



Gertrude Stein: "Writers have two countries, one where they belong and one in which they live really. The second . . . is not real but it is really there."

A Wonderchild for 72 Years

SELECTED WRITINGS OF GERTRUDE STEIN. Edited by Carl Van Vechten. New York: Random House. 1946. 622 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by LEO LERMAN

ONCE upon a time a child, Gertrude, was born in Alleghany, Pa., which later became Pittsburgh, U. S. A. And this child, Gertrude, was born in many places for seventy-two years—Vienna, Austria; Paris, France; Oakland and San Francisco, California; Boston, Massachusetts; Baltimore, Maryland; Florence, Italy. She died on July 27, 1946 in Paris, France. But doubtlessly she had died in many places before. It is almost impossible to live without dying, and Gertrude lived all the time she was living. Now Gertrude was a wonderchild. She was a wonderchild in all the places in which she was born and died and lived, and she was a wonderchild in places in which she had never been and of which she had probably never heard. But they all heard of her because she was this wonderchild—oh yes. Most of all she was a wonderchild in Paris, France, where also in and about she went to live in 1903 and where she lived almost always. There and everywhere she was also an *enfant terrible*—meaning a bully. What she said went, because she knew that she knew. If you did not know that she knew, you went. She would brook no interference and not a no. Lots of people came and some stayed, but sooner or later almost everybody went. Of course, some

came back. But with this child, who had the look of an ageless, very wise peasant woman, everything was forever, everything was permanent, everything was everything, but she was she and that meant she was first person singular always. Sometimes she was generous with her first person singular. But always she was so explicitly first person singular that you said yes—or else! Once she met a girl, Alice B. Toklas. She took her into her first person singular so completely that later she wrote "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas," and many people read it because it became a best seller because many people read it. And almost everyone was delighted because it was quite easy to understand and so almost everyone understood it and they were pleased because now they could be among the initiate, too. There's nothing people like so much as to be among the initiate. But ever so many who read it said which is which—which is Gertrude, which is Alice B.? And some of them never did find out, nor did it matter. And she wrote it in six weeks because she had been her whole life preparing it, because a genuinely created and creative work does not spring out just like that but has to be simmering inside for years. And she bought herself a new eight-cylinder Ford car "and the most expensive coat made to order by Hermes and fitted by the man who makes horse covers for race horses, for Basket the white poodle and two collars studded for Basket. I had never made any money

before in my life and I was most excited."

So the next year which was 1934 she came back to America because this was the year for her opera "Four Saints in Three Acts," and this was the year for her lecturing and seeing America and hearing it and inhaling it and not especially feeling it more than all those years in Paris, France, and elsewhere because she always felt it intensely. She always felt America. She was America. Meaning: she had an abiding sense of fun, she was an energist; she was the biggest, the best; she was an evangelist; she was all past but even more future. She was sentimental. She was real. She was decided. She was shrewd. And, of course, she was a wonderchild. That's America. That's being an American. She wrote all about being Americans in "The Making of Americans," which is enormous, almost one thousand pages, and there is quite a lot of it in these "Selected Writings of." She wrote all about being American in almost everything she wrote whether it was all about Picasso or Matisse or Melanctha Herbert (which last Richard Wright has called "the first long serious literary treatment of Negro life in the United States"). And when she wrote "Paris, France," she wrote:

A child does not forget but other things happen . . . After all everybody, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there.

And so this is all about Gertrude's first person singular again but this time it is all about everyone's dream world, everyone understanding, of course, that there are two dream worlds, both real, and the problem is to coincide them and then you are adjusted. Gertrude coincided her dream worlds: she was adjusted. She was so well adjusted that sometimes people couldn't stand it, and they tried, if they dared to maladjust her, but all they did was maladjust themselves. She was as incorruptible as Gibraltar, but stone is no longer impervious, so there is nothing to compare but herself to herself. No one could distract her from herself. Not even the Nazis could dislodge her from France and not even the G.I.'s could do anything except love her, so they did that. Everyone is interested in personality. She was personality. Everyone wants to partake of being alive, and the moment you heard of her or saw her you knew she was alive—living. Everyone wants to es-

cape into a dream. She was living in a dream. She was truer than history, more like fiction. Fairytales are fiction, which means fiction and fairytales are dreams. E. M. Forster said it not thinking about her but saying it and it is about her, because she was never as dim as most people are dim in "real" life. "... fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond the evidence, and each of us knows from his own experience that there is something beyond the evidence. . . ." Thomas Wolfe said it all exactly about her. He, too, was not saying it about her, but there is nothing better said about her. He said:

There are some people who have the quality of richness and joy in them and they communicate it to everything they touch. It is first of all a physical quality; then it is a quality of the spirit. . . . It is probably the richest resource of the spirit; it is better than all formal learning, and it cannot be learned, although it grows in power and richness with living. It is full of wisdom and repose, since the memory and contrast of pain and labor are in it. . . . People who have this energy of joy and delight draw other people to them as bees are drawn to ripe plums. Most people have little power for living in themselves, they are pallid and uncertain in their thoughts and feelings, and they think they can derive the strength, the richness, and the character they lack from one of these vital and decisive people.

So this source of strength, this deep well of wisdom, this grandmother was a wonderchild for seventy-two years, an authentic wonderchild. That meant she was a prodigy and she behaved accordingly and was fawned upon and never fawned. And in Paris she met and stopped meeting and met again all the great because she was she and they were great and she made them great. Paris just before 1914 and until 1938 or so was the place to meet and be great, so it was obviously the place for her to be great and American and a catalytic agent. Even people who have never heard of genius are its heirs. Then there are the ones she influenced or circumscribed directly—the ones who sat around her in her beautiful rooms, the ones who wrote because she was and the ones who painted because she was. And on and off they included all the bright young men. There was Hemingway with whom "she quarreled," and to whom she once said something like, "Remarks are not criticism, Ernest." And there was Picasso. But almost from the first there was Picasso and they were two *enfants terribles*, and they got on famously even when they did not get on and together, between them they practically invented today in literature and painting. So she opened doors with what she wrote and



with what she said, and she did this for years. And sometimes she could go on materially because she had "independent means." This variety of means is most important, and fortunately for all people she had them. It's fortunate for all people because when a door is opened somewhere in the universe everyone passes through whether he knows it or not and whether its sooner or later.

Now sometimes Gertrude, the wonderchild, spoke right out and it was lucid. Everyone understood immediately. But sometimes she sang away more for herself than for others. She made up rhythms and said words, holding them up individually—beautiful pebbles found accidentally on some obscure beach—even the most populated shore is obscure to eyes which do not see. So when she sang or said:

Sweet sweet sweet sweet tea.
Susie Asado.

or:

Pigeons on the grass alas.
Pigeons on the grass alas.
Short longer grass short longer
shorter yellow grass. Pigeons
large pigeons on the shorter long-
er longer yellow grass alas pigeons
on the grass
If they were not pigeons what were
they.

Lots laughed and laughed and said, "It's a joke! It's a racket! [Sinclair Lewis said that! She's crazy!]" But some could see with their ears and smell with their eyes and taste with their whole selves. And they knew what she was saying and that it was important. What she had to say was: examine language—take up words as you would beautiful objects. Look at words. Listen to words. Have they shape, color? What do they say without context? Do you see these words. Words are words. But some people never knew what she was talking about, and, of course, sometimes they couldn't have known because when a child makes up songs or phrases you can't know what he's talking about all the time even if the child's a prodigy. Children speak a shorthand all their own. They lead curious and elaborately real interior lives. There were things published which probably shouldn't have been published until a definitive edition. But after all it's

because she was difficult that everyone eventually came to hear about her.

So now she has departed but she is here and everyone who writes must be more explicit because of her writing both intelligibly and unintelligibly. And now she is historical in "Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein." All wonderchildren love publicity and to be immortalized because they know that they deserve it—who else does? So she was very pleased when she knew that this "Selected Writings of" was happening, and she wrote to Carl Van Vechten who was doing it. "I always wanted to be historical, from almost a baby on, I felt that way about it, and Carl was one of the earliest ones that made me be certain that I was going to be." And she is. But more than historical or a force or a catalytic agent or a wonderchild or a grandmother or a semanticist or an experimental writer or a publicist, or a woman, she was a philosopher being faithful to herself. William James, it is said, considered her his most brilliant pupil. And, after all, he was one of the founders of pragmatism. She studied medicine for four years at Johns Hopkins. She believed in continuity, and that everything was everything all the time. And she believed that she would inevitably get what she wanted. She did. She wanted people to see, especially to see her way. Captain Edmund Geisler, her escort on her venture into Belgium at the end of this last war, said to Carl Van Vechten, "Whenever she spoke she was frank and even belligerent. She made the G.I.'s awfully mad, but she also made them think and many ended in agreement with her." And that's about it: she made many mad and many thought her ridiculous and a phony, but she made everyone, with any sense, think. Now, I have written all about "Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein" and all the writings of Gertrude Stein this way because to write about her means to enter right into her first person singular. This is not a formal criticism nor a parody, but it is about the "Selected Writings of" which Carl Van Vechten edited so lovingly and to which he wrote such interesting notes and from which he omitted "Paris, France" and the whole book of "Picasso" both of which I love. Now "Picasso" is a real omission because it says more about art and artists than any other document I know and it says it irrefutably in fifty pages. But as Gertrude wrote in her little note, "And now I am pleased here are the selected writings and naturally I wanted more, but I do and can say that all that are here are those that I wanted the most, thanks and thanks again."

Christopher Marlowe, with Poetry

THE MUSES' DARLING. By Charles Norman. New York: Rinehart & Co. 1946. 272 pp. \$4.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

THE great and shadowy figure of Christopher Marlowe has fascinated many readers and writers, scholars and amateurs alike. All that we know of his life is to be found in a few legal documents, while we know nothing of his appearance, for there is neither contemporary description nor portrait to perpetuate his likeness. That he died of a dagger thrust at the age of twenty-nine is a matter of record, but the exact manner of his killing, and what interests may have moved behind the act, are still subjects for speculation. And as it was with his dying, so it was with his living. His poet's claim upon our abiding interest has been seconded by the claim that mystery always makes upon curiosity; a double pressure not to be resisted. Mr. Charles Norman has been yielding to it for some twenty-odd years, and the present volume is the matured fruit of his far from passive surrender.

His debt to the scholarship of others—Hotson and Eccles and the rest—is fully acknowledged, but what he has made of that scholarship is his own, by virtue of understanding and the ability to express understanding in evocative, satisfying prose. "The Muses' Darling" is a work of literary distinction: a book with a style. It is a documented book, into which the kind of fiction dear to certain biographers has not been allowed to enter; but at the same time the author has managed to put a little imagined flesh on the bare bones of fact. He does this successfully and legitimately in such passages as those which describe Alleyn's performance as Faustus at the Rose Theatre, Robert Greene's filthy but literary death-bed, and the arrest and torture of Thomas Kyd. He gives life and color to his scene by calling on Dekker to assist him in picturing Elizabeth's London; and he has widened and deepened the interest of his study by reaching out to give "occasionally full accounts of his [Marlowe's] acquaintances," in accordance with a "plan, which was to throw light on his life by showing how his familiars lived, whenever the records dealing exclusively with him seemed inadequate." The plan was well conceived and has been well executed. Mr. Norman has not only assembled and arranged every scrap of information regarding Marlowe that is extant, and weighed probabilities, but he

has also put that information in a vitalizing setting of correlative fact.

Here, then, is just about as good a life of Marlowe as present knowledge permits. But the life, of course, would be nothing without the poetry; a fact that some scholars seem to forget. Mr. Norman, being a poet himself, does not forget it, nor does he permit us to do so. However obscure the biography, the poetry is plain to read, and the biographer reads it with us. The ways by which Marlowe journeyed from Canterbury to Deptford are dark, but the development of the poet as poet is clear, and Mr. Norman traces it from the first translations of Ovid and the early tragedy of "Dido," through "Tamburlaine" and "Faustus," to "Edward II"; the last, according to this critic, being "the book with which Shakespeare went to school," the play in which Marlowe first displayed complete mastery of the dramatic medium, creating real characters rather than mighty puppets fitted to bear the weight of their maker's mighty line.

Among other things, Mr. Norman understands the art of quotation: enough but not too much. And, as quotation stirs the reader's memory, the echoes that cluster in its train move the biographer-critic to his greatest eloquence. I have said that "The Muses' Darling" is a book with a style. I should add that this style flexibly encompasses both factual statement and poetic imagery. So, writing of the Marlowe of "Tambur-

laine," Mr. Norman declares: "Exultation rings the deep bell of his being. Like combers making toward the land, treading the offshore deeps with flashing, rhythmic thunder, the music of his marching iambs surges forward, thundering harmony to the shores of consciousness." And again:

He is the true Elizabethan, voyaging on strange seas to mine the mines of beauty. And he is lost to us, lost in the corridors of the years, as one is lost who, turning his back in a corridor of mirrors before we have seen his face, is lost to sight, then reappears to stride silently in the deeps of glass, an image that recedes, yet in a fixed moment is forever there, so that we seem to hear, along the passageway, the fading footfall.

Yes, he is lost to us, while the plaguing questions remain. What did he look like? Whom did he love? How seriously did he take the atheism of which he was accused? What service caused Her Majesty's Government to intervene in his behalf at Cambridge? What were his relations with Shakespeare? Was Raleigh's figure, or another great one, behind Ingram Frizer's sudden thrust? These riddles and many more are still with us. But so is the poetry. And therefore, on balance, we may conclude with Charles Norman: "We know him so well and so little!"

This is the book that I shall give to anyone whose mind I wish to turn towards Christopher Marlowe; and, giving it, I shall remark that the well-chosen illustrations, including Ortelius's map of Africa, add much to the volume's interest and the pleasure that it affords.



Alleyn as Faustus, Devil as Devil.

—From the book.