

THE REAL CHEKHOV: AN INTRODUCTION TO CHEKHOV'S LAST PLAYS. By *David Magarshack*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, a division of Harper & Row, 1972. 249 pp. \$11.50.

THE CHEKHOV PLAY: A NEW INTERPRETATION. By *Harvey Pitcher*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, a division of Harper & Row, 1973. viii, 224 pp. \$9.50.

Both these volumes treat Chekhov's four major plays: *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. David Magarshack undertakes to elucidate what he believes is the correct reading of the plays. He evidently intends his book as an introduction for either the uninitiated reader or anyone who has been exposed to performances of the plays controlled by those whom he labels Chekhov's executioners—the stage directors. However, it is precisely as an introduction that Magarshack's study is dangerously misleading. He insists, for example, that in *The Seagull* Chekhov opposes some established body of Russian symbolist drama, though no such school existed. He further leads the reader to believe that Vladimir Soloviev was an exponent of such works, while in fact Soloviev mocked the symbolist poets. In explaining Solienii's references to Lermontov, Magarshack summarizes *A Hero of Our Time* as the story of “. . . a proud man who wished to cut a figure in society but, hurt by its indifference and spurned by the woman he loved, vowed to vent his spite on his rival” (p. 176). While this resembles Solienii's emotional gyrations, it simply does not correspond to Lermontov's novel. Another difficulty is Magarshack's tendency to state as fact what can only be called whimsical interpretation. Indeed, in any number of instances he attributes to characters motivations which the text will not support.

Like many of Chekhov's admirers, Magarshack assigns all four plays equally high marks—a view which muffles our apprehension of Chekhov's innovations in drama. Harvey Pitcher, on the other hand, sees in them a gradual transformation of conventional elements. For him Chekhov in *The Seagull*, and to some extent in *Uncle Vanya*, has not quite made the final leap, but in the last two plays he transforms the drama of action into a play which concentrates on the emotional network generated by the characters themselves. He defines Chekhov's plot as the working out of a disruptive process caused by the conflicting interests of insiders and outsiders.

Pitcher's criticism of the earlier plays and his analysis of the process by which the innovations emerge are extremely perceptive. He has indeed produced the new interpretation which his subtitle proposes. Along with John Styan's recent book, it is an important study of Chekhov the dramatist. He faults *The Seagull* as a work in which the playwright could not yet focus on the emotional network because he was juggling four strong, independent personalities. His analysis of the way *The Wood Demon* is transformed into *Uncle Vanya* is fascinating. He convincingly argues that the changes produced a play which reveals not the action which may arise out of emotion, as *The Wood Demon* had, but the emotional stance itself, in this case frustration. In his treatment of *Three Sisters* he makes an excellent case for viewing the fourth act as a mirror-like inversion of the situation at the outset, though he curiously fails to note the major parallel between Olga's recollection in act 1 of the military band which accompanied her father's funeral procession and the recurrence of both marching band and a death in the finale. He considers *The Cherry Orchard* the culmination of Chekhov's dramatic

gifts—a play in which situation rather than personality is central. His argument is sound, but there remains a question: had Chekhov not died within a year, what direction might his plays have taken? One of his notebook jottings suggests a tantalizing answer; he contemplated a drama about a group of people anticipating the arrival of a person who fails to show up.

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LITERATURNOE NASLEDSTVO, VOL. 84: IVAN BUNIN. 2 vols. Edited by V. G. Bazanov et al. Moscow: "Nauka," 1973. Vol. 1: 696 pp. 4.13 rubles. Vol. 2: 551 pp. 3.46 rubles.

Ivan Bunin, the first Russian to win the Nobel Prize for literature, is also the first Russian émigré writer to be honored by the well-known *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* series with a publication entirely devoted to him. This two-volume tribute, lavishly illustrated with photographs of Bunin and his friends and contemporaries, reproductions of Bunin's autographs, pictures of various places associated with him, and so forth, was apparently intended to mark the centenary of his birth (in 1970), but its publication was delayed and coincided with another memorable date—the twentieth anniversary of his death.

Volume 1 opens with an article on Bunin's art by O. N. Mikhailov, one of the leading Soviet specialists on Bunin. The bulk of the volume (pp. 60–418) is then given to the publication of Bunin's literary legacy: his stories, poems, book reviews, speeches, interviews, reviews written for the Russian Academy of Sciences, autobiographical notes, and other pieces that remained uncollected during his lifetime. Separate sections are introduced and commented upon by well-known Bunin specialists, such as A. K. Baboreko, A. N. Dubovikov, and T. G. Dinesman. This publication of Bunin's literary legacy, though it is dominated by his early writings (many of the stories and poems are those which he did not wish to include in his subsequent collections), reflects to some extent the "double life" of Russian literature since the Revolution: its division into Soviet Russian literature and émigré literature. Thus, it includes some pieces which, while they will be new to the Soviet reader, have already been included in the books published abroad. On the other hand, much of what may be described as "casual pieces" has been excluded from this publication because it reflects Bunin's uncompromising hostility to the October Revolution and the Soviet regime. It should also be noted—and this, unfortunately, not to the credit of the editors—that the title of the leading and most prestigious Russian post-World War II periodical, the New York *Novyi Zhurnal*, is taboo. In all references to items which originally appeared in this journal (and there are a great many of them, including some by Bunin's widow), we read: "First published in . . . [the year only is given here] in New York"—no title, no number or month. Yet, there are references to other émigré publications (*Vozrozhdenie*, *Russkaia Gazeta*) with exact dates. It seems as though the present-day Soviet reader is not even supposed to know of the existence of *Novyi Zhurnal*, though we know that now and then it falls into his hands.

The rest of volume 1 is taken up by Bunin's letters. There are 244 letters, more than half of which are Bunin's, exchanged between Bunin and his great friend, the writer N. D. Teleshov (1867–1957). Chronologically speaking, this correspondence falls into two parts. The first 225 letters cover the period from 1897 through 1916,