

"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?   ∞

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