

Wanderers Along the Volga

Going to Town and Other Stories, by Yuri Kazakov, translated from the Russian by Gabriella Azrael (Houghton Mifflin, 325 pp. \$4.95), are emotionally and imaginatively concerned with man, rather than Man. A Mount Holyoke history professor, Pulitzer Prize poet, and author of "The Unadjusted Man," Peter Viereck is writing a book for Macmillan on his many personal meetings last year in the USSR with the young rebel writers. Among his other titles are "Dream and Responsibility: Tension Between Poetry and Society," "First Morning," and "Conservatism Revisited."

By PETER VIERECK

HOLDEN CAULFIELD living in Winesburg-on-the-Volga: this photomontage phrase, for all its seeming breeziness, is the best brief image for conveying the art of Yuri Kazakov to American readers, for indicating his uncanny resemblance to Salinger and Anderson (not via imitation but via a common descent from Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*), and at the same time for extricating him from the various ideological frameworks with which both Russian and American critics distort so much of the post-Stalin flowering. "Senza ideologia" (without ideology): so reads a sign in an Italian bookstore announcing Kazakov's first Italian edition. There are two kinds of literary rebels against Stalinist bureaucracy, those who partly politicize, like Yevtushenko in poetry and Solzhenitsin in prose, and those pure esthetes who are relatively nonpolitical, like Voznesensky in poetry and now, in this well-translated American selection, Kazakov in prose.

No middle-aged bourgeois, Kazakov is only thirty-six, the son of a worker. During my three recent literary-research visits in Russia, *The Catcher in the Rye* was the rage among young students. Reading Kazakov one can see why, both for better and worse. Almost all these short stories have an unfulfilled Sensitive Plant as hero or heroine, and this on a more adolescent, more sentimental level than Chekhov. Yet there is more craftsmanship here than appears, even in the plotless plots. Further, the



Yuri Kazakov—"the concrete individual is paramount."

—Sovfoto

waif characters (mostly presented in pairs: Gusta and Zabavin, Lilya and Alyosha, Manka and Perfilii, Yashka and Volodya, Tanya and Blokhin) display not only the author's craftsmanship, not merely skill, but his deep emotional and imaginative involvement, even with the secondary characters—and in one case (the bear Teddy) with an animal waif. For the reader something is gained—a cumulative capacity for empathy—by reading here together the stories one has seen (for example, in *Encounter* or in Russia) separately. But something is also lost; certain repeated effects wear numb; for example, the repetition of the concluding question: was it all a dream? This theme and even the actual word "dream" recur—effectively, astringently—in the last paragraph of "The Island" but recur too automatically in the last paragraph of "The Blue and the Green."

In the Anderson-Salinger (that is, early-Turgenev) category of wistful, wandering waifs the best story in the book is "The House Under the Hill" and the most characteristic (neither best nor worst) is "The Blue and the Green." Lots of these sketches could happen anywhere, regardless of social system.

The concrete individual is paramount: very human and unheroic, unpoliticized, ungeneralized. The subject matter is the inner private life, especially love and loneliness, and not the outer gregarious public life. However, if you really want to look for references to current Soviet public disputes, you can find them too. For example, in "Adam and Eve" the artist Ageev complains to the girl Vika that "the political types" denounce him as "an abstractionist, a nonrealist, a formalist . . . they can't teach me anything. Life is teaching me. . . . When they talk about 'man,' it is always with a capital letter. To their clear vision MAN represents the nation, a thousand years, the cosmos! One man is not enough for them to think about; they have to have millions!" Esthetically what saves Kazakov's uneven, delicate, lyrical art is that it presents man, not Man.

One caution: what seems cliché in the West may be unconventional and brave in the East. In America today the pessimism and the mawkish, anti-activist introspection of some Kazakov characters are a stale convention. This was not the case in an earlier American era. It is not the case in Russia today, where such defiance of official eager-beaver activist optimism is both courageous ethically (Kazakov has been denounced for it) and a big step forward esthetically (from the "positive-hero" cult of the Party line).

The Soviet overlap between esthetic and ideological criticism of writers has forced many American critics, by a reverse mirror-image, into the same overlap, only with Western *plus* substituted for Marxist *minus*. My preceding paragraph is partly guilty of this process, in so far as I tried to find a local Soviet merit in what, from universal standards, was partly *vieux jeu*. The time has come to go beyond this (I am appealing herewith to all fellow American reviewers of Soviet books) and to advance to a more rigorous stage in criticism. Now that the semi-thaw has produced writers as good as Kazakov and Voznesensky, we should stop patronizing them by making allowance for local handicaps (the isolation and lag caused by Stalinism) and should start judging them by the same universal criteria by which we judge the great Russians of the past: Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoevsky. By these criteria, let us ask of the new poets and prose writers: 1. Are they of universal interest or of mere local Soviet merit? 2. Are they great (in the sense that a Faulkner in America or a Pasternak in Russia is great)? 3. Are they at least very good writers, from a universal and not merely Soviet or American standard? In regard to Kazakov, the answer to question 1 is yes; to 2, no, and to 3, emphatically yes.

Season of Magic and Mystery

A Fool in the Forest, by Basil Burwell (Macmillan, 430 pp. \$5.95), celebrates the unfailing fascination of the stage. Padraic Colum was a founder of the Irish National Theatre, along with W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and others.

By PADRAIC COLUM

WHY IS it, I wonder, that those of us who have been with play-acting groups and writers' groups will read with more nostalgic interest about the first than about the second group of associates? Writers are more learned; they may even be more our own sort than the players; their connections may be more worthwhile for us. But players have their own world, one where people are less depersonalized than in the world of writers. They are more unsophisticated. And so they are more affectionately remembered than writers. When one who has mixed with players reads about them the suspense of rehearsals, the exaltation of successful first nights, the sense of life being not worth living that comes with failures, are all back with him, and he lives once more before and behind the scenes.

In *A Fool in the Forest* Basil Burwell gives us a piece of fictional reminiscence rooted in theatrical history. His personages, members of a stock company, are rendered present to us: There is Sam Hernshaw, experienced and tutorial, "with the beautiful skin that old actors have, though a bit florid, especially on the turned-up, slightly bulbous nose that Sam used to straighten out with nose putty when he was a leading man." There is Ma Barker, professional, sensible, helpful, and given to theosophical sermonizing; there is Mavis, the leading lady, competent and somewhat shopworn, and Don Francis with the cultivated aloofness of the leading man. There is Cyrus, the director, who can impress his cast despite his neuroticism.

They all know the lore of the theatre, and it is rewarding to hear them recount it, as it is to hear the stray pieces of dramatic criticism that one or another of them delivers with authority. Hear Sam Hernshaw: "Gordon Craig and those fellows had done a lot

to ruin the stage with their notions of doing without footlights. Fancy effects were all they thought about, fancy effects that lit the scenery and made the actors invisible . . . In the theatre the actor should be king. Footlights help to make him king. Footlights give magic to human faces, and it's the human being who matters every time."

From each of the comradely troupe young Jeff Ramsey, who tells the story, learns a little. He has had some teaching from schools of drama, but none of it could show him what one appearance on the actual stage could and did—"The phenomenon of the theatre, which turns the presence of the audience into so powerful a stimulant that pain can be forgotten, may explain the joyous mutilations and flagellations of primitive rites."

As I put the book back on my shelf I find that *A Fool in the Forest* takes on a pattern that I had not perceived while reading it. The forest that the immature Jeff goes into has other denizens besides those in the show booth. Prowling through it are two fellows whose gratification is in dirty words, abuse, near-murder. And dryads, perhaps—the two almost mindless girls who give themselves so easily to the young narrator. And here let me say that, for my taste, there are too many lapses from chastity in the story. I use this old-fashioned and negative expression to denote my feeling that the sexual encounters have little of positive desire in them. Perhaps the sense of guilt that Lucy and Vickie force upon him has given Jeff a tragic experience that is needed to make him mature. And there is a memorable lesson in the words of old Cagliari, who has learned that preaching anarchism isn't enough, and who is unable to save his wife and daughter from misery and degradation.

A Fool in the Forest, however, is not an allegory; neither is it a morality; it is a season of that perennial institution, the theatre.

Their Brothers' Keepers

The Seed and the Sower, by Laurens van der Post (Morrow, 256 pp. \$4.50), probes the cultural abyss between prisoners of war and their guards. James Gray, essayist and critic, is the author of the collection "On Second Thought."

By JAMES GRAY

THESE are stories of men at war, and of what certain peculiarly alert intelligences perceive when they are confronted with some of its crucial instances of loyalties in conflict. It is the psychological battle, brought to crisis in prison camp, that interests Laurens van der Post; for there the central issue seems to him to be revealed as it cannot be either in the wordy preliminaries to war or in the brutal, physical emergency of actual fighting. In the momentous passivity of the relationship between guard and defeated victim men face each other with an urgent need to comprehend divisive philosophies—and with the pitiful certainty that they will fail.

In two of the three loosely related narratives brought together in *The Seed*

and *the Sower* this point is made. All men are prisoners of the way of life under which their discipline has been inculcated. The British entered World War II under the control of a tradition that had been shaping their pattern of behavior for centuries. The Japanese had been directed for a much longer time toward the worship of attitudes that were totally different but, for them, equally valid. In the painful intimacy of the prison camp superior representatives of the two cultures can only yearn in vain for a meeting of intelligences; the rigidity of their respective values is such that they are bound to reject any attempt at rapprochement, and mutual hostility steadily mounts in bitterness.

In each of these parallel stories a British soldier senses that there is no hope except through a leap of faith across the abyss of difference. A simple gesture of respect should be enough, each thinks, to show that unlikenesses are trivial compared to the vast, enclosing sameness of human need. A staid British colonel in *A Bar of Shadow* wishes that he had not curbed his impulse to express—with a kiss on the forehead—his respect for the former
(Continued on page 57)