

CHEKHOV IN PERFORMANCE: A COMMENTARY ON THE MAJOR PLAYS. By *J. L. Styan*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971. viii, 341 pp. \$14.50.

In the English-speaking world Chekhov's plays do not suffer from a shortage of critical analysis. There are at least two full-length studies of the plays, those by David Magarshack and Maurice Valency, and numerous chapters in books devoted to the modern theater, including Professor Styan's own excellent chapter on *The Cherry Orchard* in *The Dark Comedy*. However, this latest study completely justifies its place in Chekhov criticism by being far and away the finest close analysis of the four major plays—*The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*.

Styan acknowledges a debt to S. D. Balukhaty, who created a model for the kind of close descriptive and stylistic analysis which he employs in this book. But the debtor has amply repaid the debt by bringing far greater insight into the clusters of meaning that erupt constantly in the plays. He articulates precisely and accurately the ambivalent feelings that Chekhov puts into Uncle Vanya's climactic confrontation with Serebryakov in the third act, or the multifarious significances of Varya's raising a stick at Lopakhin in the third act of *The Cherry Orchard*. These are two of the most impressive discussions in the book, but through the author's running commentary on virtually every line, gesture, and stage-set in the four plays, each page is studded with fresh insights. This method is notably successful in revealing the relationship between Varya and Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard* and the obstacles which make their union impossible.

Styan offers compelling arguments for rejecting such standard Soviet interpretations of Chekhov as the uplifting choral effect at the end of *Three Sisters*, or Trofimov as the embodiment of the glorious wave of the future. One recognizes the bias in these interpretations but may find it difficult to formulate an objection. Styan succeeds in doing so by noting Chekhov's own way of balancing the pathetic with the comic, the melodramatic with the practical, always creating a scene which in its totality forces the audience to be objective and never fully acquiesce in the view of any single member of the cast.

The author also provides considerable detail on the way different scenes have been handled in production, though what he finally achieves is a nearly ideal verbal description of all that we should be aware of in each scene.

Styan does not know Russian, and occasionally this lack produces an awkward phrase or permits a garbled translation to stand: thus Nikolai Stepanovich, the central character in "A Dreary Story," is referred to as Stepanovich (p. 104); the author is apparently unaware of the derogatory implication in using the patronymic alone. In referring to Chekhov's own description of Solyony he quotes this translation: "He should be made up to look like Lermontov" (p. 191); Chekhov's own phrase (*Grimirova'sia on dolzhen Lermontovym*) clearly means, "He must affect the appearance of Lermontov." But this obvious limitation on Styan only occasionally throws him off base. His close textual analysis rings truer than that of many a commentator whose knowledge of Russian is flawless. The book, like others I have seen in the recent Cambridge publications on Russian literature, lacks an index. This is a serious drawback for a book that contains numerous scattered references to major themes running through all the plays (for example, it would be difficult for a reader to put together all of Styan's shrewd observations on time as a major theme in the plays).

But one should not quibble over minor deficiencies in a book that is the finest study of Chekhov's plays available to us today.

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LEONID ANDREYEV: A STUDY. By *James B. Woodward*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. xi, 290 pp. \$8.25.

J. B. Woodward's is the first significant Andreyev study to appear in English since Alexander Kaun's in 1924. The forty-some year hiatus between monographs should raise no eyebrows, since Andreyev's literary reputation and colossal popularity had been swept into "the abyss," along with the epoch he epitomized, even before his own death in 1919. Nor does an Andreyev renaissance appear to be in the offing: the centenary of his birth, in August 1971, has been commemorated—to the best of my knowledge—by a mere half-page spread in *Literaturnaia gazeta* in the East and this book review in the West.

If Kaun's study, appearing in the early twenties, was probably inspired by the still potent residue of the Andreyev legend, then Woodward's, appearing in the late sixties, can obviously dispense with any form of shadow-boxing with Leonid's ghost. At this point in time one would expect an Andreyev study to be informed by a sense of historical distance, by thoroughness and objectivity: a kind of *Leben und Werke* based on all the available information.

And that is just about what Woodward sets out to offer us—with one crucial qualification: "Questions of style and technique," he says in his preface, "are discussed only in so far as they contribute to this central purpose," the central purpose being "to determine the mainsprings of his [Andreyev's] art and to provide an interpretation of his major works." Accordingly, Woodward analyzes Andreyev's writings almost exclusively in terms of intellectual and biographical factors; in addition he elucidates the philosophical and societal background as well as Andreyev's relations with contemporary *littérateurs*.

Comprehensive and impressive though it may be, Woodward's compendium of Andreyev's ideas proves only one thing, namely, that Andreyev did indeed think and that his mind and heart were basically in the right spot. But so what? What good are ideas to a writer when he lacks the ability to integrate them artistically in his fiction? It is precisely on this point that we can observe the consequences of Woodward's decision to declare style and technique incidental to his discussion of literature: he has placed the cart before the horse and finds himself in the position of having to defend artistically indefensible works on the grounds that they contain ideas or autobiographical elements of importance.

The last thing Andreyev needs at this late date is any vindication or defense for having blighted, as Woodward himself admits, most of his works with the curse of "ideas." The fact is, of course, that the less Andreyev thought, the better he wrote, and the few things of his that can still be read without too much gnashing of teeth are readable precisely because they are not overburdened with *Weltanschauung*. Woodward's failure to make that clear constitutes, in my opinion, the Achilles' heel of a book which otherwise is highly recommended to everyone interested in Leonid Andreyev's cometlike appearance on the Russian literary firmament.