

relentlessly playful and quite sacrilegious—one might even say *capitalistic*, she uses them so—toward the twin gods of meter and rhyme) or strict free-versifiers (even her prosier poems and prose works are far from prosaic, which must distress devotees of the cult of Just Write What You Feel). In fact, Smith, a student of classical English poetry and a highly talented metricist with a faultless ear, is “strict” about little else but making us see ourselves as we are. Only she does it with vastly more wit and affection than your basic modern clergyperson.

Smith felt driven, in many of her poems, to expose the ridiculous, complacent, snobbish, unduly complicated side of modern established Christianity, the side that is highly fortified not against the Devil, but against newcomers to the communion. “Was He Married?” is a cynical, wistful litany of the ways in which Christ did *not* share in the earthly sorrows of real humans; yet the poem’s ending hints at Smith’s philosophy: “To choose a God of love, as [Man] did and does, / Is a little move then? // Yes, it is. // A larger one will be when men / Love love and hate hate but do not deify them? // It will be a larger one.” “The Airy Christ” couches in its charming musicality some bull’s-eye theology: “Whatever foolish men may do the song is cried / For those who hear, and the sweet singer does not care that he was crucified. // For he does not wish that men should love him more than anything / Because he died; he only wishes they would hear him sing.”

“The Airy Christ” and “The River Deben” (which, like many of Smith’s poems, explores a longing for death) are as *organic* as any poems in modern English literature—perfect, memorable matings of content and form. Songs as poetry is meant to be song, they speak of humankind’s oldest and deepest sorrows. Yet this organic quality is present in nearly all Smith’s poems, even the silly ones. Her rhyme is at once artificial (like Ogden Nash, she sometimes goes to great lengths to get there from here) and absolutely natural (her lines are seldom unconversationally metered, which only shows how metrical human conversations really are). Nothing could be more “natural” than the half-rhymes, internal rhymes, alliteration, and tight metrics crammed into the inconspicuous two-line “To an American Publisher”: “You say I must write another book? But I’ve just written this one. / You liked it so much that that’s the reason? Read it again then.” Her rueful recipe for ceasing to long for death, stated in

“Thoughts About the Persons From Porlock,” is, “Smile, smile, and get some work to do / Then you will be practically unconscious without positively having to go.” Robert Lowell had it right when he wrote about Smith’s “cheerfully gruesome voice”; her poems are dark as Charles Addams’ cartoons, but softened with a tenderness lacking there.

The poems in *Stevie Smith: A Selection* were picked from *The Collected Poems of Stevie Smith*, published in England in 1976 and in the U.S. in 1983 (Smith died in 1971). The prose was extracted mainly from Smith’s novels and other works. If, as Lee says, “The suspicion that [Smith] is an over-rated minor English comic writer is likely to persist,” what has she done to alleviate the problem? How, for instance, does Lee’s *Selection* stand up against the *Selected Poems* compiled by Smith herself and published in 1962?

Very well, thank you. There are a few small poems in Smith’s selection which perhaps should have been included in Lee’s, but the omissions are not grave, and all the best poems in the former—50 or so of them—appear in the latter. In addition, of course, the best of the poems Smith published between 1962 and her death, and representative excerpts from her equally highly voiced prose, are offered in this new selection. Hermione Lee’s book, “designed especially for students but also for the general reader,” is slender and strong enough to astonish a few Lit. 202 classes and, together with Smith’s original kinky drawings, leads provocatively to the larger, complete works of this underrated poet. cc

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They Were the World

by Gary Jason

Miron Dolot: *Execution by Hunger: The Hidden Holocaust*; W.W. Norton; New York; \$16.95.

Most people are unconcerned about the plight of the very poor because they have their hands quite full enough providing for the health and safety of their own families. But then there are “the fashionably concerned,” those who are very concerned that they *appear* concerned about the poor. One thinks of certain entertainment person-

alities, religious leaders, and (of course) academics.

In such circles, public indifference is now considered bad form. Professors ritualistically bemoan poverty (and oppression and other bad things), but rarely reach into their own pockets. Similarly, entertainers who enjoy feeling publicly guilty of being American rarely do penance by donating the princely sums their countrymen pay them for mediocre work. Instead, they keep their fortunes and make themselves highly visible in fund-raising efforts—like the rock video *We Are the World*. Truly helping the needy, however, requires more than goodwill and generosity. It requires an arduous study of what caused the hunger and of what actions will eliminate these causes.

Anyone genuinely concerned about those now suffering in Ethiopia should read Miron Dolot’s powerful new book, *Execution by Hunger*. Dolot eloquently describes the famine that the Soviet government inflicted upon the Ukraine and other areas in 1932-33. Dolot rightly calls the Great Famine a holocaust. Five to seven million died in the Ukraine alone, along with half the population of Kazakhstan. These people were killed as part of the official government policy set by Stalin. They died not because of anything they had done as individuals, but because they belonged to the wrong social groups.

Stalin committed this genocide to complete his ruthless campaign of collectivization. Agriculture, which had recovered from the ravages of the revolution and civil war, was deliberately devastated by a campaign to force peasants off their own land and drive them into the communes. Former serfs were to be landless once again. The property of 25 million peasant households was to be combined into 250 thousand collective and state farms. The kulaks (i.e., all successful farmers) were to be liquidated as a class—and that meant killing millions of people.

Statistics cannot convey the real horror of such an event. Dolot vividly describes what he witnessed, much as Solzhenitsyn did in *The Gulag Archipelago*. The result is a vivid but frightening account of how a village filled with decent, closely knit, quiet religious folk can be put through hell. Dolot conveys his insights through fascinating vignettes. Those who sympathize with liberation theology would greatly profit from the story of the Marxist priest (affectionately known to the villagers as “Comrade Judas”), who helped destroy the village church during a government-staged riot. His description

of what the later stages of starvation do to the body and the soul is chilling.

Dolot's description of the cunning ways the government enforced and utilized the famine to achieve policy objectives is especially timely, for Ethiopia's Marxist dictator Mengistu is using hunger to destroy the Eritrean movement for independence in the same way Stalin used that weapon against the Ukraine. Without historical perspective, it is impossible to imagine that even Marxists could be so cruel.

Unfortunately, the fashionably concerned probably will not take the time to read Dolot's testimony. It is much easier to buy a record or a T-shirt and "show" your concern than to actually sit down and think about how to help the Ethiopians. Why worry about dead people who once were the world? cc

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IN FOCUS

The "News" From Moscow

by Henry Mason III

Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson: *Dezinformatsia—Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*; Pergamon Brasseys; Washington.

The analysis of *dezinformatsia* here provided by Richard Shultz and Roy Godson is overloaded with scholarly paraphernalia, ranging from statistical tables of Soviet "overt propaganda themes" to an erratic glossary containing a pompous and unnecessary definition of "forgery" ("Forgery, one of many disinformation techniques, is the use of authentic-looking but false documents and communiqués"). Because of a zeal to appear "learned," the authors' style and method of presentation often get in the way of their message. Nonetheless, *Dezinformatsia* contains much valuable information about Soviet propaganda methods. Unlike some other writers in this field, Shultz and Godson properly emphasize the central importance of International Information Departments of the Communist Party's Central Committee rather than focus entirely on the KGB. The book also includes a useful analysis of Soviet manipulation of front groups to further the U.S.S.R.'s foreign policy goals.

If *Dezinformatsia* has a major substantive flaw, it is its failure to give

sufficient attention to Soviet exploitation of the non-Soviet press, which is the rhetorical technique that most immediately strikes the reader of Soviet publications. In connection with the Korean airliner outrage, for example, the Soviet countercharge of espionage was elaborately buttressed by references to Western sources ranging from the San Francisco *Examiner* to the New York Times columnist Tom Wicker (who, as one émigré commentator put it, "frequently provides Soviet newspapers with extremely useful quotations"). Similarly, a recent *Pravda* diatribe on "psychological warfare against Afghanistan" cited three separate non-Soviet sources (the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *USIA*, and the "Indian magazine *Link*") in addition to agencies of the Afghan puppet regime.

When convenient Western sources do not already exist, it is easy enough to create them, and Soviet chutzpah in this area knows no limits. A good illustration is the Soviet coverage of the assassination of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, who was shot to death by his thuggish comrades of the New Jewel Movement, a party inspired by the Soviet Union and its hirsute marionette, Fidel Castro. Shortly after the American liberation of the island, *Pravda* suddenly announced that Bishop had been murdered by the CIA. *Pravda's* source for this remarkable intelligence was an obscure English-language weekly located (of all places) in New Delhi.

According to *Pravda* (December 20, 1983):

The weekly magazine *New Wave* has published facts incontrovertably demonstrating that the murder of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop was carried out by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency on orders from the White House. . . . Based on the testimony of Grenadian eyewitnesses who fled the island after its occupation, the magazine writes that the CIA succeeded in recruiting the chief of the Prime Minister's personal bodyguard and one of his subordinates, who carried out Washington's order and shot Bishop.

However, as a commentator for the Russian-language New York daily *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* noted, not only is *New Wave* too small to employ any foreign correspondents, but at the time of Bishop's murder Grenada was crawl-

ing with Soviet journalists, including a *Tass* correspondent. (Now the Soviets have issued a postage stamp to commemorate the "fortieth anniversary of the birth of Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister of the People's Revolutionary government in Grenada, who met his death in 1983 at the hands of enemies of the Grenadian revolution.")

Though Shultz and Godson frequently sacrifice clarity for pedantry, any attempt to expose the Soviet disregard for truth can only be welcome. cc

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Samizdat Philistine

by Andrei Navrozov

Alexander Kaletski: *Metro*; Viking; New York; \$17.95.

The philistine is alive and well in Soviet Russia—and, like his brethren the world over, he is writing novels. It is a mistake to assume that under the conditions of totalitarianism, culture naturally separates, like oil and vinegar, into two discrete layers: the official, government layer and the subterranean, clandestine one. Instead, rather like the dressing on a tossed salad, culture under any political conditions is an emulsion that coats the living fiber of society as if it were the leafiest Bethany lettuce. Accordingly, the epithets "good" and "bad" are not synonymous with "samizdat" or "Goslitizdat"; as elsewhere in the world, the wind bloweth where it listeth. In *Metro*, billed punningly as "a novel of the Moscow underground," the wind bloweth not.

To be sure, the Soviet philistine turned novelist is not as virulent a species as his West European or American equivalent. After all, since any unofficial act is an act of dissidence, every time he takes up the pen he flirts with martyrdom; his Western confrere risks only unemployment. Still, while this makes one something less of a philistine than the other, it has little effect on either one's writing, and equally bad novels can be written in a writers' colony in San Francisco and in a penal colony in Vorkuta.

Typically, the philistine's novels contain richly varied material—comedy and tragedy, farce and drama, truth and invention. He can write about anything, in any style, because he is not