of direct thinking, of the peculiar game of substitutions which, as indicated in her autobiography, has been her life.

At certain times in the history of civilization life has been so repulsive that men and women have rejected it as reality and sought reality elsewhere. St. Simeon Stylites found reality on top of a pillar; Huysmans thought he had imprisoned reality in a sealed room rank with perfumes; Harry Crosby located reality in the stupor of opium. Reality, in the last generation, malodorous with the decay of the capitalist system, has been an unamusing spectacle, to use Miss Stein's terminology. The escapist writers, of whom Miss Stein is the most notable, have turned away from reality, physically, by emigration, intellectually by burrowing into the world of literature itself. When it is a burrowing into reality literature is as deep as life; but, when it is a burrowing to escape from reality their literature proves to be as thin as its page of paper.

Miss Stein's escape, however, due to an income which permitted her to live "in a civilized manner," to eat well, to travel, to buy paintings, to hear music, to entertain interesting people has led her to a cult of enjoyment, the implications of which she does not understand. She happens to be the one success among the escapists, and forgetting deaths like Ernest Walsh's and suicides like Crane's, and Crosby's and the miseries and frustrations which have made this one of the most tragic literary generations in history, she speaks of the "amusement" active-minded people can find in the world. It has been easy for her to lead a life of continuous amusement not only because she had the means to indulge herself but because she has been so completely self-centered and self-protected. Other writers have accepted the responsibilities of their ideas—they have worn themselves out editing and publishing and polemicizing; but Miss Stein has sat back, preened and talked, and let others worry about printing bills and distribution. Even in the matter of according recognition to contemporary writers she has not stirred herself. Her favors have been granted only to the courtiers, only to those who could afford a trip to Paris and had the *entrée* with the result that the praises awarded in her autobiography go to a surprising number of nonentities. She has been, in a fantastic version, the bourgeois housewife, living on the labor of others and keeping a stylish house.

Her division of people into active-minded people and just people is class arrogance in a special version. But her scorn for politics—

"janitoring"—(the metaphor itself is a damning piece of class hatred) has a special origin. It is the old-fashioned self-exaltation of the writers of the art-for-art's-sake era. In compensation for their neglect by society, artists, in their enforced solitude in society, flattered themselves that they were somehow god-like; shunned as a nobody, the artist compensated by saying that he was more than a somebody, an everybody. Eighteen years ago, I was beaten up by a couple of art-for-art's-sakers for denying that artists, in their intuitions, comprehended all that scientists could reveal. Today, as the devisers of political change advance in importance, Miss Stein flips them away with jealous malice.

Today Miss Stein is having her hour of glory. She is visiting America in a period of torment and upheaval, to enjoy fame which, I suppose, she finds amusing. The facilities of a corrupt civilization that are closed to the wholesome voices of revolution, are opened to her work, the most extreme expression of escape, the most typical expression of the neurosis of shunned art. Universities, clubs, popular magazines, radio stations—are allowing her to do her stuff, hoping it will provide an hour's diversion in the deepening twilight.

In the meanwhile one of the handsomest books [*Portraits and Prayers*, by Gertrude Stein. Random House.] made this season has wasted excellent paper and other materials, the time of skilled book designers and the labor of printers, binders, to say nothing of the facilities of its enterprising publishers, the handling by shippers, booksellers, book editors, re-

viewers, a portion of the working time of at least several hundred people, and a few minutes anyway of the reading time of some thousands of its purchasers who will look into it a few minutes before squeezing it into place among other curious and unread books in their libraries, to be dusted once a week by several thousand maids. . . .

A book which contains matter like this:

ACT I

Having not met one.
Maximilian Or a million
Or Maximilian Or in a million
Maximilian Or in a million or one
A Play to Believe a Poem.

Miss Stein says to understand her work one must enjoy it. When the Broadway, Tin Pan Alley dadaists write nonsense they are more honest. They say enjoy it but you don't have to understand it. Yip—I-addy—I-ay—I-ay, I find superior musically, and rhythmically to Miss Stein's Max in a million; and if meaning must be found, will disclose vaster depths of meaning to the patient explorer.

I am sure of course that Miss Stein enjoys her own work, but I am not sure that she understands it. Perhaps, if she considered the phenomenon of herself, which has occupied her all these years, considers it as a Marxist would, she might understand it. But she would not find it amusing. She would in fact find it terrifying. And she would know, at last, why she is the only success among the escapists.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

In the Great Tradition

THE EXECUTIONER WAITS, by Josephine Herbst. Harcourt, Brace and Company. \$2.50.

THE class consciousness of the middle-class American is still only partly touched by economics. His drug store may net next to nothing, his salary may be cut, he may lose his job, but he still clings desperately to a little sense of position and distinction that seems quite apart from the N.R.A. or a general strike, so completely identified is it with his personality or his memories of childhood. If he preserves this, remains an individual, he feels that somehow he will get the breaks, find eventually his proper place. His consciousness rejects the economic categories that underlie his social feeling, because they threaten to doom him, to imprison him, forever. Many individuals of this kind will be glad when Fascists tell them that class economics are a Marxist plot, that they can keep their pride and hope and prejudices, and still save society.

To anyone who lives at all in this middle-class consciousness—and it still dominates most of America, even among the workers—*The Executioner Waits* must serve as a brilliant clarification. For most of us a sense of life as it is actually lived around us does

not come out of books and movies. It is carried rather in conversation, in the talk of youngsters lying together on a beach, in the endless voices of women in upstairs rooms on Sunday, analyzing and justifying, going over again and again family quarrels and crises, sickness, failure and debt. Josephine Herbst begins with the material of such talk, catching the tone and the phrases so well that at first it merges with the reader's own family memories. But then the work broadens and develops without ever losing its immediacy, without leaving the single family, until it becomes the experience of a whole class, and spreading like water, flows over the history of these years until the aches and pains of individuals, their making wills and selling lots, become suddenly an inseparable whole with strikes and farm revolts, I.W.W. meetings and the torture of conscientious objectors.

This novel, *The Executioner Waits*, had *Pity Is Not Enough* before it, and is the second of a trilogy which centers largely on the Trexler family. The first volume showed them in the decades after the Civil War, pushed around by the empire builders, missing always the main chances, clinging precariously. The second describes two generations of them up almost to the present time. The older generation, withering emotionally

on its stalk, is still firmly rooted in the past, but is incapable of ideas, of understanding what is going on. It tries to escape from its bewilderment by seeking to find again the strength of its tradition, by trying to revive old relationships. The novel ends with David Trexler at the grave of the man with whom his daughter Millie eloped for one brief year of bliss after he had kept the couple apart, out of paternal jealousy, for twenty years. The lives are full of such meanness, indignity and obscure feelings, with always the odor of money about them, breeder of family hatred and power. The younger generation, drifting after the war from place to place, from job to job, are pulled one way by this class and family feeling, and another way by new ideas which have a reality for them that ideas never could have for their parents. In the last years, and particularly as a result of coming up against open class conflicts, some of the younger Trexlers are drawn uncertainly toward the cause of the workers.

Although the great function of *The Executioner Waits* is to take familiar non-political, middle-class individuals and make them the expression of a society at a crucial point in the class struggle, it is done with complete freedom from lumpy ideology. The only parts of the book not immediately concerned with the Trexler family and its connections are eight short descriptions of struggles of workers and farmers in Iowa, Detroit and Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1932 and 1934. They are enough to locate the Trexler lives in historic and geographic perspective. Otherwise, everything comes of itself; the characters are self-revealing, are described, even, in their own phrases. And yet Miss

Bertrand's Deviations from Russell

FREEDOM VERSUS ORGANIZATION, 1814-1914, by Bertrand Russell, M.A., F.R.S. Norton. \$3.50.

IN the literary-tea sense of the words, this book is "modern" and "sophisticated." It is bulky enough and concerned with such weighty topics that it will be considered "serious reading." Yet it is not forbidding, for it contains almost everything from *Realpolitik* to gossip (such as calling the Prince Regent "an elderly beau, much ashamed of his corpulence, but too greedy to take any steps to cure it" or describing Marx as full of "envy and malice"). It attempts of course the now fashionable task of liberals, the "demolition" of Marx's philosophical, economic and political theories and practices. And all in the "lucid and effortless prose" and "quiet irony and wit" that evoked gurgles of approbation from Mr. Hazlitt in *The Times*, Section V.

Nevertheless, if one should wish to understand as well as to "enjoy" the book, there are difficulties. Russell purports to have written history, but to him "history . . . is not yet a science, and can only be made to seem scientific by falsifications and omissions." He takes

Herbst's use of this speech has nothing in it of ventriloquism or the long flats that sometimes appear in Dos Passos's work. It is so selected, so shaped that one thinks to see in it, as in Robert Cantwell's prose, the emergence of a new classic American style. Even when later wisdom seems inserted in the earlier material, as in this bit from a letter from Munich early in the twenties, effectiveness is not destroyed: "all night parties where orgies went on behind palms and a German with a Harvard accent talked seriously about an incredible little pansy who was trying to push over affairs in the south." Only the climax at the end seems a little managed, perhaps, when David Trexler, going on his strange errand with the potted blue hydrangea, is forced to listen to the funeral speech for a worker killed on the picket line.

In theoretical articles on Marxist literature, the problem of the middle-class writer's making significant novels out of middle-class experience has been made to seem a very difficult one. With the publication of *The Executioner Waits* the problem is solved or made irrelevant. Three things only are necessary: knowing what is going on in America in terms of class forces, knowing what the lives of middle-class individuals really are like, and being able to describe the second in the perspective of the first without any theorizing or distortion. This Josephine Herbst has done brilliantly, and I think that in what Granville Hicks has called the great tradition in American literature, her present social treatment of middle-class life is really the first that can stand in valid succession to the work of William Dean Howells.

OBED BROOKS.

his motto from Milton: "Chaos umpire sits" and "Chance governs all." In other words, Russell is never that bugaboo of liberal thinkers: "doctrinaire," or "dogmatic," or consistent or even fully intelligible. But he does have a general thesis and plan (from which he deviates as often as he adheres to it): "The purpose of this book is to trace the opposition and interaction of two main causes of change in the nineteenth century: the belief in *freedom* which was common to Liberals and Radicals, and the necessity of *organization* which arose through industrial and scientific technique." One wonders why there should have been any opposition between these two main causes, but that would involve us in history, which is not a science . . . although there are "main causes" somehow, but not scientifically, perceived. Russell develops his thesis by showing the varied interactions between the "principle of legitimacy," the "principle of nationality" and the "principle of nationalism" (the third differing from the second in that it leads to "imperialism" somehow or other). To clarify his account, Russell also uses such concepts as the spirit of the eighteenth century (which is tied up with

"legitimacy") or the nineteenth century (connected with "nationality" and "liberalism," etc.). Although, on occasion, he expressly denies it, he nevertheless time and again, especially both in his opening and closing sections, operates on the premise that the course of events is determined finally by great men: Francis of Austria, Frederick William of Prussia, the Prince Regent and Louis XVIII, and Metternich, Castlereagh, and Talleyrand in 1814; and William II, Nicholas II, Sir Edward Grey, Holstein, Delcassé and Poincaré in 1914. This is why so much of the book is gossip, well informed and polite, but nevertheless gossip—not history.

It is quite significant that Russell has written a chapter on Imperialism, but, although he includes Hobson's, he does not mention Lenin's work in his bibliography.

The reviewers on

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