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Editor's Note

You are owed yet another apology for the long delay between the last issue of *The Bulletin* and this first issue of 2014. But the more essays, notices, and reviews submitted, the less time between appearances of this publication. So, do think of sharing your work on Chekhov with other readers and do encourage your students, colleagues, and friends, who work on Chekhov, to submit their essays, reviews, or news for publication.

I would also welcome suggestions, if not help, in renovating and even remodeling the NACS web site. My computer maven, who, as a young lad, designed and launched the original web site, has graduated from university and business school and is now busy fashioning his career. I could, therefore, use the help of young, tech-savvy NACS volunteers in developing a more interesting and dynamic site. Suggestions for the site as well as submissions for *The Bulletin* should be sent to [ralph.lindheim@utoronto.ca](mailto:ralph.lindheim@utoronto.ca) or mailed to Ralph Lindheim / Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures / University of Toronto. 121 St. Joseph St. / Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J4 / Canada.

This issue offers two essays. The first essay, written for the Summer 2004 issue of the *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, focuses on Chekhov's handling of the "trope" of the provinces inherited from his literary predecessors. Both the essay's author, Anne Lounsbery, and the editor of *TSQ*, Zakhar Davydov, have graciously agreed to its reprinting. The second essay on the reception of Chekhov in Brazil was written by Rodrigo Alves do Nascimento and offers fascinating glimpses into the tangled history of the responses to and popularity of Chekhov in this vast country whose influence and power continue to grow.

The issue ends with both the usual biennial installment of a select bibliography of recent books and articles on and about Chekhov, and a somewhat unusual but intriguing announcement from the Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute of competitions for "linguistic, cultural and film studies projects" centered on Chekhov's life and works.

**“To Moscow, I Beg You!”:  
Chekhov’s Vision of the Russian Provinces  
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In *Three Sisters*, Chekhov’s characters invoke “Moscow” over and over (and over) again. Lovingly, obsessively, urgently, dreamily they repeat the name of the Russian capital, which ends up sounding like a talisman intended, it seems, to stave off the truth about their provincial lives. Very often the city’s name is in the accusative case, suggesting movement toward something, movement that in this play is never initiated. Olga cries, “Yes! Quickly to Moscow!” and Irina concurs, “Go away to Moscow. Sell the house, finish with everything here and—to Moscow ...”<sup>1</sup> The last lines of Act II (spoken by Irina) are “To Moscow! To Moscow! To Moscow!”<sup>2</sup> The last lines of Act III (also spoken by Irina) are, “Only to go to Moscow! I beg you, let us go! There’s nothing on earth better than Moscow! Let us go, Olia! Let us go!”<sup>3</sup> And as these characters long for the capital they bemoan the meagerness of their provincial life, a life that they see as being “without poetry, without meaning.”<sup>4</sup>

But what do the words *Moscow* and *provincial* actually mean in this context? Do these terms have anything to do with real places, or not? Of course we know that Moscow is “symbolic” in *Three Sisters*, that it stands in some way for a rich, meaningful, dreamt-of life that is beyond the characters’ reach. I am interested, however, in how the play’s symbolism relates to larger patterns that structure how relationships between province

and capital, periphery and center, are represented in Russian culture, specifically in nineteenth-century literature. Thus this paper concerns the *idea* of the provinces and provincialism and how this idea is developed and played out in literary texts. Eventually the argument I articulate here will form part of a larger study examining Russian literature's symbolic construction of the provinces and provincialism. My focus is less on the realities of provincial life than on the symbolic weight that the provinces were made to bear in Russian literature and culture from approximately 1830 to 1917.

Russian letters' awareness (or invention) of a "provincial problem" dates back to the eighteenth century (in, for example, the writings of Andrei Bolotov<sup>5</sup>), but it was the work of Nikolai Gogol' that transformed the provincial backwater into one of Russian literature's governing tropes. As a result, an overview of what the provinces mean in Gogol''s oeuvre can help illuminate the symbolic constructs that Chekhov was to inherit. In *Dead Souls* Gogol' gives us the Town of N as a "place without qualities," a town that is above all exactly the same as all other provincial towns.<sup>6</sup> *Dead Souls* repeatedly suggests that any provincial city can stand in for any other; in fact, almost no trait is attributed to N that is not also attributed to "all provincial cities."<sup>7</sup> Such uniformity suggests that any provincial place, even an unfamiliar one, is in effect always already known, since the provincial admits of no real variation, no individuality, no change. And indeed, as the trope of the miserable provincial town evolved over the course of the nineteenth century, this emphasis on the monotonous interchangeability of provincial places remained a constant.<sup>8</sup>

Gogol''s Town of N is defined by what it lacks, and in this it reflects a view of the Russian provinces that predates *Dead Souls*. Russian scholars

have argued that the tendency to define provincial places in terms of what they are *not* originated in the eighteenth century, which is when the noun *provintsiia* lost its concrete administrative meaning and came to refer simply to the not-capital, to things outside of Petersburg and Moscow. Eventually the designation *guberniia* (the term adopted under Catherine) began to carry the same connotations, with the result that the adjectives *provintsial'nyi* and *gubernskii* finally came to serve less as geographic designations than as qualitative judgments.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, while highly particularized descriptions of both capitals are common in Russian literature, “the provinces”—and particularly the provincial city—have often been represented simply as places that lack what the capitals have. All this reflects what I see as a tendency to collapse the peculiarities of European Russia’s huge array of local subcultures into the label “the provinces.”<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted, however, that “the provinces” are not everything outside of Petersburg and Moscow, because this term does not refer to rural life per se. Rural life is the village (*derevnia*, *derevenskii*), whereas “provincial” typically describes not peasant villages, but rather cities, towns and (sometimes) estates. Thus peasants are not provincials, and peasant culture is not provincial culture. Indeed, peasants are associated with a folk “authenticity,” and as I argue elsewhere, it is precisely authenticity to which the provincial sphere has no legitimate claim.<sup>11</sup> Landowners’ country estates, regardless of their location, occupy a liminal position: they can be deeply provincial (like those in *Dead Souls*) or not provincial at all (like the Sheremetevs’ huge lavish estate, complete with its own opera company).<sup>12</sup> According to one nineteenth-century ideal, the nobleman’s estate partook of the authenticity of village life even while providing the gentry with a space for cultural freedom and creativity, sheltered from officialdom and state

interference.<sup>13</sup> Not everyone, however, subscribed to this ideal, which was in any case far from universally attainable. Indeed, nineteenth-century literature represents many estates as markedly provincial places that occupy the same symbolic space as the adjacent provincial towns. In *Dead Souls*, for example, gentry estate and provincial town are equally “provincial,” and are symbolically opposed not to each other but to the capital.<sup>14</sup>

Gogol’s provincials dream of the capital because the capital has power to confer *significance*. In *The Inspector General*, petty malefactors in an anonymous provincial city may fear the accusatory and unmasking gaze of Petersburg, but they long for it as well—because, it seems, their manifestly insignificant lives promise to take on meaning when subjected to the capital’s ordering Logos. One character sums up the provincial view of the capital’s signifying power when he begs Khlestakov to inform Petersburg that *he exists*: “in Petersburg tell all the various bigwigs ... that in such-and-such a town there lives Pëtr Ivanovich Bobchinskii” (note that the provincial place—”such-and-such a town”—goes unnamed even by its own inhabitants).<sup>15</sup> In *The Inspector General* the capital looks (occasionally, and unpredictably) at the provinces in order to inspect, indict and control; the provinces look back in order to imitate, and to formulate alibis as needed.

In *The Inspector General* as in *Dead Souls*, what goes on in the provinces has the potential to evade both the penetrating eye and the ordering force of the capital, for a time at least. As a result, things in the provinces tend to teeter on the edge of chaos: witness, for example, the social disorder and collective delusion that grip the Town of N at end of *Dead Souls*, the hysteria among provincial officials attempting to out-bribe each other in *The Inspector General*, and indeed the memorably random quality of much that characters do and say in both these works. Of course, in

Gogol's fictional world, randomness and unintelligibility are in no way confined to the provinces (there is plenty of both in "The Nose" and "The Overcoat"), but the provinces seem to provide them with an especially congenial environment. Or perhaps more accurately, in the provinces such randomness and unintelligibility can be readily labeled "provincial," despite the fact that the same conditions may very well hold sway in the far-off capitals as well.

After Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Khvoshchinskaia, Leskov, Turgenev and Dostoevskii (and later, Sologub and Dobychin) all imagine nameless towns that are said to resemble myriad other such towns, each embodying the often horrific pettiness of provincial life.<sup>16</sup> In representing the provinces as a kind of permanent void, they again follow Gogol, whose working notes to *Dead Souls* conjure up the Town of N as a place embodying what he terms "the highest degree of Emptiness."<sup>17</sup> Here, I think, Mikhail Epstein's characterization of what it means to be provincial is useful. Epstein argues that "a province is located, as it were, not in itself; it is alien not in regards to someone or something else, but to itself, inasmuch as its own center has been taken out of itself and transferred to some other space or time." As a result, Epstein writes, "alienation from itself" is a "structural characteristic of the provinces." This is why provincials are forever yearning for something that is somewhere else, "not here, not at this place, but [over] 'there'"<sup>18</sup>: indeed, this is the yearning that we hear in Irina's desperate exhortation, "Only to go to Moscow!"

By the later nineteenth century, this trope of the wretched and anonymous provincial place had already been well developed by the writers I have mentioned (among others), and Chekhov was to become one of their

main inheritors. Here I want to address how Chekhov's artistic world represents the opposition between capital and province. To that end, I will focus mainly on four texts—the play *Three Sisters* and the stories “On Official Business,” “My Life (A Provincial Story),” and “Ward No. Six”—with some attention to Chekhov's other works as well (especially the other plays). While no short list of texts can perfectly represent the province/capital relationship that obtains throughout Chekhov's oeuvre, in these particular works the idea of provincialism plays a crucial role; as a result, taken together these texts cast light on what province and capital mean in Chekhov's work generally. My larger project, as I note above, investigates the trope of the provinces in Russian literature—how this trope developed, and indeed how it insinuated itself even into the work of writers who, like Chekhov himself, did not necessarily subscribe to its often rather reductive and distorted view of provincial life. Thus my reading of Chekhov aims to illuminate both the role played by the trope of the provinces in Chekhov's writing and the role played by Chekhov's writing in the trope of the provinces.

Indeed, Chekhov was among the writers most engaged with the realities of provincial life. Unlike Gogol—who, as S. A. Vengerov charged in the early twentieth century, “knew nothing of real Russian [provincial] life”<sup>19</sup>—Chekhov was not only born in the provinces but maintained close ties there, traveling throughout Russia and involving himself in various provincial institutions. Furthermore, he wrote famously sensitive descriptions of the Ukrainian and Siberian landscapes, and in the course of his overland voyage to Sakhalin Island he noted the very real differences among various Russian towns along the way. Thus there is much in Chekhov's writing to belie the claim that specificities of place meant nothing

to him, or that he subscribed to a view that collapsed all regional differences into the category of “the provincial.”

And yet, Chekhov was also capable of making statements like the following, which is drawn from a letter he wrote in 1890: “In Russia all towns are the same. Ekaterinburg is exactly like Perm’ or Tula, or like Sumy and Gadiach.”<sup>20</sup> While this declaration is clearly not meant to be taken literally, it nonetheless suggests that when he wants to, Chekhov has no problem assimilating specific provincial cities to the idea of “the Russian town,” a place virtually indistinguishable from all other Russian towns. Indeed, as my readings below indicate, in the imagined geography of Chekhov’s fiction (not his non-fiction), most often (though not always), the provinces are a place where “Ekaterinburg is exactly like Perm’ or Tula, or like Sumy and Gadiach.”<sup>21</sup>

Thus we might begin an analysis of *Three Sisters* with a very basic question—where exactly does the action take place? Chekhov’s stage directions state only that that the play is set “in a provincial town” (*v gubernskom gorode*); in one of his letters Chekhov elaborates on this very slightly by describing the setting as “a provincial town, like Perm’.”<sup>22</sup> But as the sisters’ endless invocations of the capital city suggest, the setting might best be described simply as *not*-Moscow. Beyond that, it is hard to say—and it is probably not very important to say, either. Nothing suggests that in the world of this play the differences between one provincial town and another provincial town are particularly significant. “In Russia”—or at least in *Three Sisters*—“all towns are the same”: Chekhov has taken as his setting a version of the anonymous, could-be-anywhere provincial city, a setting made available to him by a whole series of literary predecessors.

In the characters' descriptions of their city we hear the same emphasis on stasis, sameness, repetition and indistinguishability that we hear in Gogol's description of N. In *Three Sisters* Andrei evokes his provincial town with a long series of negative constructions: "Our town has been in existence for two hundred years, there are 100,000 inhabitants in it, and there is not a single one who does not resemble all the others, not one hero [*podvizhnik*] either in the past or in the present, not one scholar, not one artist, not one person in the least bit remarkable." There is nothing to indicate that this town is distinguishable from any other, and nothing to indicate that this will ever change: all the town's inhabitants inevitably become "the same pathetic, identical corpses as their fathers and mothers".<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the town's other denizens, the Prozorov sisters have been elaborately educated. But Masha declares that in a place so "backward and vulgar," "knowing three languages is a useless luxury. Not even a luxury, but some sort of useless appendage, like a sixth finger."<sup>24</sup> This grotesque image of a useless physical appendage with no reason to exist suggests the purposelessness of life in this town, a town that is itself superfluous since it is merely one in a series of indistinguishable N's. Thus life here seems to have no discernible meaning; it is, one might say, illegible. One character tells us, for example, that "the railway station is twenty versts away [from the town], and no one knows why." Another character offers the following absurd reason for this geographical peculiarity: "because if the station were near, then it wouldn't be far, and if it's far, then that means it's not near."<sup>25</sup>

The only thing explained by this brazenly absurd non-explanation is the following: not only is the provincial town of *Three Sisters* not Moscow, and not only is it not connected to Moscow or to anyplace else, but also there is no reason for any of this. Similar moments of unintelligibility recur

in the play. One character's incoherent French phrases, another's non sequitur literary citations, their desultory efforts at fortune-telling in an effort to predict whether they will ever get to go to the capital—all leave us with the impression that it is going to be very hard to extract any meaning from life in this place. This impression is reinforced by the frequently random quality of exchanges between characters: as Andrei dreams aloud of sitting in a Moscow restaurant, the addled old servant Ferapont replies, “And a workman was telling how in Moscow some sort of merchants was eating bliny, and the one that ate forty bliny, looks like he died. Forty or fifty, I can't remember.”<sup>26</sup> A moment later Ferapont continues, just as inexplicably, “and you know, that same workman, he was saying how they got a rope stretched all the way across Moscow ...”<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, when Irina complains that her work in the telegraph office is “without poetry, without meaning,” this is an indictment of their lives overall: everything here is “without meaning.”<sup>28</sup> In another scene she cries in despair, “My God! I've forgotten everything, everything ... everything is all muddled up in my head. I can't remember how to say window or ceiling in Italian ... I'm forgetting everything, every day I'm forgetting ... *and we will never go to Moscow.*”<sup>29</sup> Here we see that in *Three Sisters* as in *The Inspector General*, what the capital has the power to confer is coherence, meaningfulness. Being in Moscow, going to Moscow, or at the very least believing that one might one day go to Moscow are the only things that can stave off the pointlessness of this life, a life that is threatening to slip into pure randomness, pure *sluchainost'*.

Are we then to imagine that these characters' lives would become rich and significant, would take on luminous meaning, if they were actually to find themselves in Moscow? Of course not, because “Moscow” as the sisters

imagine it does not exist. But this does not change the meaning of the provinces in *Three Sisters*: as in *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector General*, even if the far-off, longed-for capital cannot possibly be what provincials believe it to be, it is nonetheless the ever-elusive signifying ideal that serves to reveal—or perhaps to enforce—the insignificance of provincial lives. Similarly, in *Uncle Vania*, we listen to Serebriakov’s litany of complaints about the “sepulcher” of provincial life (“trivial conversations . . . like being in exile . . . as though I’ve fallen off the earth and landed on some alien planet”<sup>30</sup>) in full awareness of the fact that he made nothing of his years in the capital; again, the capital itself offers no solution. And yet it was the idea of Serebriakov’s being in Moscow that had once given meaning to those laboring and sacrificing for him back on the provincial estate: “I worshiped that professor . . . I worked like a dog for him! . . . I was proud of him, proud of his learning, it was like the breath of life to me,” says the disillusioned Voinitskii.<sup>31</sup> “The capital” as an idea represents a promise, even if a vague and distant one, of the kind of significance and purpose otherwise absent from desultory provincial lives.

A similar point is made very explicitly in Chekhov’s 1899 story “On Official Business.” In this narrative one Lyzhin, a young government official originally from Moscow but assigned to work in the provinces, arrives in a village to investigate the unexpected and unexplained suicide of another official. Forced to spend much of the night alone in a hut with the suicide’s corpse, a blizzard raging outside, the young man reflects on how “our homeland, the real Russia, is Moscow and Petersburg, while here is just the provinces, the colonies.”<sup>32</sup> “How remote,” he thinks, “was all this from the life he had wanted for himself, how alien was all this to him, how trivial, uninteresting.”<sup>33</sup>

Most importantly, this character believes that what makes everything around him so trivial is precisely its remoteness from the center, from Moscow. Lyzhin muses, “If this person had killed himself in Moscow or someplace near Moscow ... then it would have been interesting, important ...; but here, a thousand versts from Moscow, all this was somehow seen in a different light, all this was not life, not people ... it would leave not the least trace in the memory and would be forgotten as soon as he, Lyzhin, left [the village].”<sup>34</sup>

What’s wrong with the provinces, in Lyzhin’s estimation here as in Irina’s in *Three Sisters*, is that things here do not mean anything. Lyzhin keeps returning to the thought that “here there is no life, but rather bits of life, fragments; everything here is accidental [*sluchaino*], there can be no conclusion drawn from it.” For him what is most painful about his situation is not the awful suicide, the intractable poverty, the dirty hut, the snowstorm, but rather the fact that this provincial place has no power to confer significance on any of it. He laments being stranded “in a backwater, in the provinces” precisely because it is “far from the cultural center ... *where nothing is accidental*, where everything is in accordance with reason and law and where, for example, every suicide is comprehensible and one can explain why it is and what significance it has in the general scheme of things.”<sup>35</sup> In this passage we see laid out very clearly the idea that only the center has the power to confer order on the phenomena of life, to render them legible. Everything that falls within range of the capitals’ ordering Logos (including even an unexplained suicide) will be significant, while everything else will slip into chaos or insignificance.

When I say that this story tells us something about how the province/capital opposition works in Chekhov’s world overall, I do not mean

to say that Lyzhin is Chekhov's mouthpiece—far from it. Chekhov has Lyzhin himself realize (if briefly and confusedly, literally in a dream) how wrong he was to think that real life does not exist outside the capitals, how wrong he was to tell himself, “all this isn't life, it isn't people ... to live, you have to be in Moscow.”<sup>36</sup> In a half-awake state at the end of the story, Lyzhin embraces the thought that “some tie, unseen but meaningful and essential, exists ... between all people.” And again he connects this possibility of meaningfulness to the idea of place: “even in the most desolate desert, nothing is accidental, everything is full of one common idea.”<sup>37</sup>

But the belief that Lyzhin seems here to renounce—i.e., the conviction that all significance and coherence are located in the center, and thus that a meaningful life can be found only in the capitals—this seemingly discredited idea is nonetheless what structures the symbolism of place in many of Chekhov's texts. Even when debunked, this organizing principle returns to haunt Chekhov's symbolic geography. For example, in the novella “My Life (A Provincial's Story)” (1896), the title itself—“A Provincial's Story”—invites us to connect the failure and incoherence of the narrator's life to the place where he lives. Here as in *Three Sisters*, the railroad station is several miles away from the town (this time as the result of the townspeople's ill-considered failure to pay the appropriate bribe), thereby underscoring the town's seemingly irremediable isolation. And the provincial town is described in exactly the same terms as is the town in *Three Sisters*—sameness, repetition, stupidity, incoherence. Needlessly grim material conditions like bad food and dirty water point to the inhabitants' moral failings: endemic corruption, “coldness and narrowness of opinions”—“how these people lived, it was shameful to say!”<sup>38</sup> The story concludes with this indictment: “Our town has existed for hundreds of years,

and in all that time it has produced not one ... useful person.” Were this “useless” place to disappear suddenly from the face of the earth, the narrator declares, not one soul would lament its passing.<sup>39</sup> Here the narrator’s insistence on his town’s pointlessness suggests that it would be difficult for him to concur with the hopeful insight granted to Lyzhin towards the end of the story “On Official Business,” that is, the belief that “even in the most desolate desert, nothing is accidental, everything is full of one common idea.”

Once again in “A Provincial’s Story,” the problem with the town lies not only its many predictable vices but also, and more importantly, in the unintelligibility of life here, its lack of discernible meaning. Over and over the narrator reflects on his town’s incomprehensibility, declaring himself unable to understand what this place is and why it is that way: “I couldn’t understand why and how these 65,000 people were living ... What our town was and what it was doing, I did not know.”<sup>40</sup> Over and over he asks questions like, “why is [life here] so boring, so undistinguished, why in not one of these houses ... are there people from whom I might learn how to live in such a way as not to be culpable?”<sup>41</sup> There is, it seems, no answer: “I couldn’t understand,” he repeats, “how these 60,000 inhabitants were living.”<sup>42</sup>

The only answer is to get out of town, which is what the narrator’s intelligent and sensitive wife does when she finally abandons him. Her husband does not blame her for this, and the text as a whole does not seem to invite us to blame her, either. When it comes to extracting oneself from the provincial mire, perhaps it’s *sauve-qui-peut*. As in Chekhov’s story “The Fiancée,” in which a young woman quite justifiably ruins her family’s life and saves her own by fleeing yet another wretched Town of N, those who

are worthy have the right to do whatever they need to do in order to escape. And it turns out that for the wife in “A Provincial’s Story” as for the heroine of “The Fiancee” (both of whom end up happily educating themselves in Petersburg), leaving the provinces for the capital really does open the way to a better life. By contrast, in a story like “At Home” (1897), an equally spirited and intelligent young woman who is unable to flee will gradually learn to live within the disfiguring limitations of her provincial environment. This is not to say, of course, that making it to the capital is any guarantee of a meaningful life (witness the main character in “Lady with a Little Dog,” who has constructed for himself a perfectly empty life in Moscow), but staying in the provinces is probably a guarantee of stagnation and pointlessness.

This raises an important question about Chekhov’s famous story “Ward No. Six”: is the hideous life described in this text—a life of confinement, cruelty, cultural deformation—specific to the provinces? Are things so bad here actually *because* they are in the provinces, in yet another “dirty, wretched little town” located (once again) “two hundred versts from a railway station”?<sup>43</sup> Or is this geographic peculiarity finally incidental to the misery the story depicts? The answer is important if we wish to understand something about how “the provinces” function in Chekhov—do the provinces stand for the provinces, or do they stand for something else? In Gogol’, for example, I would argue that ultimately the provinces do not really stand for the provinces, since Gogol’’s symbolic geography does not allow us to imagine that a better life might be found in some other real place, whether in Petersburg or Moscow or Paris or wherever. Thus in the end it seems that place does not matter very much in the Russian world that Gogol’

imagines (his Ukrainian world may be another matter). Can we say something similar about Chekhov, or not?

The town that provides the setting of “Ward No. Six” is condemned for all the familiar and fairly general vices we have heard in other indictments of Russian provincial life—its “stifling” character, its society “without any higher interests” leading a “dull, senseless life,” et cetera.<sup>44</sup> But here these indictments take on particular power because the narrative’s structure leads us into a closed space and then immures us there with the rest of the characters. The opening paragraphs require the reader to follow the narrator (“if you are not afraid of being stung by the nettles, walk down the narrow footpath ...”) past heaps of moldering trash and a fence topped with upturned nails into the prison-like hospital yard, and finally into a stinking room dominated by more images of decay, “disfigurement,” and captivity.<sup>45</sup> Thus “Ward No. Six” opens with profoundly disturbing images of enclosure and confinement, images that manage to condense all the horror of provincial stasis, isolation, powerlessness, and injustice into one tiny space.

In “Ward No. Six” as in “On Official Business,” “A Provincial’s Story” and *Three Sisters*, the setting is explicitly “provincial” but beyond that it is unspecified.<sup>46</sup> It is another anonymous Town of N, and in interpretations of “Ward No. Six” this lack of geographic specificity is part of what has allowed the town and the hospital to be seen as stand-ins for all of Russia, for the suffering and injustice that were thought to grip the whole country in the late imperial period. As Nikolai Leskov said, ““Ward No. Six’ is everywhere ... This is Russia.”<sup>47</sup> The characters’ tendency to philosophize and thereby generalize the significance of their own sufferings has probably encouraged this reading as well.

Thus we might read these local details as symbolic of something “bigger” than a description of the provinces—“all of Russia,” perhaps, or even “the human condition.” But in “Ward No. Six” this interpretation (i.e., “provincial horror = everywhere”: an interpretation that I see as quite valid in readings of Gogol’) raises a problem. If we read Chekhov’s story in this way, we are aligning ourselves with the story’s most morally corrupt character, that is, with the doctor Andrei Efimovich Ragin, who justifies his passivity in face of the suffering all around him by recourse to “bigger” thoughts. Ragin tells himself that nothing matters, that there is ultimately “no difference between the best Viennese clinic and my hospital,” simply because in the end death will win out all the same.<sup>48</sup> The doctor knows that there has recently transpired a genuine revolution in medicine (Pasteur, Koch), that there are ways of saving people and alleviating suffering; he even acknowledges to himself that “such an abomination as Ward No. Six is possible only two hundred versts from a railroad station” in a town run by “half-literate petty merchants.” “Anywhere else,” he thinks, “the public and the newspapers would long ago have torn to pieces this little Bastille.”<sup>49</sup> But he convinces himself that none of this matters, just as he tries to convince one of his incarcerated patients that there is no real difference between his (the patient’s) life and that of a philosopher in ancient Greece (the patient begs to differ).<sup>50</sup>

All this, it seems to me, invites us to see the grotesque existence depicted in “Ward No. Six” as quite specific to this provincial place, to see it not as a manifestation of the “human condition” but as a phenomenon that is indeed “possible only two hundred versts from a railroad station.” As Ragin himself says, “in our town it’s agonizingly boring ... there are no new people ... but judging by everything [that we hear], in our capitals there’s no

intellectual stagnation, there's movement—which means there must be real people there.”<sup>51</sup> Maybe, then, the ills described in “Ward No. Six” are specific to this provincial place—or rather, maybe these ills are specific to the provincialism of this place, this city that could be any provincial city. The individuating details of life in this one town may not matter, but the fact that this town is not the capital matters very much indeed. “In our capitals,” as Ragin muses, there do indeed exist “real people.”

If this reading is correct, it points to a crucial difference between what “the provinces” stand for in Chekhov and what they stand for in Gogol’. As I argue elsewhere, Gogol’s texts draw on the symbolic opposition between provinces and capital, but they do not necessarily endorse the idea that there is truly an essential difference between the two; indeed, in the end Gogol’s provinces are no more “provincial” than the capitals.<sup>52</sup> *Dead Souls*, for example, at times implies and at times states explicitly that there is *no* essential difference between province and capital, no matter how much the characters and even the narrator may find themselves trapped within this idea. And in *The Inspector General*, every “Petersburg” attribute is simply invented by the provincial townspeople and projected onto Khlestakov, with the result that the quality of *stolichnost*’—“capital-ness”—appears as a sort of floating signifier that might well attach itself to anyone or anything. Once his provincial hosts have “taken him for” a Petersburg official, Khlestakov regales them with made-up stories of how he was once “taken for” the commander-in-chief, and the provincials are duly impressed: in this world, being “taken for” something is as good as the thing itself.<sup>53</sup> A text that creates such a world is unlikely to hold out hope that the capital will in reality turn out to be all that different from the provinces. But in Chekhov, by contrast, it seems that the curse of provincialism is in significant part the

result of real-world geography. In the “dirty, wretched little town” of “Ward No. 6,” with its “senseless life enlivened only by violence, coarse dissipation, and hypocrisy,” abuses are allowed to persist only and precisely because they take place in the provinces.<sup>54</sup>

“Ward No. 6” would seem to be the last, grim word on what province and provincialism stand for in Chekhov. And yet, in closing, I would like to complicate this conclusion, at least to some degree, with reference to *The Cherry Orchard*. *The Cherry Orchard*, too, is concerned with ignorance, injustice and stagnation, with what one character calls the “filth, vulgarity and asiaticism” that hold sway in a provincial place.<sup>55</sup> And yet in this play, the opposition province *versus* capital does not really figure. Instead, the opposition at work (implicitly) is Russia *versus* Europe. Characters arrive not from the Russian capitals but from abroad (from Paris, the distilled essence of “Europe”); they talk of traveling back and forth not to Moscow and Petersburg but to Yaroslavl and Kharkov; “Moscow” is mentioned only in passing, in the same breath as Kiev as a “holy place” symbolically opposed to Paris/Europe. Accordingly, “provincialism” appears to function somewhat differently in *The Cherry Orchard* than it does in the other texts I have cited.

The setting of *Three Sisters*, for example, is represented as irremediably and almost ahistorically provincial. But it seems that in *The Cherry Orchard*, we witness a place in the (historical) process of being provincialized, in the process of having “its own center ... taken out of itself and transferred to some other space or time,” to quote once again Epstein’s description of the phenomenon of provincialism. In *The Cherry Orchard* Chekhov’s characters voice their memories of a time when the orchard was in effect its own center: one notes that the orchard is mentioned in the

*Encyclopedia*, another recalls how they used to send cartloads of dried cherries off to Kharkov and Moscow, and another declares, “if there’s one thing in this whole province that’s interesting, even remarkable, it’s our cherry orchard.”<sup>56</sup> Indeed, when this character declares that “without the orchard [she] cannot understand [her] own life,” the cherry orchard is made to occupy the same position that “Moscow” occupies in *Three Sisters*—touchstone, organizing principle, bearer of meaning.<sup>57</sup> What all the characters are recalling is a time before their own place had been provincialized by its new proximity to something else, something more important. As the merchant Lopakhin understands, the orchard is no longer its own place, but rather a place that is close (enough) to another, more central place—it is now simply land that is “only twenty versts from town,” with “the railroad close by.”<sup>58</sup> Once it has been provincialized in this way, the country estate can be definitively transformed into real estate, easily divisible into plots for summer cottages.

What becomes clear in this play is that provincialism depends as much on proximity as it does on distance. This underscores the importance of Chekhov’s notes describing what we see on the set of *The Cherry Orchard*: in addition to the dilapidated garden, the orchard, and the road leading to the manor house, there is “a row of telegraph poles” and in the distance the outline of “a large town.”<sup>59</sup> As these notes suggest, *The Cherry Orchard*, along with *Three Sisters*, is the play in which Chekhov most explicitly thematizes railroad lines and telegraph poles; and not coincidentally, these are the plays which are most clearly marked by a clear opposition between periphery and center.<sup>60</sup> In these plays as in many of Chekhov’s other works with provincial settings (“A Provincial’s Story,” “At Home,” “In the Ravine,” and “Murder,” to take only a few of many possible

examples), railroad tracks, railroad stations and telegraph poles figure prominently; indeed, these technologies of travel and communication are frequently incorporated into the plot (witness Irina's job as a telegraph operator in *Three Sisters*). Most often the lines of tracks and wires stretching off into a vague distance seem to indicate not any genuine link between a provincial place and anyplace else, but rather an unbridgeable gap (geographic and symbolic) between the periphery and a "center" that is forever out there, "somewhere," far far away.

This points to the fact that a place can come to experience itself as "provincial" only after it is made acutely aware of some other, central place, and of its own distance from that central place and thus from everything that counts as significant (which is precisely what was accomplished by technologies like the railroad over the course of the nineteenth century).<sup>61</sup> In *The Cherry Orchard* we witness a formerly remote place being brought just close enough to a "center" that it will be made constantly aware of its fundamental distance from and dependence on that center. Thus while the setting of *The Cherry Orchard* shares certain traits with Chekhov's other provincial settings (most notably "filth, vulgarity and asiaticism"), in this play there is not perhaps the same sense of immutability and stasis that prevails in texts like "Ward No. Six," since to some degree at least we are watching a place that is changing.

In a sense, of course, the newly provincialized place is not unlike Russia itself, and the play invites us to make the obvious comparison: "all Russia is our orchard," one character declares.<sup>62</sup> As characters speak of coming and going to Paris, the least sophisticated among them having learned to bemoan Russia's "barbarism" and "ignorance," all of Russia is made to resemble a little town on the steppe that becomes definitively

provincial once the railroad and the telegraph arrive.<sup>63</sup> The more closely Russia is brought into contact with Europe, the more acutely it experiences its own provinciality. This relates to the working hypothesis I have developed while reading some of the many nineteenth-century Russian texts that treat the “problem” of provinciality: maybe we can best account for Russian literature’s preoccupation with (and <sup>64</sup>demonization of) the provinces by considering Russian culture’s constant, anxious awareness of a European “center,” a center that threatens to relegate all of Russia—capitals included—to the realm of the provincial.

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<sup>1</sup> A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v 30-i tomakh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 13: 120. All citations are from this edition; translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Chekhov, 14: 156.

<sup>3</sup> Chekhov, 13: 171.

<sup>4</sup> Chekhov, 13: 144.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Newlin, *The Voice in the Garden: Andrei Bolotov and the Anxieties of Russian Pastoral, 1738-1833* (Evanston: Northwestern U.P., 2001).

<sup>6</sup> The same cannot be said for the places represented in Gogol’s early Ukrainian tales, which have more specific identities. For more on Gogol’s views of Ukrainian vs. Russian identity, see Edyta Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol’: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 2007).

<sup>7</sup> In reality these towns often did look the same, as the result of urban planning practices that had been in effect since the eighteenth century. Indeed, under Catherine every town center was required—in theory, of course—to contain the same combination of public buildings. See Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850-1900* (Berkeley: U. of Calif. Press, 1990), 15, 10. See also Evgenia Kirichenko and Elena Shcheboleva, *The Russian Province* (Moscow: Nash dom, 1997), 28, 30-31, 62. This English translation of Kirichenko and Shcheboleva’s work was published as an appendix to their Russian text, *Russkaia provintsia* (Moscow: Nash dom, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> A passage from *Fathers and Sons* sums it up: the provincial pseudo-intellectual Kukshina asks, “It’s an unbearable town, isn’t it?” and her cool interlocutor Bazarov replies, “It’s a town like any other.” I. S. Turgenev, *Sochinenia v 15-i tomakh* (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1964), VIII: 260-261.

<sup>9</sup> Kirichenko and Shcheboleva, , 5, 25.

<sup>10</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to the schematic picture I have just drawn. Indeed, a number of factors serve to complicate the stark province/capital dualism I describe: borderland regions (the Caucasus, Crimea and Baltics), “semi-Russian” places (Ukraine, the Asian steppes), the image of Moscow as both provincial (compared to Petersburg) and authentically Russian, and a few writers who might truly be described as regionalists within Russia itself (Mel’nikov-Pecherskii). Nonetheless, this dualism (capital *versus* province) prevails in many representations of European Russia’s symbolic geography. Furthermore, given European Russia’s huge size and cultural and linguistic variety, regionalism has played a strikingly insignificant role in the literary tradition.

<sup>11</sup> See my article “‘No, this is not the provinces!’: Provincialism, Authenticity and Russianness in *Dead Souls*,” *Russian Review* 64 (April 2005), 259-80.

<sup>12</sup> See Kirichenko and Shcheboleva, 38.

<sup>13</sup> See Patricia Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate* (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1995), esp. ch. 11, “Ideal Worlds: The Idyll of the Russian Intelligentsia.”

<sup>14</sup> Other classic examples of culturally provincial estates include those in Turgenev’s “Hamlet of the Shchigrov District,” Pushkin’s *Captain’s Daughter* and Dostoevskii’s *Village of Stepanchikovo*.

<sup>15</sup> N. V. Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1952), 4: 67 (act IV, scene vii).

<sup>16</sup> While many of Russian literature's anonymous provincial places are labeled *gorod N* (for example in Khvoshchinskaia and Dobychin), in Russian the letter N functions as a placeholder much as X does today in English—"brand X," "city X," et cetera. This usage originated in the eighteenth century, with the N standing for the Latin noun *nomen*. Therefore the formula *gorod N* does not automatically call up associations with *Dead Souls*, although a work of fiction describing a miserable provincial town labeled N is very likely to do so.

<sup>17</sup> The full quote is as follows: "The idea of the city. The highest degree of Emptiness. Empty talk. ... The reader must be struck ... by the dead insensibility of life" in the provincial town. Gogol', *PSS*, 6: 692.

<sup>18</sup> Mikhail Epstein, "Provintsiia," *Bog detalei: Narodnaia dusha i chastnaia zhizn' v Rossii na iskhode imperii* (Moscow: Izdanie R. Elinina, 1998), 24, 29-30.

<sup>19</sup> S. A. Vengerov, "Gogol' sovershenno ne znal real'noi russkoi zhizni," *Sobranie sochinenii*, II, *Pisatel'-grazhdanin*. Vengerov claims that the writer of *Dead Souls* (a text so often taken by nineteenth-century readers as an exposé of hard Russian realities) spent less than two weeks of his life in the Russian countryside, and that most of that time was spent inside a moving carriage. While Vengerov's literalism is perhaps misguided (since the amount of time Gogol' spent in the Russian countryside matters very little to the artistic truth of *Dead Souls*), his criticism does speak to the unreal quality of the Russian provinces as Gogol' represents them.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of April 29, 1890, from Chekhov to his sister Mariia.

<sup>21</sup> As this quote suggests, the category of "the Russian town" is capable of encompassing Ukrainian cities as well, since both Sumy and Gadiach are in Ukraine: for Chekhov as for many other nineteenth-century Russians, it was quite possible to figure Ukraine either as a benignly exotic Other or as a version of Ur-Russia, the epitome of Slavicness.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Emma Polotskaya, "Chekhov and his Russia," in Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov* (Camb., UK: Cambridge U. P., 2000), 19. The mention of Perm' is rather striking, since a city that far east (in the Urals, at one time considered to be on the edge of Siberia) might be expected to have a slightly exotic or at least distinctive identity in comparison to central Russia's (emphatically and exclusively Russian) provincial towns.

<sup>23</sup> Chekhov, 13: 181-2.

<sup>24</sup> Chekhov, 13: 131.

<sup>25</sup> Chekhov, 13: 128.

<sup>26</sup> Chekhov, 13: 141.

<sup>27</sup> Chekhov, 13: 141.

<sup>28</sup> Chekhov, 13: 144.

<sup>29</sup> Chekhov, 13: 166. My emphasis.

<sup>30</sup> Chekhov, 13: 77, 98 (act II, III).

<sup>31</sup> Chekhov, 13: 80 (act II). Furthermore, in *Uncle Vania* Chekhov rejects the idea that life on the country estate transcends the provincialism of the provincial city. One character tries to dissuade another from leaving the estate and going to live "in town" by calling on the putative difference between "provincial" town and "rural" estate: "You're better off here, in the lap of nature, than in some Kharkov or Kursk. Here at least it's poetic ... here there are the woods, and the dilapidated manor house in the style of Turgenev ..." Chekhov 13: 110. Lap of nature, poetic, in the style of Turgenev: the irony here signals Chekhov's awareness that the heyday of the sophisticated manor house is past, and that the outdated image of a shabby-chic gentry nest can do nothing to obviate the overwhelming sense of provincial stasis that has all the play's characters in its grip. Life "in some Kharkov or Kursk" might indeed be even worse, even more provincial, but the difference is quantitative rather than qualitative. Here as in Chekhov's other plays, the ideal of the country estate as a space of creativity, freedom and possibility is clearly no longer viable.

<sup>32</sup> "Rodina, nastoiashchaia Rossiia—èto Moskva, Peterburg, a zdes' provintsiia, koloniia." Chekhov, 10: 93.

<sup>33</sup> Chekhov, 10: 92.

<sup>34</sup> Chekhov, 10: 92-3.

<sup>35</sup> Chekhov, 10: 96. My emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> Chekhov, 10: 92-3.

<sup>37</sup> Chekhov, 10: 99.

<sup>38</sup> Chekhov, 9: 205-6.

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<sup>39</sup> Chekhov, 9: 278.

<sup>40</sup> Chekhov, 9: 205.

<sup>41</sup> Chekhov, 9: 278.

<sup>42</sup> Chekhov, 9: 269.

<sup>43</sup> Chekhov, 8: 78.

<sup>44</sup> Chekhov, 8: 76.

<sup>45</sup> Chekhov, 8: 72-73.

<sup>46</sup> The village where “On Official Business” is set has a name (Syrnia), but no discernible location.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Polotskaya, “Chekhov and his Russia,” *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Chekhov, 8: 92.

<sup>49</sup> Chekhov, 8: 91-2.

<sup>50</sup> Chekhov, 8: 100.

<sup>51</sup> Chekhov, 8: 97-8.

<sup>52</sup> See Lounsbury, “‘No, this is not the provinces!’: Provincialism, Authenticity and Russianness in *Dead Souls*.”

<sup>53</sup> Gogol”, *PSS* 4: 48 (act III, scene vi).

<sup>54</sup> Chekhov, 8: 78, 76.

<sup>55</sup> Chekhov, 13: 223.

<sup>56</sup> Chekhov, 13: 205-206 (act I).

<sup>57</sup> Chekhov, 13: 233 (act III).

<sup>58</sup> Chekhov, 13: 205 (act I).

<sup>59</sup> Chekhov, 13: 215 (act II).

<sup>60</sup> In his notes on the setting of *The Seagull*, for example, Chekhov mentions no railroad, no telegraph, no views of an adjacent town, and indeed in this play the simple opposition between “province” and “capital” is blurred by the opposition between country estate and various provincial towns that are mentioned throughout (though characters do travel in trains). But even in *The Seagull* Moscow figures prominently in characters’ dreams of success (Nina the aspiring actress goes there to “begin a new life”), and failure is associated with (Nina’s) slow descent into smaller and ever more miserably provincial towns (“I must go to Elets, third class ... there the educated merchants will pester me with their attentions. It’s a coarse life!”). Chekhov 13: 44 (act III) and 13: 57 (act IV).

<sup>61</sup> This is the idea expressed by the French sociologist Gabriel de Tarde in his 1890 study *Les lois de l’imitation*: “Paris reigns ... over the provinces [because] ... every day, by telegraph or train, it sends into all of France its ideas, its wishes, its conversations, its ready-made revolutions, its ready-made clothing and furniture.” Thus, Tarde argues, the modern nation itself is “imitation on a large scale.” Qtd in Williams, Rosalind H., *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late 19th-c France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 355.

<sup>62</sup> Chekhov 13: 227 (act II).

<sup>63</sup> Chekhov 13: 236, 247 (act III, IV).

**Chekhov's Reception in Brazil:  
From the Rough Stages to the Main Theatres<sup>1</sup>**

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Nowadays Anton Pavlovich Chekhov is probably one of the most staged playwrights in Brazil. Many important theatre groups and directors have already expressed interest in Chekhov's plays, announced an intention to stage one of his major dramas, or shown an interest in adapting his short stories for the stage. Remarkable groups such as *Teatro Oficina*, *Cia dos Atores* and *Grupo Galpão*<sup>3</sup> have had their productions of *Three Sisters*, *The Seagull*, or *Uncle Vania* recognized as turning points in their development. But to those who know a little about the history of modern Brazilian theatre, this seems a curious phenomenon, for, until the 1980s, many artists considered Chekhov out of date, unable to express the ideological demands of a country emerging from a dark dictatorship. Chekhov's poetics were not really absorbed by many directors and actors who were still contending with their recent theatrical tradition<sup>4</sup>. The assumption that Chekhov was

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Ralph Lindheim for his suggestions, which helped clarify the text. I am also indebted to Eric Mitchell Sabinson, who helped me with the translation of some parts of this article.

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<sup>3</sup> *Teatro Oficina* (Oficina Theatre) is one of the most important theater groups in Brazil. Led by José Celso Martinez Correa, it produced *Three Sisters* in 1972. Recently, José Celso declared in an interview that “the most important thing that I have to say about theatre, and about life, is already expressed in that work, which has been living inside me.” *Cia dos Atores* (Actors Group) is a contemporary theater group that works with the concept of *viewpoints*, adapted by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau. They staged an adaptation of *The Seagull*, called *Gaivota – tema para um conto curto* (*Seagull – A Theme for a Short Story*) in 2007, directed by Enrique Diaz. This production travelled through many countries and won many awards. A sample of that is available on <http://zip.net/bnlkRY>. *Grupo Galpão* (Hangar Group) was founded in 1982 in Belo Horizonte, and it is known for its remarkable version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which was chosen to be performed at the Globe Theatre Festival, London, in 2000. Its version of *Uncle Vania* played throughout 2012 to commemorate the group's birthday and was widely praised by the critics.

<sup>4</sup> Until now the question about the modernization of Brazilian theater is polemical. It is difficult to discuss what is a “modern procedure” or what is the “national tradition” (which is conceived always in terms of a European pattern). At the same time we are forced to recognize that only from the 1950s on Brazilian theater, actors, directors, and critics started to think in a more systematic way about the training of actors,

tragic, over-refined, and linked to productions that were frequently slow and melancholic obstructed the understanding of other productive facets of his mature plays, such as his comedy, his light irony, and the subtle message of hope expressed by some of his characters. In other words, the difficulty of accepting Chekhov into the canon has more to do with the Brazilian theatrical tradition than one would have imagined at that time.

It is possible to trace this situation back to Stanislavsky's strong influence over Brazilian directors, since the Russian actor and director served as an unquestionable model for their productions. Laurence Senelick, in his detailed study of the productions of Chekhov's plays around the world, said that "in most of these cases [scenic approaches in the Hispanic and Portuguese world], the usual model applies: epigones of the Moscow Art Theatre prevailed until recently."<sup>5</sup> Senelick's words hold true, though the focus of his extensive research was not Latin America. He showed how the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) conceived powerful interpretations of Chekhov's plays and demonstrated how these readings traveled the world. Their progress changed the everyday practices of many theatre groups in the United States, the United Kingdom, and continental Europe, and definitely influenced more peripheral or younger theatrical traditions, such as the Brazilian.

### **Chekhov in Brazil – first appearances**

The paths of the reception of Chekhov's plays in Brazil were curious and often unpredictable. When many theatre groups in Europe and the United States had come to appreciate the Moscow Art Theatre's productions, Chekhov was only beginning to appear on the Brazilian stage.

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public funding for groups, the dramaturgical tradition, and the relation between Brazilian theatre and the "external" or "international" influence – topics that, in general, work like signs of "modernization."

<sup>5</sup>Senelick, Laurence. *The Chekhov Theatre – a century of plays in performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

The “myth of Chekhovism,” crystallized by Stanislavsky and his international “translators” (Richard Boleslavsky in the United States, Theodore Komisarjevsky in the United Kingdom, and Ludmila and Georges Pitoëff in France) reached its peak during the 1930s and 1940s, the period in which Chekhov started to be translated in Brazil.

Until 1900, references to and about Chekhov were rarely encountered in Brazilian literary circles. Only three or four of his short stories were translated before the 1920s. His lack of recognition was probably due to Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé’s establishing the Russian novel as the most significant product of its culture. Novelists such as Tolstoi and Dostoevskii were seen as representative of the “Russian point of view,” and this left Chekhov and other writers of short stories far in the background. From the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, the French critic held sway over Brazilian writers, critics, and artists interested in “Russian culture.” According to Vogüé, Chekhov was a writer with a wide range of characters and with a refined manner of defining their psyches, but, at the same time, his pessimism was a “wall” that obstructed idealistic or transcendental poetics<sup>6</sup>. The Russian perspective presented an alternative to the naturalistic point of view presented in the French novel at the end of the nineteenth century, and “the Russian novel” was a symbol of a new and fresh trend. Yet Vogüé undermined and saw as limited many writers or genres that did not fit his overall conception. His influence is better understood when one notes that the first translations of Chekhov’s short stories in Brazil were based on French translations.

After 1917, the reception of Chekhov (and of Russian culture in general) changed<sup>7</sup>. Writers such as Andreev, Gorkii, and Averchenko

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<sup>6</sup> Vogüé, E.-M. “Anton Tchekhof.” *Revue des deux Mondes*. Jan-Feb. (1902), 201-216.

<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it is important to emphasize that this is not the “ground zero” of the reception of Russian literature in Brazil. To clarify this movement, the book by Bruno Barreto Gomide is exemplary: Gomide, Bruno, *Da Estepe à Caatinga: o romance russo no Brasil – 1887-1936* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2013).

started to be translated, and Chekhov appeared more frequently in literary reviews. His image received a new outline: he was no longer the “naturalistic painter,” as posed by Euclides da Cunha,<sup>8</sup> nor the “pessimistic writer,” as defined by Vogüé. Despite his secondary position at the time in relation to other Russian writers, Chekhov started to be appreciated as an accomplished comic writer, and the brief biographies that appeared at the beginning of his short stories started to present him as a “new Russian humorist.”<sup>9</sup>

The understanding of Brazilian critics became even more acute after the Russian Revolution. The demand to understand what had happened to the Russian people opened the door to new possibilities of interpretation beyond the universe presented by Vogüé, which became evident after the “cultural wave” that defined the 1930s in Brazil. During this period, important essays about the social and cultural history of Brazil were published, valuable editorial projects were organized<sup>10</sup> and many immigrants, marked by the Great War and the Russian Revolution, came to Brazil.

A relevant consequence of this wave was the publication of the first collection of Russian stories, entitled *Biblioteca de Autores Russos* (Russian Authors Library), translated by Iurii Zéltzov, a Russian immigrant who came to Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century. Curiously, he used the name of Georges Selzoff, probably because this French variant was, at the time, an entrance ticket to official literary circles. The two first

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<sup>8</sup> Euclides da Cunha was a [Brazilian journalist](#) and writer. In 1902 he wrote *Os Sertões* (*Rebellion in the Backlands*), a non-fictional account of the military expeditions promoted by the Brazilian government against the rebellious village of [Canudos](#). The book was translated into English by Samuel Putnam and published by the [University of Chicago Press](#) in 1944. Euclides da Cunha was the basis for the character of *The Journalist* in [Mario Vargas Llosa's](#) *The War of the End of the World*.

<sup>9</sup> Tchekhov, Anton. “O álbum.” *A maçã*, 92 (1923).

<sup>10</sup> To learn more about the rapid increase of editions and translations in this period, read the essay by Antonio Candido “A Revolução de 30 e a cultura.” *A Educação Pela Noite e Outros Ensaios* (São Paulo: Ed. Ática, 2000), 181-198.

books of Chekhovian short stories translated directly from Russian were: *Os Inimigos* (“Enemies”) and *O Pavilhão n° 6* (“Ward N° 6”).<sup>11</sup>



(Front Cover of *O Pavilhão n° 6* – 1931)

However, it was still too early to think of Chekhov’s work in a new light. Despite the variety of short stories that were translated – prose that showed other facets of his production — the editorial project still had little reach. Through the 1940s and the beginning of the 50s, Chekhov’s writings were hidden in the shadow of Dostoevskii’s and Tolstoi’s ethical and transcendental legacies. During those years, at least five collections of his short stories were translated, all of them from French and with biographical notes that were not extensive and did not present the main features of his poetics.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Tchecoff, Anton. *Os Inimigos - Contos*. Translation: Georges Selzoff e F. Olandim (São Paulo: Edições Cultura - Georges Selzoff, 1931). / TCHECOFF, Anton. *O Pavilhão n° 6* (São Paulo: Bibliotheca de Autores Russos, 1931).

<sup>12</sup>Tchecoff, Anton. *A Estepe*. Translation: Cordeiro de Brito (Lisboa: Editorial Inquérito, 1940). Tchekow, A. *O Banho e Outros Contos (Zola)/ O Beijo e outros contos (Tchekow)* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Segredo/ Ed Tecnoprint, 1951). Tchekhov, Anton. *O Duelo*. Translation: Otto Schneider (São

The real turning point for his reception was in the late 1950s, when Boris Schnaiderman and Tatiana Belinkii translated from the Russian two important collections of short stories: *A Dama do Cachorrinho e outros contos* (*The Lady with the Dog and Other Short Stories*) and *Histórias Imortais* (*Immortal Stories*). Both translators were immigrants, Boris from Ukraine and Tatiana from Russia, who had come to Brazil with their families immediately after the Revolution. Boris Schnaiderman had a special role at that moment, and his collection had a solid essay about Chekhov's short stories, dealing with his poetics and offering brief commentaries on each story. This was the first text published in Brazil that explored in depth the central contribution of Chekhov to modern narrative. According to Schnaiderman, Anton Pavlovich was responsible for subverting the notions of "happening" and "climax" that came from the works of Poe and Maupassant. Instead of a melodramatic outcome, Chekhov placed emphasis on internal development. Instead of the concentration on a sensational event, he converted the narrative itself into a concentrated process.<sup>13</sup>

These two collections sold an impressive number of copies, which led to Chekhov's name becoming familiar to Brazilian readers. Yet, at the same time, his plays remained unknown due to the stage of development of the Brazilian theatre during that period.

### **The playwright as the best teacher**

During the 1930s and 1940s, the rhythms of everyday life in the Brazilian theatre were different from those in other art forms. Painters,

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Paulo: Edições Melhoramentos, 1955). Tchecof, Anton P. *Olhos Mortos de Sono*. Translation: Carlos M. A. Bittencourt (São Paulo: Editôra Assunção Limitada, 1945). Tchekhov, Anton. *Amor Impossível*. Translation: Marina Salles Goulart de Andrade and Gilberto Galvão (Rio de Janeiro: Casa Editora Vecchi Ltda, 1945).

<sup>13</sup> "Afterword" in Tchekhov, A. P. *A Dama do Cachorrinho e Outras Histórias* (São Paulo: Ed. 34, 2006), 334-367.

writers, sculptors and musicians had already taken part in the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week) in 1922 – an event that symbolized the official inclusion of these arts in the list of “modern arts.”<sup>14</sup> But the Brazilian theatre lacked a professional environment and a more systematic debate on dramaturgy, the role of the director, and the training of actors that would have fostered dynamic experimentation. The official and professional theatres were more interested in the old classic standards, popular escapist entertainment, or light comedies, many of which were rehearsed in one or two weeks and designed to promote a specific artist, who played the main comic or tragic character. At the same time, undergraduate students and amateur groups in major cities like Rio de Janeiro, Recife, and São Paulo made an effort to establish a new and more serious theatrical scene. And, mirroring the *Little Theatres* in the United States, amateur and student theatrical groups sought new dramatists and new acting techniques.

This alternative movement was very important for the first moments of the reception of Chekhov’s plays in Brazil. The first staging, for which an account exists, was *O Urso* (*The Bear*), directed by Hermilo Borba Filho in Recife in 1946, and performed by the *Teatro dos Estudantes de Pernambuco* (The Pernambuco Students Theatre Group). The students intended to create a theatrical alternative to the bourgeois and sentimental plays staged in the city and grounded their theatre on the “national and organic roots” of Brazilian popular culture. Therefore, the first production of Chekhov’s play had a picturesque staging in the library of the Law School: on a small number of tables, the actors improvised a stage and, before the presentation, they read the public a manifesto, “*Teatro, Arte do Povo*” (“Theatre: The People’s Art”). The scenery was intentionally

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<sup>14</sup> Prado, Décio de Almeida. “O Teatro e o Modernismo.” *Peças pessoas, personagens: o teatro brasileiro de Procópio Ferreira a Cacilda Becker* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1993), 15-37.

amateurish, emphasizing disproportional perspectives and objects in order to subvert the Law School ambience — in other words, a protest against “bourgeois conceptions” of a normal room and conventional theatrical space. The group, however, did not conceive of the play as a traditional *vaudeville* or light comedy: instead, they wanted to explore the dynamic dialogues and the misunderstandings between the characters according to a specific, national comic tradition established by Martins Pena, a nineteenth century writer of rural comedies. Chekhov’s play was thereby recognizable to an audience familiar with the social structure explored in rural comedy: on the one hand, the landowner, the servant, and the widow in mourning and, on the other, the sugarcane farmers, the slaves involved in the everyday life of the aristocratic families, and obsessively religious women.

This staging of *The Bear* marks the curious introduction of Chekhov’s plays into the Brazilian theatre, where his farces were, at first, more popular than his major dramas. There were four productions of *O Urso (The Bear)* and eight productions of *Um Pedido de Casamento (The Proposal)* produced between 1946 and 1954 in the major Brazilian cities: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Salvador, and Porto Alegre. Most of these productions were produced by amateur and student groups. Not every group, however, performed Chekhov in an experimental manner, though they were bound to the common idea of a “general modernization” of Brazilian theatre. And Chekhov’s dramaturgy represented just such a fresh trend against the standard *boulevard* playwrights. In this sense, his farces were seen as an excellent laboratory to practice a dynamic, modernist language, theatrical as well as verbal, and close to the popular *quid pro quo* structure that was ubiquitous in comic Brazilian theatre. This was not the only tendency, and other groups saw Chekhov in a more pragmatic light as a practical and internationally profitable author, easily digested by the middle class.

Despite the popularity of Chekhov's comedies among amateur groups, his farces were ignored by professional companies and were absent from their repertoires until the 1970s. There are two probable reasons for this: these farces were not connected to the general idea of what was "Chekhovian"—an idea generated from foreign productions—and comedy was looked down upon as a secondary genre. In Brazil, the best national dramatists had produced comedies, successful with all audiences, but, even so, it took time for comedy to be recognized by professional groups and critics as "serious" and important.

The first professional performance of a Chekhov play was undertaken by the *Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia* (Brazilian Comedy Theater - TBC), in 1950: a production of *O Urso* (*The Bear*), directed by the Italian Adolfo Celi, and presented on the same night on a double-bill with *Huis Clos* by Jean-Paul Sartre. *The Bear* was considered by many to be only a mitigating late-night diversion to the acidic and polemical existentialist play by the French writer. Furthermore, Celi's staging reaffirmed the trend of a "conservative modernism" behind the plays of TBC: a long period of rehearsal, focusing on the virtuosity of the actors, but conventionally staged. Décio de Almeida Prado, an important critic of the period, rebuked the farcical tone given by the director to Chekhov's play, which seemed to create the feeling that the actors performed *against* their characters, not *with* them.<sup>15</sup> This observation dominated later productions: in 1954, TBC revived *O Pedido de Casamento* (*The Proposal*), staged by the Polish director Zbigniew Ziemiński<sup>16</sup> with strong existential and clownish accents. The production enjoyed a resounding success, and, of all

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<sup>15</sup> Prado, Décio de Almeida. "Entre Quatro Paredes e O Pedido de Casamento." *Apresentação do Teatro Brasileiro Moderno 1947-1955* (São Paulo: Martins, 1956), 249-251.

<sup>16</sup> Zbigniew Ziemiński left a career as a theatre director in Warsaw, where he had already contributed to the staging of classics such as Shakespeare and Shaw. He went to Brazil in 1941 and conducted an anthology staging of *O Vestido de Noiva* (*The Wedding Dress*) in 1943, written by Nelson Rodrigues, which was considered the foundation of Brazilian modern theatre.

the plays of Chekhov, *The Proposal* reigned alone in the repertoire of professional groups until the 1980s.



From Left to Right: Waldermar Wey (Chubukov), Célia Biar (Natal'ia) and Ruy Affonso (Lomov) Picture: Playbill - *TBC - Suas origens* (undated).

Thanks to the stimulating, modernizing impulse of the amateur and student groups, Russian playwrights finally gained admission to the Brazilian stage. Until 1955, only artists and intellectuals knew of the importance and relevance of Chekhov's full-length plays for the European stage. Some might have seen *La Cerisae* in the short 1954 season in Brazil of the Jean Louis Barrault-Madeleine Renaud troupe, but it is interesting to note that the reputed "myth of Chekhovism" anticipated the arrival of his long dramas. Adolfo Celi, presenting Chekhov in the liner notes to his production of *The Proposal*, had described the Russian plays as "intimate" and "crepuscular." Emigrants or directors with international careers, such as Ziemiński and the French actor-director Louis Jouvet, brought to the repertoire versions of a Chekhov shaped by the Moscow Art Theatre:

Chekhov as a tragic, melancholic, and a “bitter reader of provincial life”. Facing a playwright like this, any professional Brazilian theater group in this period would look warily. Throughout the 1950s, the Brazilian theater suffered constantly not only from “box office pressure,” but also from organizational and structural difficulties. And Chekhov’s plays could be considered synonymous for financial failure.

Therefore, it should be no surprise that it was a serious amateur group, *O Tablado* in Rio de Janeiro, resistant to easy repertoire and to commercial pressure, that first produced one of Chekhov’s canonical dramas, *Tio Vânia* (*Uncle Vania*), in 1955. The group rehearsed four months (an exorbitant rehearsal period), working with a translation from the French by Aníbal Machado. The director Geraldo Queiroz tried to give the play a faster beat, avoiding the slow rhythm that he had felt in the 1952 production of *Three Sisters* by Luchino Visconti in Rome. This, however, was not the impression left on the public, and, years later, the critic Paulo Francis remembered, with an acidic tone, that the audience left the theatre with the sensation that Chekhov was “dim lights, veils, missing only the gong to feel transported to an atmosphere of eastern mystery as seen by Hollywood.”<sup>17</sup> According to Francis, the languid rhythm *à la* Greta Garbo meant that the term “Slavic soul” emerged in the minds of spectators at all times during the performance: Brazilian Chekhovian interpretation, he continued, was similar to that which had proliferated on the European stage in an attempt to replace the “excessive triviality” in the lives of these characters with long silences and an almost “mystical” aura, in an ironic exercise to justify the greatness of the playwright by producing dramatic effects where there weren’t any.

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<sup>17</sup> Francis, Paulo. “Tchekhov e seus admiradores (1958).” *Opinião Pessoal (Cultura e Política)* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1966), 117-126.

In the same line of interpretation, a production of *As Três Irmãs* (*The Three Sisters*), by a student group at the *Escola de Arte Dramática* (School of Dramatic Art – *EAD*) in 1956, was directed by Alfredo Mesquita and translated from the French by Esther Mesquita. The director was a frequent visitor to French productions and knew the staging of Chekhov by Pitoëff. Therefore, he directed the play as an exercise in mood, full of suggestive pauses. The overall rhythm was slow and overtly tragic. In the playbill Nelson Xavier observed: "At the final moments of a Chekhov production a deep sadness should remain in the mind of the spectator, a deep impression that nothing remains and everything is lost."<sup>18</sup>



From Left to Right: Cândida Teixeira (Masha); Cecília Carneiro (Olga); Glória Sampaio (Irina). Picture: *EAD 48-68* - *Alfredo Mesquita* (São Paulo, S. Est. da Cultura, 1985), 65 – EAD Archive)

Regardless of the slight impact of the two productions and their apparent missteps, according to the critic Gilda de Mello e Souza, *O Tablado* and the *Escola de Arte Dramática* should be praised for their initiative in introducing aspects of the playwright previously unencountered or perhaps undervalued in Brazil: namely, longer plays, in which expected

<sup>18</sup> Xavier, Nélson. Playbill - *As Três Irmãs* – *EAD* (São Paulo. August, 1956), 2.

well-oiled structures, obvious conflicts, unusual characters, and strong images were replaced by a gallery of anti-heroes, engaged in dialogues and mismatched situations of apparently dramatic irrelevance. By not concerning themselves with the pressure of deadlines and “box office” success, these companies could use Chekhov as a valuable teacher and opportunity for experimentation.<sup>19</sup> Instead of individual brilliance, emphasis was placed on the interaction between the actors, the search for the invisible links that connect the characters. Instead of high emotion, easily discoverable in typically dramatic plays, it was understood that Chekhov demands careful study and relentless pursuit of shades of feeling and nuances. This experience of a theatrical context, which places education and aesthetic development first, gradually overcame the popularity of spectacles constructed hastily to serve a star system. In Brazil, as in Russia in the late nineteenth century, Chekhov contributed to the renewal of the language of theatre.

### **The “Chekhovism pinnacle”**

Initially, it may seem rash to speak of the “pinnacle of “Chekhovism” in addressing a playwright who had only very recently begun to be staged in Brazil. Yet many Brazilian directors and intellectuals already looked up to him with devotion, and specific conceptions on “how Chekhov should be presented” were already fairly widespread.

If among some directors and critics there was a certain fear of and difficulty in staging the Russian playwright, it could be no other than a Polish immigrant, Ziemiński, to mount the first professional production of one of Chekhov’s major full-length plays. In 1960, the *Teatro Nacional de Comédia* (National Comedy Theatre) in Rio de Janeiro presented *The*

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<sup>19</sup> Mello e Souza, Gilda de. “As Três Irmãs.” *Suplemento Literário do Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 13 Oct. 1956).

*Three Sisters*, working with a translation from English and French by Maria Jacintha. Due to financial pressures, the director had fewer than ten rehearsals, and the premiere took place in haste. Though Ziemiński was one of the great names in theatre at that period, *Three Sisters* did not garner good reviews, despite its success with the general public.<sup>20</sup> The *émigré* director, who previously had contact with the Stanislavsky system and some of the productions of Chekhov in Eastern Europe, conceived of the play, following in the footsteps of the Russian director, as a tragic symphony. He valued a cadence in speech and movement, that accentuated the tragic drama lived by the sisters. However, even with the support of a conception that had won applause in European countries, Brazilian critics attacked savagely the “relentless slowness,”<sup>21</sup> the “leveling of the rhythms of the characters” (which canceled the singularities of each),<sup>22</sup> the unevenness of the actors, who had not received equal training or lacked much experience as actors<sup>23</sup>--noting some of the prerequisite but missing features for a director committed to the Stanislavsky system. The scenography and lighting of José Maria dos Santos contributed to the tragic reading of Ziemiński. From the very start the oppressive heaviness and gloom of the environment were suggested by the designer’s solid, grey back wall, despite one of the first stage directions given by the playwright: “Midday: outside it’s sunny and bright.” For many critics, the problems raised by the production ran deep and lay bare the director’s inability to

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that, given the blockbuster success of the play, the *Teatro Serrador* (Serrador Theatre), in Rio, had to draw up a new contract for a one week extension of the play’s run. That, in view of the bad season of the company and the terms of the professional theater of the period, was atypical.

<sup>21</sup> Francis, Paulo. “Teatro Nacional de Comédia é contra o povo e fracassa.” *Última Hora* (Rio de Janeiro, Jan. 1960).

<sup>22</sup> Magno, Paschoal Carlos. “As Três Irmãs’, no Serrador.” *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro, 16 Jan. 1960).

<sup>23</sup> Heliadora, Barbara. “Tchecov, Stanislavsky e alguns problemas.” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 23 Feb. 1960).

appreciate the strength of the utopia expressed by the sisters as well as the acidity with which the characters analyzed themselves.<sup>24</sup>



From Left to Right: Wanda Lacerda (Masha); Glauce Rocha (Olga); Elizabeth Gallotti (Irina); Beatriz Veiga (Natal'ia Ivanovna). Picture: *Revista Dionysos* 10 (Dec. 1960), 130-135.

At the same time, if for some insightful critics "Chekhovism" was something to object to, for some actors, directors and commentators such a conception was a sign of something "modern," in line with updated interpretations overseas. In a sense, for many amateur and professional groups Chekhov's plays became "a challenge to be accepted," since professional groups like the *TBC* (*Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia* – Brazilian Comedy Theatre) were capable of developing a more systematic approach to both the individual study and the ensemble rehearsal demanded by such plays and heretofore attained by no one and nothing in the Brazilian theatrical tradition. Also, the relationship of the playwright, not only to his theatre and actors but also to the world outside the theatre, to the life of his country and time. was undergoing change.

<sup>24</sup> Campos, Astério. "As Três Irmãs." *Gazeta de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro, 16 Jan. 1960).

The 1960s brought an intense debate about what it meant to modernize the Brazilian theater. A strong political coloration marked the period with its internal struggle for land reform, the intensification of the workers' struggle, and an expansion of student organizations. At that moment many in the theatre wondered if Brazilian theatre should learn from foreign models or whether real modernization demanded the creation of local themes and typically national staging procedures. Considering how Chekhov was received and interpreted, the questions asked were if Brazilian theatre was able to stage Chekhov or if Chekhov was in tune with the political demands of the time.

### **Chekhov: tropicalism, politics, and some contradictions**

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the previous questions had been answered by theatre directors and critics in different ways. Some amateur theater groups such as the group *A Barca*, led by Luiz Carlos Maciel, produced a festival with Chekhov's one-act plays<sup>25</sup> in Salvador in 1962, since he was seen as a great channel for the anti-bourgeois agenda that the student theater advocated. The stagings intended to make the Russian writer less intellectualized, and more distant from the "typically Chekhovian" manuals of interpretation. To Maciel, it was necessary to produce a clean and straight-to-the-point act without "addressing his ideas to a wider audience in a language that is understood only by the privileged who are able to enjoy the subtleties and tastes of aesthetic charms."<sup>26</sup> The production was part of the student theater's tour across the country and was successful in several cities.

Although there were minor triumphs throughout Brazil, Chekhov didn't enjoy among professional groups the same popularity that he had in

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<sup>25</sup> On the same bill: "The Celebration", "The Proposal" and "An Involuntary Tragedian".

<sup>26</sup> Playbill - *Festival Tchekhov - A Barca* (Salvador, April 1962).

countries such as the United States and England. Too many critics of this period questioned what space should be reserved for a foreign playwright who proclaimed, above all, the necessity of the writer to remain objective and impartial in front of the facts and events of life. How could his long plays with little dramatic action, marked by a dubious perspective that both loves and rejects the decadent upper classes, contribute something to the Brazilian theatrical tradition, which at that moment valued lively dramatic contrasts and clear ideological conflicts?

To contend with these musings of the intelligentsia of the period, in 1968—one of the hardest years of the Brazilian dictatorship—Ivan Albuquerque tried to smooth over the controversy by presenting the first production of *O Jardim das Cerejeiras* (*The Cherry Orchard*) with a strong but unexpected political accent. Its main features were the subversion of prevailing Stanislavskian readings of Chekhov and the promotion of the comic aspects of the text—something that had a decisive political impact. On the one hand, Ivan Albuquerque wanted to restore the original intention of the Russian playwright to see his play staged as a comedy. On the other, the production projected a reading informed by the politically engaged period, looking with sympathy to the feelings of those who saw the disappearance of their holdings and influence, but were also aware of themselves as an idle class being surpassed by history.

This interpretation was reinforced by the set design by Marcos Flaksman, which was completely clean and marked by the resignification of objects in a Brechtian manner. However, despite this attempt to attune the production with the time, critics were divided: some enthusiasts noted the high quality in the treatment of the comedy and in the actors' training (something rare for a recently professionalized theater)<sup>27</sup>; others objected that the comic accents and the “defamiliarization effect” were excessive,

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<sup>27</sup> Michalski, Yan. “Um Jardim Florido e Amigo (II).” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 23 Oct. 1968).

with the Brechtian device, which should be applied carefully and selectively, turning into something artificial.<sup>28</sup> Even critics like Luiz Carlos Maciel, who a few years earlier directed the Chekhov Festival with a political accent, said harshly that this play was extremely “naïve” for a historical moment marked by ideological polarization. The orchard and the feelings of the impoverished gentry could not be regarded with sympathy. In this sense, he said, Chekhov was an outdated writer.

Thus, Chekhov’s plays were facing a cultural field full of extreme positions and of theatres still afraid to perform them. However, thanks to the initiative of an equally controversial group decisive for the history of Brazilian theatre, a less restrictive reception of this Russian playwright was enacted in a Brazilian scenario. *Teatro Oficina* (Oficina Theatre), headed by José Celso Martinez Correa, astonished the critics by choosing *Three Sisters* to conclude the season in 1972. During those years, the *Oficina* was famous for its serious questioning of the Brazilian theatrical tradition, and of the theatre itself as an institution. Unlike other contemporary groups, its political engagement interpreted the Brazilian social struggles in a different way: its *tropicalism* consisted in understanding the Brazilian dilemmas from a critical distance, because these dilemmas were so out of date, but also from a celebratory point of view, which enjoyed these dilemmas as charmingly Brazilian. For that reason, many critics wondered: was *Teatro Oficina* embarrassed after its recent assertion of the “demise of the theatre”?<sup>29</sup> Was this troupe, some asked, trying to return to Stanislavskian traditionalism? Or was it a return to the typically realistic Brazilian theatre from the 1950s and 1960s in order to rebel against it and prove its power of reinvention?

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<sup>28</sup> Wolff, Fausto. “Com Tchecov só se chega a Brecht através de Stanislávsky.” *Tribuna da Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro, 31 Oct. 1968).

<sup>29</sup> It was declared in *Gracias Señor* (1972), a production in which the group undergoes a transition to a type of alternative community. It was a collective creation designed while traveling through Brazil and incorporating cutting-edge procedures from the counterculture and experiential theatre.

Chekhov had already been linked in Brazil to the "Stanislavsky method," but his plays were much closer to the model provided by the *Oficina* company, whose repertory included Gorky's *The Petty Bourgeoisie* - 1965, Oswald de Andrade's *O Rei da Vela* – 1967, and Brecht's *Galileo* and *In the Jungle of Cities* - 1969. This model was marked by a strong non-realistic pulse and aimed at progressively increasing the bond between the actors and the audience that was the source of strong emotions. Chekhov in the productions of this theatre could act as a “sensitivity trainer,” demonstrating the strength of the body as well as of speech.<sup>30</sup>

First, the group explored the esoteric background of the play since, according to José Celso, the play had a different approach to time, which could not be captured in conventional or naturalistic terms. This was definitely an aspect not explored in Brazil and in major European productions. To Celso's actors it started to be evident in the rehearsal period, when they went to Boraceia Beach, ingested mescaline, and with slow music and dance improvised a ritualistic staging – something that looked and sounded like a meditation session.



Rehearsals at Boraceia Beach. (Source: Oficina Theatre Fund, AEL-Unicamp)

<sup>30</sup> It was in this way that many people awaited the debut of *Three Sisters*. Posted on the newspaper *Ultima Hora* in 1972 was the notice “José Celso relapsed once again: he will perform Chekhov and it will be a very well-behaved production.”

The scenography was produced collectively and was based on the mandala symbol, which offered up a rich combination of images and meanings. The mandala circle was divided in four parts, representing the four elements—earth, water, fire and air—and also represented the four stages through which the human body passes in its life cycle: birth, waiting, breaking, and death. The whole circle suggested the idea of a clock and became a symbol for the passing of time. And in the very center of the stage—and of the scenography in general—was a clean circle made of wood, in which the scenic action was concentrated.

According to José Celso, "time" became a major character in the play, and it was necessary to highlight its corrosive force, which often creates expectations, destroys dreams, and, worse, can put many people in a "standby" position and condition. Therefore, as the "boredom" increased in the sisters' everyday life, the scenic action was compressed into the small "quadrants" of the symbolic clock – something that created a strong feeling of suffocation. A musical beat was set by constant music, which created the idea of a permanent dance ritual. The culmination of this process came at the beginning of the third act: the fire in the Prozorovs' neighborhood was converted into a sort of spontaneous "fire dance" that ended with an improvised manifesto by a specific number of the group of actors, namely, by those who had rejected the anarchist Chekhov and urged a more respectful performance.

The main idea of this production was not only to reflect the *Oficina's* history, but also to analyze critically the recent history of Brazil and to confront the intelligentsia's apathy. Because of the military coup of 1964 and the subsequent persecution and massacre of the dissenters on the left, ideas such as that "it was necessary to gain strength" or "wait for the better times coming" were voiced as a defense by many exhausted and resigned opponents of the government. Celso's production of *Three Sisters*

attempted to show the identity between the intelligentsia and the Prozorov family and friends, all of whom were responsible for social apathy. To those with progressive views as well as to the progressive theatre itself, the question “why wait?” was posed.

This interpretation brought polemical solutions onto the stage: the feeling of a strong trial—after all, the family and its culture were directly responsible for their own situation—hovered over the Prozorovs. However, many critics asked how one could ignore the individuality given by Chekhov to each character, how ignore the writer’s famous compassion for his characters, his lyricism, and the dream of a bright Moscow utopia (a bridge between the past and the future)? Surely José Celso unfairly suppressed this dimension of Chekhov’s drama.<sup>31</sup>



On the left: scene of the first act (see the image of a clock and inscriptions as "Tic-Tac" on the back wall. José Celso, as Chebutykin, is in the center, with a newspaper in hands). On the right, installation of the circular stage by actors. (Source: Oficina Theatre Fund, AEL- Unicamp)

<sup>31</sup> Michalski, Yan. “As Três Irmãs: Vítimas ou Culpadas?” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 16 Jan. 1973).

Despite the harshness of several critics, Mariângela Alves de Lima observed a new and interesting aspect in Celso's staging: although there were difficulties faced by the troupe in dealing with their own theatre traditions and in fighting crystallized interpretations of Chekhov, they read the dramatist as esoteric and called the apathetic audience to think about themselves and their political situation. By doing so, *Oficina* converted the Russian playwright into a privileged reader of Brazilian reality.<sup>32</sup> Finally, he was no longer a simple "imported classic" in the repertoire of major companies.

### **Chekhov – our contemporary**

The 1960s and 1970s in Russia and Europe were marked by a revision of the Stanislavskian interpretation of Chekhov's dramaturgy. In Brazil, however, *Teatro Oficina* reigned alone in the 70s for their experimental innovations in the field of Chekhovian drama. Even worse, this period would be an empty decade for any serious theatre in Brazil. In the 1960s and after, many of the experimental theatre groups (such as *Arena Theatre* and *Teatro Oficina*) suffered from censorship and exile imposed by the dictatorship. The control exercised over some artists and groups, as well as the difficulties of financial survival, hindered their attempt to modernize scenic language and discouraged experimentation.

In the 1980s, Brazilian political life showed signs of renewal, with the emergence of worker and peasant organizations. Theatrical companies took advantage of their financial difficulties, which also seemed to stimulate the democratization of the whole process of production, direction, and acting. The idea was to abolish the "dictatorship" of the director and aerate the theatrical *milieu*. It was in this environment that Maria Clara

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<sup>32</sup> Lima, Mariângela Alves de. "O Oficina revigora a atualidade da peça." *O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 28 Dec. 1972).

Machado offered in May 1980 at *Teatro Tablado*, Rio de Janeiro, a new perspective on the Chekhovian text. She staged the first Brazilian production of *Platonov* and worked with her amateur actors not to create a serious and heavy Stanislavskian Chekhov but to project a lighter Chekhov, a "mischievous"<sup>33</sup> Chekhov. The director markedly displayed her vision especially in the last act, which she constructed as if it were a French *vaudeville* – a genre that had a tradition in Russia and marked a number of Chekhov's plays in one act. She gave a slightly accelerated beat to the final scenes and, during the interludes, projected excerpts from Chaplin movies. Her intention was to emphasize the tragicomic facet of the characters inherent in this "impure" and unfinished play. The production was very successful with the public, even though it was part of a truncated season.

In the same line of investigation of the comic tradition, Marcio Aurelio directed *Trágico à Força* (*An Involuntary Tragedian*) in São Paulo in 1982. Initially he played together in one night *Os Males do Tabaco* (*The Evils of Tobacco*), *O Pedido de Casamento* (*The Proposal*), *O Urso* (*The Bear*) and *Trágico à Força* (*An Involuntary Tragedian*). The main theme established by the director—marriage as a variant on the level of the household of the oppressiveness of the State—was very curious and politically engaged. The stingy obsession with money and its impact on the desires and actions of the characters as well as their enslavement to harsh marriage and social conventions were motifs and themes often met in Brazilian comic plays in the nineteenth century, which were later, by Chekhov and others, taken to a grotesque extreme.<sup>34</sup> For some dissatisfied critics, however, Aurelio's combination of short plays did not reach the height of great Chekhovian theatre with its "profound psychology"). Of course, positions like these reveal an underestimation of comedy as a genre,

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<sup>33</sup> Marinho, Flavio. "Retrato de uma raça. No Tablado, Tchecov estreante." *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro, 24 May 1980).

<sup>34</sup> Lara, Paulo de. "Obras de Checov num só espetáculo." *Folha da Tarde*.(São Paulo, 23 Jun. 1982).

as well as the petrification of an idea of Chekhovian "atmosphere", tied in a strong way to the American reading of Stanislavsky.

Even so, we can say that these groups began exploring a new dimension of Chekhovian dramaturgy, incorporating the best of Brazilian theater (mainly from the 1970s) and the comic tradition.

### **1990s and later: a plurality of trends**

From the mid-1980s to the present day, I find it difficult to chart and generalize about the many stagings of Chekhov throughout Brazil. In these few years one can count more than forty productions of reasonable quality and impact that presented three different readings of Chekhov: a *universalist* Chekhov, a *politically engaged Chekhov*, *reader of Brazilian reality*, and a *deconstructed* Chekhov.

It is worthwhile to begin by highlighting the productions that valued a *universal* Chekhov, the playwright known as the reader of "human souls." Into this category fall the productions by *Teatro dos 4* (Theatre of the 4), headed by Sergio Britto and Paulo Mamede. In 1984, the group presented *Uncle Vania* in Rio de Janeiro. Britto eliminated the "detailed" environment and the slow beat widely considered as typically Chekhovian. He preferred to emphasize the comic elements in the text and constructed the acts as variations of mood. The same universalizing was imprinted on *O Jardim das Cerejeiras* (1989), which premiered in Rio de Janeiro, directed by Paulo Mamede. The idea was to "show that the human being is timeless, eternal, since men and women, despite fantastic technological and scientific achievements, continue to search for their own achievement: the other."<sup>35</sup>

In the same line was *The Seagull*, directed by Jorge Takla, who preferred a return to more traditional scenography and costumes. Finally, within this trend, *Uncle Vania*, directed by Adherbal Freire-Filho in 2003

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<sup>35</sup> Cezimbra, Márcia. "Comédia da decadência." *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 25 July 1989).

in Rio de Janeiro, is worth highlighting. In this innovative version, which took the play to the grass of a local, recreational park, Freire-Filho chose a direction, which did not pollute the text by saturating it with the melancholy emphasized in many productions: “We tried to keep the human aspects of the text that, many times, are disregarded in favor of a certain melancholy.”<sup>36</sup>

As another visible trend of this period, we find readings that valued the critical or even political dimensions of the playwright, as if Chekhov offered a careful external view of Russia that really illuminated Brazilian reality. Élcio Nogueira Seixas, in his direction of *Uncle Vania* (Curitiba, 1998), explored a little more explicitly the need to open the stage to understand the mechanisms surrounding the social status of the characters. To him, Chekhov may have written a “testimony about Brazil, given the similarities between the crisis experienced by the characters in their historical time and that experienced by the Brazilian people.”<sup>37</sup> But the director did not attain the same force with his *Cherry Orchard* in 2000 in São Paulo, in which the excessive externalization of the direction to distance the audience from identifying with the decadent class who lost the orchard lacked both the intensity and the subtlety required for Chekhov.

As a last and representative example of a clean installation, relying on an economically spare stage and on the strength of the text, *Uncle Vania*, by Celso Frateschi (São Paulo, 2000) stood out. The director believed that, by the simple strength of the “nakedly” displayed dramatic text, the audience would draw the necessary parallels with Brazilian reality in the late twentieth century.

Finally, from the mid-1990s to the present date, many performances have been characterized by a third trend, trying to break away from the

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<sup>36</sup> Almeida, Rachel. “Infelizes para sempre.” *Programa - Jornal do Brasil*, 10. (Rio de Janeiro, Jun. 2003).

<sup>37</sup> “Tio Vânia, como o Brasil, está em crise.” *Jornal do Comércio* (Porto Alegre, 25 Sep. 1998).

ideas of a "power text" and "realistic" representation. Consonant with modern critical theory on theatre (which in many cases, but not all, reverberates with the thought of Antonin Artaud, Eugenio Barba, and Jerzy Grotowski), the third trend spectacles sought to specify the essential material of theatrical language and to explore deeper meanings constructed through the actors' work with their own bodies, physical objects, and multimedia resources. Those impressed by modern theory are often more interested in constructing the present in the play than exploring a play's relevance to the present; they devise plays built more *with* Chekhov than *from* Chekhov. Take, for example, the productions directed by Bia Lessa (*Three Sisters*, 1998) and Enrique Diaz (*Three Sisters*, 1999). Both attempted to break with the pattern of naturalistic direction, emphasizing the physicality of the actors and exploring connections between the characters' and the actors' "personal experiences," which were brought to the stage.

But *The Seagull*, *Theme for a Short Story*, by Enrique Diaz (Rio de Janeiro, 2007), can be considered the decisive moment in the "deconstruction" trend of Chekhov's reception among Brazilians. Diaz's intention was not to offer Chekhov as staged in the nineteenth century, but to present a intentionally unfinished staging in order to appreciate the anguish, hardships and problems, psychological and metaliterary, that characterized the production process—a direct confrontation with Stanislavskian notions.

The stage was stripped bare in order to clear the set, conventionally stuffed and often overburdened with furniture and props, and to open space for the interaction of temporalities (the time of the fable of Chekhov and that of the nearly 110 years since the writing of the play) and materials (the set of experiences, questions and symbols that are brought from the research and rehearsal process). Thus, we understand the focus given to the

problem of Treplev's *failed* staging in the first act and to the problem of the *passage of time*, expressed in the tension between generations and artistic trends (Arkadina *versus* Treplev, Realism *versus* Symbolism). The actors questioned the public about what it meant being there, many years away from the era of the playwright, or if its risks of failure were not the same as Treplev's in Chekhov's play or the failure of *The Seagull*'s premiere in the Aleksandrinskii Theatre in the late nineteenth century.

In Diaz's production, the fable's time is left aside and, when it appears, it is as important as other temporalities (of people's experiences, of actors/performers' anxieties, and of the different stagings of Chekhov's play throughout the century). All these elements, put together, require another level of participation by the public, which can no longer expect a cathartic absorption and the beforehand presentation of easy, readymade answers to upcoming problems. Yet this production, aimed at a sophisticated audience proficient in the world of theater and with strong metaliterary interests, toured successfully in Brazil and several other countries.



Actors in *Gaivota – Tema Para Um Conto Curto*. From Left to Right: Enrique Diaz, Mariana Lima, Bel Garcia, Emilio de Melo, Felipe Rocha, Isabel Teixeira e Gilberto Gawronski. Source:

<http://feliperoch>

[gaiivota.blogspot.com/2009/10/equipe.html](http://gaiivota.blogspot.com/2009/10/equipe.html)

Throughout the history of the reception of Anton Chekhov's dramaturgy the standard interpretation established by Stanislavsky became a powerful reference, to the point that most directors refer to their work as either influenced by him or directed against him. Today, this "Chekhovism," even though operating with great strength, has already lost ground to new visions. In any case, there is no question now about whether the Brazilian theater was "ready" for Chekhov. For many theater companies, he has not only helped establish the national theatre tradition but he has more to say about today's world than most playwrights. And his audiences should now be receptive to new possibilities of interpretation for this playwright, who remains more current than ever.

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**Productions of Chekhov's plays and adaptations of Chekhov's works  
in chronological order**

**(Year, play, director, group and city until 2008)**

1946 - <i>The Bear</i> .	Hermilo Borba Filho/ Teatro do Estudante de Pernambuco (TEP), Recife.
1949 - <i>Chekhov Festival</i> .	Guilhermino César/ Teatro do Estudante do Rio Grande do Sul (TERGS), Porto Alegre.
1950 - <i>The Proposal</i> .	Adolfo Celi/ Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia (TBC), São Paulo.
1950 - <i>The Proposal</i> .	Adacto Filho/ Teatro Amador de Fantoques (TAF), Salvador.
1951 - <i>The Proposal</i> .	Osmar R. Cruz/ Clube de Teatro, São Paulo.
1952 - <i>The Proposal</i> .	Ruggero Jacobbi/ Escola de Arte Dramática (EAD), Recife.

- 1952 - *The Proposal*.  
Expedito Pôrto/ Teatro Experimental do Pessoal da Caixa Econômica (TEPCE), Rio de Janeiro.
- 1952 - *The Bear/ The Proposal*.  
Agremiação Goiana de Teatro, Goiânia.
- 1953 - *Chekhov Festival*.  
Nina Ranevsky, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1954 - *The Proposal*.  
Ziemiński / TBC, São Paulo.
- 1954 - *The Proposal*.  
Adolfo Celi/ TBC, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1955 - *Uncle Vania*.  
Geraldo Queiroz/ Tablado. Rio de Janeiro.
- 1956 - *Three Sisters*.  
Alfredo Mesquita/ EAD, Ribeirão Preto.
- 1957 - *The Proposal*.  
S. de Paiva/ Teatro Regional do Estudante (TER), DF, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1958 - *The Celebration*  
Rubens Corrêa/ Tablado, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1958 - *Three Sisters*.  
Gianni Ratto/ A Barca, Salvador.
- 1960 - *Three Sisters*  
Ziemiński / Teatro Nacional de Comedia (TNC), Rio de Janeiro.
- 1962 - *Chekhov – A Festival*.  
Luiz Carlos Maciel/A Barca, Salvador.
- 1962 - *Uncle Vania*.  
Alberto D'Aversa/EAD, São Paulo.
- 1962 - *The Proposal*.  
Luiz Nagib Amary/ Belo Horizonte.
- 1964 - *Chekhov Festival*.  
Sérgio Mibielle/ Belo Horizonte.
- 1966 - *The Proposal / The Celebration*.  
Cláudio Heemann/CAD, Porto Alegre
- 1966 - *The Proposal*.  
Maria H. Magalhães, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1966 - *The Proposal*.  
Grupo de Teatro André Luiz (GATAL), Marília.
- 1967 - *The Proposal / The Celebration*.  
Dulcina de Moraes/ Fundação Brasileira de Teatro (FBT), Rio de Janeiro
- 1967 - *Three Sisters*.  
Haydée Bittencourt, Belo Horizonte.
- 1968 - *Uncle Vania*.  
Cláudio Correa e Castro/ Curitiba.
- 1968 - *Cherry Orchard*.  
Ivan de Albuquerque/ Grupo do Rio, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1969 - *An Involuntary Tragedian*  
João Ribeiro Chaves/ Grupo Casarão, São Paulo.
- 1972 - *Three Sisters*.  
José Celso Martinez Correa/ Oficina, São Paulo.
- 1974 - *The Seagull*.  
Jorge Lavelli/ Rio de Janeiro.
- 1974 - *Uncle Vania*.  
Álvaro Guimarães/ Salvador.
- 1975 - *The Celebration*.  
Beto Diniz/ Rio de Janeiro.

- 1975 - *The Proposal*. J. B. Galvão/ Grupo ATARD, Brasília (DF)
- 1975 - *Uncle Vania*. Emilio Di Biasi/Grupo Heros, São Paulo.
- 1976 - *The Proposal/The Bear*  
*The Evils of Tobacco* Teatro Experimental de Comédia de Araraquara (TECA), Araraquara
- 1976 - *The Bear* José Guilherme de Castro Alves/ Vitória.
- 1977 - *Natalina's Wedding*. Carlos Augusto Strazzer/ São Paulo.
- 1977 - *The Proposal/The Bear* Pedro Marcos/Grupo Anhangá, São Paulo.
- 1980 - *Platonov*. Maria Clara Machado/ O Tablado, Rio de Janeiro.
- 1982 - *Cherry Orchard*. Jorge Takla/ São Paulo.
- 1982 - *An Involuntary Tragedian* Marcio Aurélio/ São Paulo.
- 1982 - *The Proposal*. Adalberto Nunes/ Rio de Janeiro.
- 1984 - *Cherry Orchard*. Lala Schneider/ Curitiba.
- 1984 - *Uncle Vania*. Sérgio Britto/ Teatro dos Quatro, RJ.
- 1984 - *Irresistible Adventure*. Domingos Oliveira/ Rio de Janeiro.
- 1985 - *The Chameleon* Reinaldo Santiago/ Lux in Tenebris, SP.
- 1987 - *Natasha* Zelia Hurman/Cia Molière, Curitiba.
- 1988 - *The Evils of Tobacco*. Ronaldo Brandão/ Belo Horizonte.
- 1988 - *The Bear*. Antonio Oliveira/ Porto Alegre.
- 1988 - *21 Lake (adaptation)*. Jorge Takla/ São Paulo.
- 1988 - *The Proposal*. Elpídio Navarro/ João Pessoa.
- 1989 - *Uncle Vania*. Celso Frateschi/ EAD, São Paulo.
- 1989 - *The Proposal*. Roberto Parkinson, Brasília (DF).
- 1989 - *Cherry Orchard*. Paulo Mamede/ Teatro dos Quatro, SJo.
- 1989 - *The Seagull*. Luiz Paulo Vasconcellos, Porto Alegre.
- 1990 - *Cherry Orchard*. Antonio Cadengue/ Companhia de Teatro Seraphins, Recife.
- 1991 - *A Proposta*. Rodolfo Garcia Vázquez/ Os Satyros, SP
- 1992 - *Seraphins Revisions –*  
*Cherry Orchard*. Antonio Candengue/ Companhia de Teatro Seraphins, Recife.
- 1994 - *The Seagull*. Francisco Medeiros/ Companhia de Teatro Bexiga, São Paulo.
- 1995 - *The Seagull*. David Herman/ Rio de Janeiro.

1996 - <i>The Seagull</i> .	Jorge Takla/ Rio de Janeiro.
1996 - <i>The Proposal</i> .	Marcus Alvisi/ Rio de Janeiro.
1997 - <i>The Art to Say "No."</i>	Maria Lúcia Pereira/ São Paulo.
1997 - <i>The Evildoer</i> .	Rosyane Trotta/ Rio de Janeiro.
1998 - <i>Uncle Vania</i> .	Élcio Nogueira/Teatro Promíscuo, Curitiba.
1998 - <i>The Bear</i> .	José Henrique/ Rio de Janeiro.
1998 - <i>Ivanov</i> .	Eduardo Tolentino/ Grupo Tapa, Curitiba/SP.
1998 - <i>On Seagull</i> .	Daniela Thomas/ Curitiba.
1998 - <i>Three Sisters</i> .	Bia Lessa/ Rio de Janeiro.
1999 - <i>Three Sisters</i> .	Enrique Diaz/ Rio de Janeiro.
2000 - <i>Uncle Vania</i> .	Celso Frateschi/Grupo Ágora, São Paulo.
2000 - <i>Cherry Orchard</i> .	Élcio Nogueira Seixas/ São Paulo.
2002 – <i>The Proposal</i> .	Os Satyros/ São Paulo.
2003 - <i>Uncle Vania</i> .	Aderbal Freire-Filho/ Rio de Janeiro.
2006 - <i>Seagull - Theme for a short story</i> .	Enrique Diaz/ Cia. dos Atores, Rio de Janeiro.
2007 - <i>Farse</i> .	Luis Artur Nunes/ Porto Alegre.
2008 - <i>Cherry Orchard</i> .	Moacir Chaves/ Rio de Janeiro.
2008 - <i>Uncle Vania</i> .	Celso Frateschi/ Grupo Ágora, São Paulo.

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This volume contains the following articles:

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thoroughly annotated and fully illustrated.”

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## **II International Contest of linguistic, cultural, and film studies projects dedicated to life and oeuvre of Anton Chekhov**

A tribute to 155th birthday of Anton Chekhov

Organizer: Anton Chekhov Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute.

Information support:

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Anton Chekhov Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute announces the Second International Contest of linguistic, cultural, and film studies projects dedicated to life and oeuvre of Anton Chekhov, whose creative work have had and still have enormous impact on world literature. The aim of the contest is to contribute to promotion of Anton Chekhov's oeuvre in the 21st century.

Time limits of the contest: from December 1, 2013 to December 1, 2014.

The contest is conducted within the following nominations:

1. For professionals – literature experts, linguists, cultural and film studies experts, and other specialists who study the oeuvre of A.P.Chekhov.
2. For Ph.D. students.
3. For Bachelor and Master students.

Every nomination accepts the following published or unpublished projects:

- Monographs;
- Study guides;
- Scientific collections of articles;
- Articles;
- Documentary and feature films (screen adaptations of Anton Chekhov's works, films about his life);
- Documentary and feature film reviews (featuring screen adaptations of Anton Chekhov's works or his life).

The contest accepts:

- Previously published works (monographs, study manuals, articles and collections of articles, film reviews) in Russian, English, French, German,

Spanish, Ukrainian, and Belorussian languages. Works not published previously are only accepted in the Russian language.

- Recorded on DVDs documentary and feature films (screen adaptations of Anton Chekhov's works, films about his life) in Russian, English, French, German, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Belorussian languages.

All materials sent to the contest are not mailed back.

The students and Ph.D. students works should be accompanied by the review of the academic advisor with the specification of his/her degree and name of the university.

The following projects are not accepted: novels, stories, plays, scripts. The works that have already taken part in the First International Contest of linguistic, cultural, and film studies projects dedicated to life and oeuvre of Anton Chekhov are not accepted.

The announcement of the results of the competitions: December 2014-January 2015.

Contest applications/works are to be sent in a single copy (published or printed papers, electronic copies, DVDs) to the following address:

Scientific Centre of Anton Chekhov Studies

Literature Chair

Anton Chekhov Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute

48, Initsiativnaya St.

Taganrog 347936

Russia

E-mail: [kaflit@rambler.ru](mailto:kaflit@rambler.ru)

The ceremony of awards will take place in hometown of the great writer – Taganrog on his 155th birthday – on January 29th, 2015.

Articles and reviews of the contest winners will be published in the anniversary collection of works dedicated to the event.