

CHALIAPIN: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS TOLD TO MAXIM GORKY.

With supplementary correspondence and notes, translated from the Russian, compiled and edited by *Nina Froud* and *James Hanley*. New York: Stein and Day, 1967. 320 pp. \$10.00, cloth. \$3.95, paper.

Two names, Chaliapin and Gorky, are featured on the spine and the dust jacket of this anthology of excerpts concerning the singer. Only Chaliapin's autobiography, which comprises about half the book, and some letters are actually by Gorky, but the juxtaposition of the two names fires the imagination. The two men's lives paralleled each other, though they did not meet until Gorky sought out Chaliapin, then twenty-three and singing the lead (1896) in Glinka's *Ivan Susanin*, to praise him for his understanding portrayal of a Russian peasant. Both had knowledge of the people, for both had started life among them. As Chaliapin says elsewhere: "At the time when as a boy I was apprenticed in Kazan to Andreev, the shoemaker, who lived on the corner of Malaia Prolomnaia Street, Gorky was working as a baker on the other corner of the parallel street, Bolshaiia Prolomnaia." Later Chaliapin at seventeen, after making his way by tugboat from Astrakhan to the Nizhni Novgorod Fair, worked, like Gorky, as a stevedore. They were both in Tiflis at the same time, though Gorky was then in prison; also both were simultaneously employed by the Transcaucasian Railroad. They both auditioned for the Kazan choir without actually meeting, though ironically it was Gorky who was accepted and Chaliapin rejected, for the younger man's voice was still changing at the time. More striking than the superficial coincidences, however, is the similarity of the two poor boys' rise to fame, yet with the conclusive dissimilarity of Gorky's final return to Russia and Chaliapin's continued career in the West. The coincidence is not explored, nor is the difference in the ending of the two lives evaluated in the present volume.

Unfortunately the translators of this Chaliapin anthology expend their effort, first of all, on a claim to research. In a translator's note Nina Froud mentions the autobiography as if it were her discovery. She writes of "burrowing in archives" for some seventeen years until a "guardian angel" placed in her hands the Gorky manuscript containing the "hitherto elusive picture of their early life together." Though, as we have seen, the two men did not spend their early life "together," the autobiography was doubtless "elusive" for years after its first serial publication by Gorky in *Letopis'* in 1917. Then it was first published in English under its proper title, *Pages from My Life* (New York, 1927), with ensuing litigation by Chaliapin against the USSR because of its previous Soviet publication. Finally, it was republished in Russian after the Gorky manuscript by the "Iskusstvo" publishing house in 1957 (with a further edition in 1960) in a two-volume Soviet anthology of Chaliapin's writings and recollections about him. As James Hanley quite properly acknowledges in his introduction, the present volume is based on the "Iskusstvo" edition. Thus the two American editors somewhat exaggerate by claiming as theirs "the fearsome task of research."

As translators at least, they have worked well, for their text reads smoothly and interestingly.

As editors they have necessarily presented less in a single volume than appears in the Soviet two-volume anthology. Yet in one instance their excerpting seems misleading, if not highly questionable. In the obituary of Gorky which Chaliapin published in a French newspaper in 1936, the singer tells how Gorky bore upon his body the marks of a hard and altruistic life, the bruises of the many beatings he

had undergone and the broken ribs he had suffered for defending a woman he once saw being beaten. Suddenly the obituary breaks off the account of Gorky and continues with a much longer discussion of Chaliapin's sense of Western music. Does this sudden change of subject corroborate the legend of Chaliapin's egotism? Was he incapable even in an obituary of writing about his friend without discoursing twice as long about himself? Rather the editors are at fault for having added with no identification an inexplicably truncated excerpt from "Mask and Soul" (Paris, 1932), another autobiographical work by Chaliapin. From the text of the obituary itself they have omitted Chaliapin's explicit disavowal of the two men's "early life together." True, Chaliapin describes their common experience in the full text of the Soviet anthology, from which we quoted initially. Did the editors suppress the passage so as not to detract from "togetherness"? On the contrary, it enhances the remarkable coincidence of the two lives.

When the dissimilarities begin, the translators have not faced moot questions like true scholars and critics. The only evaluation of Chaliapin's art occurs in an article by Stanislavsky, which is shortened from its greater length in the Soviet anthology. The impact of Chaliapin's communication of Russian music to the West, especially during Diaghilev's fabulous Paris seasons, is not assessed. Nor is Chaliapin's repertoire and achievement evaluated as a whole, though a partial list of his opera roles is given—a small percentage of the factual information included in the Soviet anthology. Even the illustrations of the American volume cannot for once compare with the greater wealth, especially of color reproductions, offered in the Soviet anthology. Finally, the question of Chaliapin's political commitment is never put. Yet his political role began to haunt him from the time of the "famous kneeling incident," which is referred to, though not fully explained, in the American introduction. The exchange of letters with Gorky relative to it is given out of order in the American translation, so that Gorky's curt request after the incident, "Do not come to see me," makes no sense until two letters later. Most serious of all, no judgment is ventured on the seeming opportunism with which Chaliapin returned to Russia after 1917, but then in 1922 remained in the West on tour without any clear decision apparently to emigrate.

In sum, once the translators found their research superseded by the publication of the Soviet anthology, they should have gone on to provide a truly critical introduction to their interesting collection. They have, however, produced, if not a scholarly, at least a popular anthology with more material on Chaliapin than has hitherto been available in English.

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THE RUSSIAN FOLK-TALE: SOME STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC ASPECTS. By *Maria-Gabriele Wosien*. Slavistische Beiträge, vol. 41. Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1969. 237 pp. Paper.

This is one of the least meritorious studies on the Russian folk tale published for years. Its emphasis is on tales that include the journey of the hero—his departure, obtaining a miraculous helper, the battle with an adversary, attainment of the goal, and his return. However, the discussion of various problems of the magic tale contains little that has not been revealed by V. Ia. Propp and other folklorists.

Wosien makes numerous vague, queer, or outright erroneous statements. For