climaxes tend to become gritty and compressed. However, no recording of this music has been entirely successful, and at least this one has an authentic Russian chorus.

The two first-prize winners of last year's International Tchaikovsky Competition have each been featured in a recording. Viktor Tretyakov, who won the violin contest, is heard in the Paganini D major Concerto (40015). He has a seemingly big, fat tone and a nimble technique (the spiccato playing in the final movement is particularly good), but as yet he lacks much sense of architecture or nuance, and there are several better-recorded performances available. There are also better versions of the Tchaikovsky B flat Concerto than that (40016) by the piano prizewinner, Grigory Sokolov, but his performance nevertheless has a lot in its favor. Emil Gilels, one of the judges, described Sokolov's playing aptly: "It breathed freshness, lightness, and youth." The approach of this seventeen-year-old pianist to the concerto is quiet and delicate, with inward rapture taking precedence over outward heroics. This is not to imply any weakness in Sokolov's technique, but merely to say that the emphasis is more on feathery poetry than muscular declamation. The conductor, Neimye Yarvy, goes along with this understated view of the music.

In the months ahead we are promised much more from Melodiya/Angel. According to Capitol's president, Alan Livingston, the series is meant to contribute to "the essential dialogue" that must be established between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the United States. No doubt it does help to serve this purpose. But a dialogue implies two-way communication, and there is no evidence of any eastbound reciprocity in the agreement between Capitol and Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga. Let us hope that the time will come when Soviet record buyers can obtain American recordings of Ives, Gershwin, and Copland as easily as we can obtain Soviet recordings of Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich. Only then will it become appropriate to refer to recordings as a medium through which the two peoples truly speak to one another.

BOOKS

The Logic and the Agony

SAREL EIMERL

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1872-1914. *Atlantic-Little, Brown. $7.95.*

Most autobiographies are narratives of action, extended *curricula vitae*, that concentrate on external events. This is suitable for politicians, soldiers, and other notables who are distinguished for their actions rather than for their thoughts. From Bertrand Russell one naturally expects something different, and he has provided it. This first volume of his autobiography does contain a few dozen pages about his family background and his professional career, as well as some delightful anecdotes about the celebrated men and women of his acquaintance. But it is primarily a narrative of emotion and thought whose purpose is not to give an accounting of what Russell has done but to attempt to answer the questions: What have been my principal concerns? What kind of man have I been?

It is unfortunate that Russell waited so long to make his accounting. He has always been impatient, and by the time this book was written, in his eighties, I believe, his impatience had reached such a stage that much of the narrative reads less like an autobiography than like notes for one. There is disappointingly little narrative and far too heavy a reliance on old letters, many of them tedious. However, the writing itself, still marked by Russell's gifts for economy and penetrating straight to the heart of any issue, is as readable as any of his popular essays. And, if for nothing else, this book would be well worth reading because it tells about a man of extraordinary intelligence.

Russell possessed an intellectual intensity that appears most vividly in his passion for mathematics. He describes his introduction to Euclid, at the age of eleven, as "one of the great events of my life, as dazzling as first love. I had not imagined that there was anything so delicious in the world." His passion continued so intense that it kept him working for almost ten years, normally for nine to twelve hours a day, on *Principia Mathematica*, even though for much of the time he found the work so appallingly difficult that "to think of it at all required an all but superhuman effort."

Russell also possessed a remarkable intellectual power, and one can get some idea of that from what happened when he was invited to deliver the Lowell lectures at Harvard: "I announced the subject . . . but could not think of anything to say." Finally, he arranged for a shorthand typist to visit him, "though I had not the vaguest idea what I should say to her when she came. As she entered the room, my ideas fell into place, and I dictated in a completely orderly sequence from that moment until the work was finished"—the work in question being *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*.

Russell's astonishing powers of cogitation and concentration seem to have been outgrowths of a general mental intensity that also gave him an exceptional capacity for experiencing emotion. When he first fell in love, with the American Quaker Alys Pearsall Smith, he was overcome with ecstasy: "We spent the whole day, with the exception of meal-times, in kissing, with hardly a word spoken from morning till night, except for an interlude during which I read *Epipsychidion* aloud." His emotional intensity also enabled Russell to achieve an extremely close intimacy with some male friends. The best illustration of it appears in his relationship with Conrad. In their first long conversation, "We seemed to sink through layer after layer of what was superficial, till gradually both reached the central fire. . . . We looked into each other's eyes, half appalled and half

intoxicated to find ourselves together in such a region." The very words bear the marks of Conrad's style. And Conrad's comment in a letter, "Generally I don't know what to say to people. But your personality drew me out," suggests that Russell, the masterful talker, was also a superb listener, which means that he must have possessed the quality, always uncommon and particularly rare in people of outstanding accomplishment, of being genuinely interested in others.

JUDGING from this volume, however, the extreme intensity and sensitivity that marked Russell's character also brought him close to insanity. When they heard that he wanted to marry Alys Pearsall Smith, his family were outraged and summoned the family doctor to persuade Russell to abandon the plan. The doctor approached his task by impressing on Russell that he should not have children because one of his uncles had been mad, an aunt had suffered from insane delusions, and his father had been an epileptic. Russell says that the fears induced by such arguments left him with a conscious fear of insanity and that while a happy marriage banished the conscious fear, an unconscious fear persisted. His repeated descriptions of people, including Whitehead, as being almost insane demonstrate that the subject of insanity continued to obsess him. But perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of Russell as being unbalanced—in the sense that his attitudes and behavior were consistently more intense than the causes appear to have warranted. In his youth he was a metaphysical idealist, and when he recovered, he found it "an intense excitement, after having supposed the sensible world unreal, to be able to believe again that there really were such things as tables and chairs." This surely is a remarkably vehement reaction compared, say, to that of Hume, who, after having spent his days proving that causality did not exist, would sit by the fire in the evenings and think how unreal were his concerns with the nature of reality.

Russell's attitudes toward the stuff of everyday life were equally excessive, and also consistently morbid. He described marriage as a competition to see which is to be the torturer and which the tortured. "To know people well," he observed, "is to know their tragedy." And in one fit of depression he wrote to Gilbert Murray: "The only thing that I strongly *feel* worth while would be to murder as many people as possible so as to diminish the amount of consciousness in the world."

AMID all this ghastliness, work was the only way to banish self. In the misery that followed his discovery that he no longer loved his first wife, Russell found his only real consolation in the construction of prose rhythms. Mathematics in particular was a haven of peace. Yet sometimes the burden of *Principia Mathematica* became so great that he determined to kill himself to escape it. Apparently it never occurred to him that he might just drop the book, as any normal person would have done. But then suicide was always in his mind as a way of escape. At school, he refrained from it only because he wanted to know more about mathematics. Exaggeration? Melodramatics? There is one anecdote that suggests otherwise. After sixteen years of marriage, he fell in love with Lady Ottoline Morrell, the most celebrated literary salonkeeper in England. Unfortunately, his wife still loved him and, in her fury, threatened to divorce him and name Lady Ottoline as the other woman. Russell's reply was that if she attempted to do so, he would circumvent her by committing suicide. "I meant this," he comments, "and she saw that I did." At any rate, she did not carry out her threat.

It is interesting that after he stopped loving his wife and before he began his affair with Lady Ottoline, Russell endured nine years of total sexual abstinence. He claims that he remained with his wife because she threatened to kill herself if he left her and because there was no other woman he wished to go to. In view of all the other evidence, it is difficult to take his wife's threat as seriously as Russell did; for he obviously lived in terror of unlikely disasters. As for his second given explanation, it seems more sensible to suppose that he shrank from a second sexual commitment and possible failure. For he never really expected to be happy. Just before he and Lady Ottoline were due to meet to inaugurate their sexual connection, Russell's dentist warned him that he had cancer. "My first reaction was to congratulate the Deity on having got me after all just as happiness seemed in sight."

It is, however, also possible that the real explanation for Russell's protracted abstinence from sexual activity lay in a vestigial belief in the Victorian moralities he had been brought up to cherish. For while in any age he would probably have been a genius and emotionally unbalanced, I suspect that his severe Victorian upbringing was responsible for most of the other principal characteristics that emerge in this self-accounting. It is true that he rebelled against several of the most hallowed Victorian moral canons. He lost his belief in God, after an agonizing struggle that today seems wholly disproportionate. He committed fornication, and he was brazenly defiant of the maxim "My country, right or wrong." It is, I think, significant that to justify himself, he wrote a great deal on all these issues, just as he also wrote a book on, of all subjects, how to be happy. He was the kind of ardent, extreme moralist who always has to find moral justification for his behavior; and he was a moralist in the true Victorian style, self-righteous and blessed with an absolute self-certainty that very few people of anything like the same education, not to mention intellect, can muster today. Moreover, he followed his preachments. He believed in the value of knowledge and of truth, and pursued them both with passion. He subjected himself to contempt, hatred, and prison to protest Britain's entry into the First World War.

AND YET, despite all his success and fame and his dedication to noble causes, he remained very doubtful whether anything he did was worth while. "Any passionate and courageous life seems good in itself," he wrote in 1913, "yet one feels that some element of delusion is involved in giving so much passion to any humanly attainable object. And so irony creeps into the

very springs of one's being." This is surely a curious observation from a man who must have believed himself to be a humanist. Why should he have taken it for granted that anything a human being can achieve is unworthy of passion? There is one obvious answer. Russell's sense of logic made it impossible for him to accept such irrational concepts as the Christian dogma of original sin or the Victorians' vision of God. But all the evidence in this book goes to show that, unconsciously, he never stopped believing in the one or missing the other.

A Critic Looks Back

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

A PRIMER OF IGNORANCE, by R. P. Blackmur. Edited by Joseph Frank. *Harcourt, Brace & World. $5.95.*

A Primer of Ignorance is a collection of Blackmur's lectures and essays, posthumously assembled, according to Blackmur's plan, by his literary executor Joseph Frank, himself a critic of note and currently a professor at Princeton, where Blackmur taught for twenty-five years. Some of the pieces discuss literary works in the scrupulous detail and diligent style that established Blackmur's reputation as a major critic, but the majority are general analyses of contemporary culture, as Blackmur saw it reflected in both literature and his own experience.

This is an oppressively sad book, whose favorite source of wise quotation is Montaigne, and sometimes, as its title suggests, an embittered one, heavily informed by that particular nostalgia which older American critics almost in unison feel for the days when modern literature and criticism were first making their way. The personal essays that comprise the book's middle are records of Blackmur's travels, often under government auspices, to audiences of European and Oriental literati and incipient literati. They are full of tokens of recognition and yet feelings of loneliness. *A Primer of Ignorance* conveys an aging man's awareness that both he and his sponsors were exploiting an excellence he would probably never be able to achieve again. The nostalgia for the culture of a past time becomes a background to the personal plight.

THOSE of us who have admired Blackmur's justifiably famous close readings of the modern poets will probably find the cultural essays disappointing, primarily because the exponent of careful analysis and hard scholarly work offers, instead, a series of excessively abstract, inadequately researched, feebly supported general remarks about the world scene. Blackmur's analysis is full of the 1950s' pieties about the elimination of poverty and the negative character of industrialization and yet neglects problems more immediate to his life as a professor—the individual's role in a bureaucracy and the teacher's relationship to his students. (Oddly, students are mentioned not at all, although Blackmur's style reveals those indulgences an eminent man allows himself before an eager, not to say captive, audience.) The author of the remark "many reviewers and critics (for the two are not the same)" here functions more as a reviewer, whose commentary is more a succession of "notices" than a thorough critique.

I would classify the most satisfactory essays in *A Primer of Ignorance* as orthodox literary criticism—the lengthy discussions of Henry James's stories about artists and several aspects of Henry Adams, all of which, indicatively, were published in the early 1940's. Blackmur's writing here is considerably smoother than his later prose—particularly immune from the clumsiness that subsequently became his primary affliction (and the sore rubbed by Frederick Crews's malicious parody in *The Pooh Perplex*); free of that "faulty relation between language and sensibility" he once identified as a sure mark of bad poetry.

In these better essays, he establishes his uncommon capacity to probe below the obvious surface of art's work—to perceive obscured but essential strategies, to make acutely fine but necessary discriminations, and to discern coherences where inferior critics find chaos. At this kind of "critic's job of work," Blackmur at his best operates as thoroughly as anyone can. My primary complaint here is that in his concern with Henry Adams as an artistic sensibility, Blackmur fails to mention what I think was Adams's most extraordinary intellectual innovation—the adaptation of ideas developed in the new sciences to defining the pattern that history makes.

THE BUTT of Blackmur's bitterness is ignorance—"the new illiteracy" of "fragmentation and specialized knowledge" which, he says, has swept American intellectual life and practically made the traditional man of letters extinct. Yet Blackmur himself hardly achieves the coherent and evenly measured breadth he so highly admires. The modes of experience significantly covered in the book encompass no more than literature, personal adventure, and architecture; and only in the first area does he transcend the mass of reviewers. Painting is mentioned here and there, and the remarks about dance, in this case on the New York City Ballet, display a solipsism and abstractness that a more scrupulous New Critic would have condemned: "If there was a unity in their dancing it was the American unity which is achieved by cutting away; unity by privation or deprivation; unity by technique—by action precipitated in the Kaleidoscope and learned in the muscles which would operate without the pressure of the person." This statement reminds me of the best aphorism in the book, "All minds should contain several vocabularies," precisely because Blackmur's primary problem here is an inability to find a vocabulary appropriate to the experience he describes.

Nonetheless, Blackmur's ideals have an enormous relevance today, as our culture continually becomes more multifarious; for he suggests that audiences, as well as critics, should be not monoliterate, which is to say specialists in only one field, but polyliterate, familiar with the "vocabularies" and traditions of several fields. However, where Black-