Bunin, Ivan Alekseyevich (1870-1953)
--Bunin, Ivan Alekseyevich (1870-1953), Russian writer, the first Russian to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature (1933).

--He was born in Voronezh (300 miles south of Moscow) in an "ancient and noble family" and was educated at the University of Moscow. With the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the family's financial situation steadily deteriorated. Young Ivan witnessed the impoverishment of his family, and this experience later formed the background for many of his literary works.

--Ivan spent a happy childhood and youth with his parents. His father was a high-spirited man with a weakness for cards and drink. Unlike her husband, Bunin's mother was deeply religious and "inclined to tears and sadness." She cherished poetry, especially the works of Pushkin and Zhukovsky, and gave Bunin the first exposure to literature and poetry. Bunin's wife and biographer, Nina Muromtseva-Bunina (1881-1961), believed that the contrasting personalities of his parents caused Ivan at an early age to reveal dual tendencies in his own character. At times animated and happy, he would become at other moments inexplicably despondent.

--In 1874, the Bunin's decided that urban life was too expensive, and moved to their estate Butyrki located near Oryol, were Ivan was lonely and had to entertain himself. In these years developpe his powers of observation and imagination that would lead to Bunin's later success as a writer.

--His early education was placed in the hands of an eccentric nobleman who taught him reading using Odyssey. At the age of 8, Ivan was inspired by the tutor to write his first poem. He spent his free time with the peasant children in the neighborhood, and this early exposure to the language and ways of this group undoubtedly contributed to the remarkable portraits of peasant life found in his mature work.

--In 1881, the future writer entered gimnaziya in Yelets. On the whole, he was a poor student, especially in math, and in 1885 he announced to his parents that he would not return to school. Later, he expressed regret at his lack of structured education. He fell in love for the first at time at the age of 15. Although this relationship lasted only a short while, it was charged with poetic sentiment. Shortly after, one of his close relatives died. Both of these episodes and many others of Bunin's childhood are portrayed in "The Life of Arsenyev."

--Ivan's older brother was a radical political activist; he was arrested and sentenced to remain on their estate for three years under police supervision. Immediately, he volunteered to take charge of Ivan's education. The brothers concentrated on history, political science and literature, in which Ivan proved to be an excellent student. They also studied languages.

--During this period, Bunin wrote many poems and a few sketches, did translations of Schiller, Goethe and Byron.

Literary Debut
--Started traveling; worked as a journalist and clerk to supplement his income.
--Bunin published his first volume of poetry in 1891. He took a stand midway between the "aesthetes" and the civic writers, a position that he occupied for many years to come.

--He became an ardent admirer of Tolstoy, "passionately dreaming about a pure, healthy, 'good' life amidst nature," nurturing the "secret hope" that through this he would have the right to meet and become close to Tolstoy.

--In 1894 he met Leo Tolstoy in Moscow.

--In 1895 decided to start a full-time literary career, after which his financial position became very insecure.

--A major crisis in Bunin's life: After a long affair, his beloved woman, Varvara Pashchenko, left him. This turbulent affair became the basis for "Lika", the fifth book of "The Life of Arsenyev."
-- The older brother made him go to Moscow and St. Petersburg to meet prominent writers.
-- In his letter to Tolstoy in 1896, Bunin complained of his lack of formal education, his inability to maintain intimate friendships, and his fear of death. He wrestled with the problem of death for the rest of his life.

In 1921 he would write: "The constant consciousness or sensation of this horror has persecuted me almost since infancy; under this fateful mark I have lived my entire life."

-- In 1895 he met Anton Chekhov, Kuprin, Korolenko, Maxim Gorky, and Fyodor Shalyapin.
-- His first collection of short stories "Na krayu sveta/To the Edge of the World" appeared in 1897.
-- In 1898 moves to Odessa and marries Anna Tsakni. The marriage didn't work, and Bunin left his pregnant wife in 1900. In 1905 his only son Nikolay died.
-- In 1899, the bloody massacre of "Red Sunday"--political disorder swept Russia. The country became incomprehensible and frightening.
-- In 1900, traveled to Switzerland and Germany; in 1903 went to Constantinople. He studied the Koran and the Bible, which led to his remarkable spiritual and creative growth.
-- In 1903 he received the Pushkin Prize of the Russian Academy for his translations of Henry Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha.
-- In 1905, Meets Vera Nikolayevna Muromtseva and travels with her to Near East (Egypt, Syria, Palestine).
-- In 1909 was awarded the second Pushkin Prize for poetry and translations.
-- In 1915 published The Gentlemen from San Francisco and Complete Collected Works (6 volumes).

Bunin's literary reputation rests mainly on his realistic tales, short stories, and novels, in which his principal theme is the bleakness of life in Russian provinces. He was considerably influenced by the works of Russian writers Anton Chekhov and Ivan Turgenev.