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Editor's Note

Let me start this issue with yet another apology to all readers of *The Bulletin* for the silence of the last year. I have had to contend with a number of problems, both physical and psychological, that drained me of energy and undermined my desire to oversee the publication of the number of issues that you have come to look forward to. I or—more likely—my successor as editor will try to get *The Bulletin* back on schedule. But I also hope that, by missing these online editions, you have realized your responsibility for keeping *The Bulletin* alive and relevant. It cannot survive without your interest and without your submissions—essays, commentaries, notes, and reviews. And you should also be looking for new talents—younger students, , scholars, critics, and admirers of Chekhov—who should be informed of *The Bulletin* and encouraged to share in its pages their responses to his writing and their considerations of the writer's impact and influence. Submissions can be sent to <ralph.lindheim@utoronto.ca>

The current issue begins with a short, select bibliography for 2014 through 2016, which is followed by Angela Brintlinger's comments on an aspect of Cathy Popkin's acclaimed Norton Critical Edition of *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories* that should not go underappreciated. Finally, two essays are offered: a recent, comparative look by Radislav Lapushin at "Ward No. 6" and a recent cinematic adaptation of the story; and a consideration of love in *Three Sisters*. The latter essay, together with Galya

Diments's remembrance of its author, are presented as a belated tribute to Karl Kramer, a fine Slavist whose work on Chekhov inspired undergraduate and graduate students of my generation and whose teaching never failed to impress. I gratefully acknowledge New York University Press for its permission to reprint Karl Kramer's essay, which appeared originally in 1981 in *Chekhov's Great Plays: A Critical Anthology* edited by Jean-Pierre Barricelli.

Select Bibliography 2014-2016

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This volume contains the following articles:

Part One: Materials

Michael C. Finke. "Chekhov's Biography: Outline, Useful Resources, and Notes on Biography as an Object of Study."

"Chekhov in Translation."

"Editions of Chekhov's Works."

Michael C. Finke, with Dmitry Tartakovsky. "The Instructor's Library."

Part Two: Approaches

Michael Holquist. "Introduction: Teaching Chekhov, Chekhov Teaching: 'A Boring Story' and Critical Thinking."

Approaches to Chekhov's Prose

Julie W. de Sherbinin. "Chekhov and the Anglophone Short Story."

Brian James Baer and Maia Solovieva. "Reading Chekhov's Short Fiction: The Invisible Language of Culture."

Carol Apollonio. "Teaching Chekhov in Translations."

Michael C. Finke. "A Tolstoyan Narratological Lesson: Teaching What Chekhov Learned."

Classroom Strategies: Writing and Performance

John Griswold. "Chekhov in the Undergraduate Creative Writing Classroom."

Valleri J. Robinson. "Adapting Chekhov: A Primer for Dramaturgs."

Annamaria Pileggi. "A Performance-Based Approach to Play Analysis Using Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*."

Kiisa Siefker Bailey. "Introducing Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* with Method-Style Acting and Facebook-Style Reacting."

Teaching Chekhov in Film and Theater

Olga Levitan. "Chekhov's *Seagull*: Teaching Poetics through Stage History."

Lyudmila Parts. "Chekhov's *Seagull* in Postmodern Times: Boris Akunin and Tennessee Williams."

Stanton B. Garner, Jr. "Stagescapes, Scenescapes: *Uncle Vanya* on Film."

John MacKay, and Rita Safariants. "Chekhov on the Screen: *Lady with a Little Dog* (1960) and *Vanya on Forty-Second Street* (1994)."

Cross-Curricular Approaches

Benjamin Knelman and Gabriella Safran. "History, Voice, Money, and Trees: 'Rothschild's Fiddle' and the Jews."

Cathy Popkin. "'A Talent for Humanity': Teaching Chekhov and the Medical Humanities."

Jane Costlow. "Reading the Environmental Chekhov."

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On Chekhov: “Translation Matters.”

Angela Brintlinger

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Having just graded yet another set of student papers for my Intro to Russian Literature course, I am reminded just how hard it is for non-Russian speakers to internalize the foreignness of the literature I am teaching them.

Gently I nudge them in the margins or in my comments: “Really? You misspelled the author’s name three times? Try proofreading.”

But it’s not their fault. Chekhov, to the American ear, “translates” to Chekov. The guttural “kh” sound – like the incomprehensible “zh” spelling that leaves readers and listeners perplexed – has no meaning for the English speaker.

So what is the answer? How can we make Russian literature accessible while still pointing to its foreignness and what that means for American readers? I think that Cathy Popkin has it just about right in her new *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, a Norton Critical edition published in 2014.

The surest way to help students remember that they are reading literature produced in a time and place utterly foreign to their own is to foreground the very concept and practice of translation itself. In her updated *Selected Stories*, Popkin has chosen from the best translations into English of what she sees as the essential Chekhov stories, and she has both commissioned new translations and translated or amended translations herself. The result is a collection not only of the finest translators, but also of different methods and emphases in translation.

By opening her volume with side-by-side comparisons of translations and biographical information on her contributors, Popkin honors the work of translators – something we should all remember to do more often. The volume, as she writes, represents her “landmark decision to make translation itself a priority” by “making the project of converting Chekhov’s Russian texts into English versions an object of study in its own right” (xi).

After all, if as the essays in *Chekhov the Immigrant* (Slavica 2007) have it, Chekhov is one of the most influential writers for American fiction (de Sherbinin, Messud, Prose, *inter alia*) and for drama (Heim, Carnicke), the way American writers receive Chekhov is highly important for their craft. To quote Claire Messud: “To have any understanding of the form of the contemporary short story is to have internalized

Chekhov's principles."¹ Before the war, Somerset Maugham declared: "Today most writers of ambition model themselves on Chekhov."² So this has been true for generations. Shouldn't writers as well as students be aware of how the process of translating Chekhov works, and what might get "lost" in translation?"

In recent years scholars have turned to this question.³ But readers of Chekhov shouldn't need to seek out scholarship in order to read his fiction. Traditionally Norton critical editions have played this role for the classroom and even the more general reader; as their website proclaims, the series has been "setting the standard for classic texts since ... 1961."⁴ Instructors can count on Norton to keep the books in print, so that teaching courses over time becomes a sustainable practice. (And isn't Chekhov all about sustainability?) More importantly, as instructors we can take advantage of editors' expertise⁵ in choosing and excerpting the most applicable and interesting scholarship – for the upper-level course, or the particularly engaged and motivated student, or even to refresh our own approaches to the primary texts.

Equally vital is the latitude that Norton has given Cathy Popkin, as it does other editors. She points out that Laurence Senelick, editor of *Anton Chekhov's Selected Plays* (Norton 2005) made the opposite choice in translation, as he emphasized the need for consistency across Chekhov's *oeuvre* and translated all the plays for his volume himself.⁶

I myself am thrilled to be putting together a new syllabus featuring both these Norton editions for a course in which we will look at Chekhov's prose fiction and drama from a variety of perspectives. In a mixed classroom – graduate and undergraduate students, Russian majors and interested literature students – the opportunity to assign primary and secondary works, to discuss translation approaches, and to compare stories and plays is an exciting one. My students will benefit from Popkin's professional eye and careful crafting of this wonderful new classroom tool.

¹ Messud, "Chekhov and Aspiring Writers," in Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin, *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon* (Slavica 2007) 169.

² Quoted in Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *The Portable Chekhov* (1947) (New York: Penguin, 1977).

³ See, for example, many of the essays in *Chekhov the Immigrant*, as well as Carol Apollonio, "Gained in Translation: Chekhov's 'Lady,'" *Chekhov for the 21st Century* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2012) 281-298.

⁴ <http://books.wnorton.com/books/college-subject.aspx?id=4294983320>

⁵ The newest Norton editions have more extensive footnotes than ever. They identify culture-specific details from Russian history and literature, but also from world literature and history. Using the new Norton *Brothers Karamazov* this year I found myself excessively distracted by footnotes; I look forward to getting student feedback on the usefulness of Popkin's notes.

⁶ See his justification of this idea and how it matters in Laurence Senelick, "Seeing Chekhov Whole," *Chekhov the Immigrant* 69-82.

Dancing in the Vicious Circle: The Provincial Town in

Karen Shakhnazarov's *Ward No. 6*⁷

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The Eternal Ward No. 6

In his *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*, Mikhail Bakhtin describes the chronotope of provincial towns thus:

The petty-bourgeois provincial town with its stagnant life is a very widespread setting for nineteenth-century novels. [...] Such towns are the locus for cyclical everyday time. Here there are no events, only “doings” that constantly repeat themselves. Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles: the circle of the day, of the week, of the month, of a person’s entire life. Day in, day out the same round of activities are repeated, the same topics of conversations, the same words and so forth. In this type of time people eat, drink, sleep, have wives, mistresses (casual affairs), involve themselves in petty intrigues, sit in their shops or offices, play cards, gossip. This is commonplace, philistine, cyclical everyday time. It is familiar to us in many variants in Gogol, Turgenev, Gleb Uspenskii, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Chekhov.⁸

The nameless provincial town depicted in Chekhov’s novella “Ward No. 6,” a story about a doctor who winds up a patient locked in his own hospital,

⁷ A version of this paper was first presented at the ASEES annual conference in Boston, 2013. I cite the film’s title in italics and place the story’s title between quotation marks. In all other cases the ward is considered a location and is treated as a proper noun

⁸ Bakhtin M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, 247-48.

seems to fit perfectly this description. Consider some representative characterizations of this town as articulated by the novella's protagonist, Andrei Efimych Ragin, which are carefully preserved in Shakhnazarov's adaptation of this work:

Not looking at anyone and speaking in a low voice, Andrei Efimych began to say what a pity, what a terrible pity it was that the townspeople should waste their vital energy, their hearts, and their minds on cards and gossip, and should have neither the power nor the inclination to spend their time in interesting conversation and reading [...]⁹

My illness consists solely in the fact that in twenty years I have found only one intelligent man in the whole town, and he is mad. (275)

Importantly for our topic, one of Ragin's observations establishes a metonymic relationship between Ward No. 6 and a provincial town: "Andrei Efimych knows that, with modern tastes and views, an abomination such as Ward No. 6 is only possible 150 miles from the nearest railway in a little town where the mayor and all the town councilmen are half-illiterate tradesmen [...]; in any other place the public and the newspapers would long ago have ripped this little Bastille to shreds" (252).

There is, however, an interesting peculiarity in the spatial design of the story. Although the protagonist himself makes a clear distinction

⁹ Trans. Constance Garnett, with revisions by Cathy Popkin. *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories. A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. Cathy Popkin. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 265. Additional references to this story are provided in the text.

between his “wretched” town and the more civilized parts of Russia, the story itself, more precisely, Ragin’s trip to Moscow and Warsaw, does very little to prove this point. Even while leaving the physical space of a provincial town, the protagonist remains under its spell (that is, under the spell of Ward No. 6), thanks to the overwhelming presence of *poshlost*’ embodied in his “friend” Mikhail Aver’ianych. Once again, anticipating my discussion of the movie, I shall note that Shakhnazarov is faithful to Chekhov in his “deconstruction” of the opposition between the capital and the provinces: his Moscow is an extension of a provincial town—a more modernized and much more shameless one, to be sure—rather than its spiritual alternative.

Similarly, Ragin’s personal case (his role reversal from a doctor in charge of Ward No. 6 to its patient without any rights) can be viewed in much broader terms. It is not accidental, for example, that toward the end of the story, the protagonist casts his personal case into existential terms: his situation is that of human beings in general, regardless of social status or general style of life (these words are also rendered in the movie):

There are few men who at the end of their lives do not experience what I am experiencing now. When you are told that you have something such as diseased kidneys or an enlarged heart, and you begin being treated for it, or are told you are mad or a criminal—that is, in a word, when people suddenly turn their attention to you—you

may be sure you are caught in a vicious circle from which you will never escape. You will try to escape and make things worse. You had better give in, for no human efforts can save you. (275)

All this accounts for the symbolic importance immediately attributed to this story (the image of Ward No. 6, in particular) by some of Chekhov's insightful readers. Consider, for example, what is arguably the most famous response from Chekhov's older contemporary, the great writer Nikolai Leskov: "Ward No. 6 is everywhere. It is Russia... Chekhov himself didn't mean it in the way he wrote it (he told me this), and yet it is so. His Ward is Rus!"¹⁰ Another sensitive reader—in this case, Chekhov's younger contemporary, Vladimir Ul'ianov (Lenin)—responded to this story in an equally emotional and even more personal way: "When I finished reading this story yesterday evening, I became downright terrified. I couldn't remain in my room; I got up and left. I felt just as though I were locked up in Ward No. 6."¹¹

The undying relevance of "Ward No. 6" in the context of Russian/Soviet life is proven by numerous accounts of how the text has been perceived over time. Characteristically, Anna Akhmatova, who famously (or rather, infamously) disliked Chekhov, made a telling exception for "Ward

¹⁰ Qtd. in *Primechaniia* to "Ward No. 6" in Chekhov, A. P. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 30 volumes. *Sochineniia*. v. 8. Moscow: Nauka, 1977, p. 458. Translations from secondary sources are by Emily Grelle.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

No. 6”: in her conversation with Isaiah Berlin, she noted that “at least in ‘Ward No. 6,’ Chekhov accurately described her own situation and the situation of many others.”¹² Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn saw this story as a prophecy of “the future Soviet psychiatric hospitals” (*psikhushki*),¹³ meaning, of course, “punitive psychiatry” practiced to punish political opponents (dissidents) during the times of “stagnation.”

Moving from the Soviet period to modern Russia, I will restrict myself to one relatively recent source, a blog post written by a political observer Leonid Radzikhovskii titled “Ward No. 6.” This post was published on the “Echo of Moscow” website in 2011, right after Platon Lebedev, the closest associate of Mikhail Khodorkovskii, was once again denied a pardon. Proclaiming that the decision regarding the “Lebedev case” was “anticipated, hopeless, meaningless, petty, malicious, absurd and inevitable,” Radzikhovskii cites a scene from Chekhov’s novella, in which, locked in the ward, Ragin is hopelessly trying to “get out.” Then, after recounting Lenin’s reaction to this story, Radzikhovskii concludes on a quite fatalistic note: “Vladimir Il’ich was strong—not like Andrei Efimych, or Ivan Dmitrich. He

¹² *Vospominaniia ob Anne Aknmatovoi*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1991, p. 450.

¹³ Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. “Okunaias’ v Chekhova.” See http://magazines.russ.ru:81/novy_i_mi/1998/10/solg.html

broke Ward No. 6, and built in its place Ward No. 666. Nothing else is built in this country, and if it is built, then it doesn't stand.”¹⁴

Based on these representative examples, one can see how effortlessly Chekhov's text transcends a particular historical period, extending from the times of Imperial Russia to the Soviet (Stalinist, Brezhnevian) and post-Soviet periods. Moreover, it appears that this story and its title image of Ward No. 6 have long transcended the realm of literature and become a manifestation of the darkest, most unbearable aspects of Russian life itself, the ones that, regardless of any social changes and cultural developments, remain intact. In his movie, Karen Shakhnazarov adapts for the screen not just Chekhov's text per se, but also the vision of Russian reality that it has generated from the time of its publication up to now—the vision of Ward No. 6 as a microcosm of Russia/Rus.

“Smearing” It over Five Centuries

As a work of cinema, Shakhnazarov's *Ward No. 6* speaks in several languages simultaneously. In her extended and engaging analysis of the movie, Yana Meerson calls it a “cinematic paratext” (“cinematic potpourri”)

¹⁴ See <http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/radzihovski/797254-echo/>

that “employs a variety of today’s cutting-edge cinematic devices,” such as “interviews with the patients of Nikolo-Poshekhonskii asylum, mockumentary footage of the fictional characters made with a handheld camera, and scenes a la silent movies.”¹⁵ An overlap of these languages creates a very idiosyncratic world, which is both real and surreal, contemporary and timeless.

The movie opens with a series of interviews conducted at the mental asylum. The camera moves from one patient to another. Each of them responds to questions about their backgrounds, dreams, etc. These interviews imbue the movie with a non-fictional, documentary air. Thus when the next “hospital” sequence starts with a doctor speaking to the camera, it isn’t immediately clear that he is an actor (Evgenii Stychkin) playing the role of Dr. Khobotov—a character created by Chekhov. Similarly, when the camera first lands on another Chekhov character, Ivan Dmitrich Gromov (Aleksei Vertkov), he is indistinguishable from other real life patients.

By reinforcing the non-fictional nature of his work, the director doesn’t let us forget that we are dealing with a cultural artifact. He does this,

¹⁵ Meerzon, Yana. “Interrogating the Real: Chekhov’s Cinema of Verbatim. ‘Ward Number Six’ in Karen Shakhnazarov’s 2009 Film Adaptation.” J. Douglas Clayton and Yana Meerzon, eds. *Adapting Chekhov: The Text and its Mutations*. New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 276.

in particular, through his use of the mockumentary form, the content of which is heavily reliant upon Chekhov's text, but sometimes offers small but consequential alterations. For example, the text provides some information on Ragin's predecessor, the nameless "old" doctor "of whom people declared that he secretly sold the hospital alcohol and kept a regular harem of nurses and female patients" (244). In the movie, we see this character himself (played by Aleksei Zharkov) repeating these accusations in his real time "documentary" interview. Tellingly, he does it in a matter-of-fact and unforced manner, apparently without expressing any feelings of regret or shame. Similarly, the narrator's characterization of Dr. Khobotov ("He regards his colleague [Andrei Efimych] as a sly old rascal, suspects him of being a man of large means, and secretly envies him. He would be very glad to take his post," 253) is also transferred to the screen almost verbatim. It is, however, presented to us as part of this character's "interview," which is also uttered in a matter-of-fact and emotionless tone. Such examples add a surreal quality (or, to put it otherwise, a tinge of theatricality) to the movie as a whole and to the documentary level.

Perhaps the director intended to create a cinematic world in which the very borderline between the real and the surreal/the absurd is blurred.

Indeed, what from a common sense perspective could be considered as

surreal, grotesque, or absurd (the monastery turned into a mental asylum, a doctor who shamelessly speaks to the camera of his excessive misdeeds, etc.) reveals itself in this movie as just the “normal” reality of a Russian provincial town. In this context, one is tempted to add a meta-poetic dimension to the brief verbal exchange between Dr. Khobotov and one of his mental patients, a “genius” Igor Iakovlevich whose paintings are hung on the asylum’s walls: “—Are you an artist-avant-gardist?—No, I’m a realist.”

A similar interrelationship exists in the opposition between the timeless and the contemporary. “We tried to immerse Chekhov’s plot in today’s reality,” explains Shakhnazarov, regarding his choice to transfer the events of Chekhov’s story from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st (the action takes place in 2007).¹⁶ The signs of this reality are numerous, especially in the way the movie depicts Moscow. The visual image of this Moscow is defined by traffic jams, flashy storefront displays, strip clubs, and casinos. Correspondingly, when Ragin (Vladimir Il’in) is “interrogated” by his supervisors, one of them recalls his vacation in Antalya, a Turkish resort popular in post-Soviet Russia. Moreover, the overall characterization of the protagonist is historically precise and

¹⁶ Qtd. in Meerzon, p. 286.

particular: his misery is emblematic of that of the “Thaw”-intelligentsia that has been alienated and marginalized in a new Russia (the pictures of Hemingway and Vladimir Vysotskii on the walls of Ragin’s apartment—his icons, as it were—speak eloquently of his belonging to this generation)

On the other hand, all signs of modernity notwithstanding, one can agree with Dmitrii Bykov who claims that rather than “carrying the plot over into the present,” Shakhnazarov “smeared it over the last five centuries of Russian history.”¹⁷ The very choice of the ancient monastery turned into a mental asylum as the movie’s key setting produces an aura of timelessness and overt symbolism. The timeless and the timely meet each other in one of the movie’s first scenes, which takes place in 1606 and depicts the founding of the Nikolo-Poshekhonskii monastery by the grey-haired monk Varlaam and two young nuns silently walking through a swampy wilderness.

A Happy Ending?

From 1606 to a modern day Moscow, from the monastery founded on the swamp to a strip club—what dizzying and striking contrasts! However, the movie is also preoccupied with continuity. Social changes are palpable;

¹⁷ See <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/1762281.html>

but the “order” and the basics of life remain the same. A manifestation of this “sameness” is Shakhnazarov’s casting: the same actor plays the ancient monk Varlaam and the ward’s current caretaker, Nikita. Such a choice can be easily justified: after all, the monastery *is* transformed into a mental asylum, so it is only logical that a modern reincarnation of the monk is attached to a modern reincarnation of the monastery. For a reader of Chekhov, however, this decision is rather shocking. It’s not by chance that Nikita is the very first character introduced in the story: he is an embodiment of the cruelty and abuse constitutive of Ward No. 6 (according to the narrator, he is one of those people who “like order better than anything in the world and are therefore convinced that *they* [the patients] must be beaten,” 235). Compared to the Nikita of Chekhov’s text, the image of Nikita in the movie is no less severe. Although his “beatings” are not as graphic as in the story and happen behind the screen, there is little doubt that he is willing to do anything to preserve “order” as he understands it.

But there is also another reincarnation of even greater importance. The movie’s climactic scene is that of the Christmas party in the mental asylum. A young patient who invites Ragin (now a mental patient) to dance is none other than one of the nuns we previously saw with Varlaam. Even more intriguingly, this nun is associated with Chekhov’s story’s most

striking yet frequently neglected poetic image: that of a “herd of deer, extraordinarily beautiful and graceful” that Ragin sees in a hallucination right before his death. In the movie, these deer appear as part of the tangible world in the scene with Varlaam and the two nuns. In a close-up, we see one of these nuns (the one who will later approach Ragin) stop and look at the deer. Thus, the reincarnation of the nun brings to the gloomy and suffocating world of *Ward No. 6* the idea of an undying sanctity, spaciousness, and beauty. As Shakhnazarov himself says in explanation of this scene, “the disbelieving Dr. Ragin is granted mercy for his suffering.”¹⁸ Along these lines, some critics see the movie’s finale as illuminating and believe that it reinstates the necessity of faith, “no matter how absurd it may be.”¹⁹ Indeed, even the ever-depressed and ever-silent protagonist (who apparently lost his speech after the stroke caused by Nikita’s beatings) finally responds to his dance partner with some kind of a reconciliatory smile.

However, when accepting this hopeful interpretation, one should not forget that the Christmas party is closely supervised by Nikita/Varlaam. It goes without saying that after the party is over, all of the patients, including, of course, the reincarnation of the nun, will be returned to their wards, with no opportunity ever to realize the dreams they revealed previously in the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Meerson, p. 285.

documentary footage and no hope to ever “get out.” In the shot that immediately follows the Christmas party, we see the panoramic view of the monastery surrounded by darkness. With the golden cupola reaching to the sky and an empty expanse of snowy space in front of the monastery, the view is beautiful and calm. On the other hand, the audible howling of the wind seems somewhat overbearing, especially if one recalls that behind the walls of the monastery there is Ward No. 6.

In my view, the finale is left deliberately unsettling and ambiguous. An interesting question is whether this ambiguity is in accordance with Chekhov’s own position and artistic style. After all, as Donald Rayfield aptly summarizes, Chekhov is “the most subtle of Russian writers, and one who appears capable of holding two opposite views and having two opposite intentions simultaneously.”²⁰ The “subtle” and “elusive” Chekhov, however, could also be clear and direct. The movie version of *Nikita* is likely influenced by another character besides his predecessor in Chekhov’s story: the assistant doctor, Sergei Sergeich, who is characterized by the narrator as “religious”. “The icon was put up at his expense; at his instructions one of the patients reads an akathist aloud in the consulting room on Sundays, and

²⁰ Rayfield, Donald. *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chekhov’s Prose and Drama*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979, vii. This statement echoes Aleksandr Chudakov’s conclusion that Chekhov allows for the possibility that two contradictory world views can coexist (See his *Mir Chekhova: Vozniknovenie i utverzdenie*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1986, p. 360)

after the reading Sergei Sergeich himself goes through the wards with a censer and burns incense” (246). Chekhov’s attitude toward this character (and this kind of religiosity, which is capable of reconciling itself with Ward No. 6), is anything but ambiguous. For him, Ward No. 6 is an absolute and unredeemable evil. The moment of belated epiphany experienced by the literary Ragin has to do not with mercy “granted” to him by means of an external intervention, but with his realization of his own personal responsibility for this evil:

He bit the pillow from pain and clenched his teeth, and all at once through the chaos in his brain there flashed the terrible unbearable thought that these people, who seemed now like black shadows in the moonlight, had to endure this same pain day after day for years. How could it have happened that for more than twenty years he had not known it and had refused to know it? He had known nothing of pain, he’d had no conception of it, so he was not to blame, but his conscience, as unyielding and as brutal as Nikita, made him turn cold from the crown of his head to his heels. (280)

On the next day, Chekhov’s protagonist dies. The movie’s Ragin remains alive. Considering that he is locked in Ward No. 6, this is hardly a happy ending (not to mention that in Shakhnazarov’s world of reincarnations, death loses its finality). In Chekhov’s world, Ward No. 6 still can—and should—be challenged: it is symptomatic that the protagonist’s conscience reveals itself as a real, physical force (“conscience, as unyielding and as brutal as Nikita”). The movie adds a fatalistic aura to the eternal

image of Ward No. 6 by establishing this Ward as an indispensable part of the Russian landscape. No matter what happens, at the end there is a new reincarnation of Ward No. 6 in the same sort of provincial town. Apparently, there is no way out of Ragin's "vicious" circle. At least, while caught in it, one can have one's dance at the Christmas party.

Karl D. Kramer, 1934–2014

A specialist on Anton Chekhov who shared with his subject a great feel for irony and a very wry sense of humor, Karl Kramer also had that which, according to Chekhov, was a sine qua non for a successful and interesting life: talent. He had talent as a scholar, talent as a teacher, talent as a leader, and talent as a friend. His colleagues, his former students, and all who knew him are deeply mourning his loss.

Karl was a true northwesterner. Born and raised in Seattle, Karl earned all his degrees—BA (English, 1955), MA (comparative literature, 1957), and PhD (comparative literature, 1964)—at the University of Washington. As a participant in one of the first Cold War academic exchanges in the Soviet Union, Karl attended Moscow State University as a doctoral candidate in 1959–60. He left Seattle for his initial academic appointments at Northwestern University (1961–65) and later the University of Michigan (1965–70), where he received tenure. But by 1970 he was back at the University of Washington, where he would teach jointly in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Department of Comparative Literature until his retirement in 1999. For ten years—from 1988 to 1998—Karl chaired the Slavic department. Some of these were tumultuous years, as when the department, quite inexplicably, was slated for elimination in 1994. Under his quiet but shrewd and competent leadership, the department fought for close to

two years and finally emerged victorious, having retained its entire faculty and all its degree programs.

Karl's scholarship on Chekhov made him one of the most sought-after authorities on the writer. His works on Chekhov included two books—*The Chameleon and the Dreams: The Image of Reality in Chekhov's Stories* (1970) and *Chekhov's Major Plays: Ivanov, Uncle Vanya, and the Three Sisters*, translated with Margaret Booker (1996)—as well as numerous articles, including some in the Norton Critical Editions series. From 1979 to 1981 he served on the editorial board of *Slavic Review*.

Equally important was Karl's public scholarship. He started serving as a consultant on stagings of Chekhov's plays in 1977, when he helped Megs (Margaret) Booker, the artistic director of Seattle's Intiman Theater, in her staging of *Three Sisters*. In conjunction with this production, Karl also acted as panel leader in post-performance discussions with the audience. In 1980, granting Booker's wish, he provided her and the Intiman cast with a new translation of *The Cherry Orchard*, which they staged in 1980. A third Chekhov play, *The Seagull*, again with Karl's active participation, was staged in 1983. After Booker left, two years later, Karl continued to work with artistic directors at Intiman as well as ACT (A Contemporary Theater) and Seattle Repertory Theater whenever they staged Chekhov. He also flew to Connecticut, where Booker was now artistic director at the Hartman Theater in Stamford, whenever she staged Chekhov there. His familiarity with putting on Chekhov's plays led him to frequently admonish his students to remember that a play is not meant to be read but to be staged. He often described staging a play as "somewhat analogous to solving a Sudoku," which was, in fact, one of his hobbies. "The author gives us a certain amount of information," he would say, "and from that the actors are expected to interpolate the rest."

Karl also brought Chekhov's plays to less traditional audiences. In the late 1980s and through the 1990s he was instrumental in organizing an outreach program, Chekhov Seen and Unseen, which was funded by the Washington Commission for the Humanities. It featured him, a director, and two actors who traveled across the state, in settings ranging from community colleges to prisons, presenting scenes and discussions of Chekhov.

Those who participated with him in this project could not say enough about his “splendid work,” the “keen interest” he took in the scene rehearsals, and his overall support of directors and actors, which, they remarked, “added much of the fun and growth” to them all.

Karl’s other talent was indeed teaching. He related exceedingly well to students not only because he was so knowledgeable but also because he refused to take himself too seriously. In a 2011 interview with his former student and close friend Professor Ron LeBlanc, now at the University of New Hampshire, for the UW Slavic newsletter, Karl reminisced about “a rather large undergraduate course” he taught in early years, “when he was—in his words—‘ranting on’ about some supposedly major issue in Tolstoy. . . . He was about to say something that he obviously considered of enormous importance, when he looked out at the students: all he could see in front of him were pencils and pens poised to catch the Delphic oracle’s overwhelmingly significant comment, and he started giggling.”

Karl died on 19 February 2014 and former students offered poignant tributes to him. “It was an exceptional academic adventure to immerse myself in Chekhov for an entire semester and to participate in Karl’s seminar and absorb his thoughts about our current readings,” wrote one. “He was a wonderful, kind, wise, droll human being and teacher.” “I will never forget,” wrote another, “how he opened my mind to *Anna Karenina*. I learned to love *Anna Karenina* through his excellent guidance.” Still another offered a perfect vignette of Karl in a classroom in the late 1980s: “I can see Professor Kramer as clear as day, delivering one of his many illuminating and amusing lectures on Russian Lit. (Chekhov lectures being my favorite). In a Thomson Hall classroom, he’d sit on one of those tables at the head of class, his arms at his side, and after posing a probing question, with a subtle smile he’d wait quietly, slightly swinging his legs (which for a man of his stature were at least 4 inches off the floor) until someone could offer insight. Forever gentle, may his sweet soul rest in peace.”

Karl's wife, Doreen, his partner since his student years, survived Karl by just ten days. They left behind a daughter, Jennifer, her husband, Jim, and two grandsons. A memorial service for Karl was held at the University of Washington Club on 5 April 2014.

Galya Diment

University of Washington, Seattle April 2014

THREE SISTERS, OR

TAKING A CHANCE ON LOVE

KARL D. KRAMER

For all the talk about *Three Sisters*, it is still extraordinarily difficult to determine exactly what the play is about. One prominent school places the emphasis on the sisters as inevitably ruined creatures. Beverly Hahn, for instance, speaks of the “inbuilt momentum towards destruction” in the sisters’ world.ⁱ Another commentator claims that we cannot avoid contrasting the success of Natasha and Protopopov with the failures of the sisters.ⁱⁱ We might do well to examine just what the first pair do achieve: a house, an affair, and a businesslike manipulation of the professional positions of the others. It would, of course, be absurd, to suggest that the sisters have in some way failed because they do not aspire to such heights of crass

avarice as Natasha and Protopopov. But there is still the claim that the sisters continually yearn for a quality of life that they do not possess, and yet do very little, if anything, to make their dreams come true. Chekhov invited this response by initiating the to Moscow line. That goal remains unattained, while the desires of Natasha and Protopopov are richly fulfilled. This seems to present an opposition between those who get what they want and those who don't, as if the goals were equivalent, but abilities not. Natasha wants the big house on the hill and a union with the man who runs things in town—the boss. These may be attainable prizes, and certainly Natasha does wrestle their home away from the sisters, but the sisters never really enter into combat with her over such issues. If they did, they would themselves be transformed into first-class Natashas, an extremely dubious achievement at best. Natasha sees living in the big house at the top of the hill as an end in itself. The sisters' aspirations go considerably beyond this. Moscow as destination is equally illusory. Natasha, incidentally, isn't even up to that aspiration on the fanciful scale; she's quite content with a good view in a city much like Perm. The questions the sisters seek answers to are considerably more basic: how to seize and properly evaluate one's own experience, how to cope with experience, and when all one's delusions have been cast aside, how to go on somehow from there. The particular area of experience around which the majority of the action revolves is the question of love. The stance of nearly every character is determined by his ability to establish a close relationship with another. Love gone awry is in most instances the pattern. Ol'ga seems to have the least chance of finding a mate—a situation to which she has become largely reconciled, though in Act I she chides Masha for failing to value the man she does have. Kulygin himself—aware of the failure of his own marriage—pathetically suggests to Ol'ga in the third act that if he hadn't married Masha, he would have married her. Irina ultimately admits that her desire to reach Moscow is directly connected with her desire to find her true love. Masha is the only one of the sisters who does at least temporarily find real love, and in this

sense her experience is the standard against which the experience of nearly all the other characters is to be measured. Chebutykin once loved their mother but has long since lost that love, and with it his involvement in actual experience. Solënyi, on the other hand, capitalizes on his inability to inspire love by deliberately creating hostile relationships. But to determine the structure of the play as a whole and the way in which the experience depicted adds up to a statement about human capabilities, we must look in considerably more detail at the variety of responses to love among the main characters.

It is Andrei's fate to make the most ghastly miscalculation of them all in believing he loves Natasha. How could he, an educated man, brought up in the same environment as his sisters, believe he has fallen in love with her? Masha in the first act discounts the possibility that he could be serious about her. The answer seems to lie in a recognition that he has been constantly living under constant pressures he can't bear. "Father . . . oppressed us with education. . . . I grew fat in one year after he died," he tells Vershinin.ⁱⁱⁱ He has been preparing for a university career, bowing to his father's wishes—a course he abandons immediately after his marriage. Since the father's death, Andrei has been under constant pressure from his sisters to deliver them from this provincial town. His love for Natasha is simply a means of escaping these various responsibilities, which have been thrust upon him. But a relationship based on such motivation becomes a trap from which Andrei desperately wishes to escape. In some dialogue that Chekhov eventually deleted from the play, Andrei dreams of losing all his money, being deserted by his wife, running back to his sisters, crying, "I'm saved! I'm saved!"^{iv} In the finished play, Andrei and Chebutykin argue about the efficacy of marriage, Andrei maintaining it is to be avoided, Chebutykin asserting loneliness is worse. But by the end of the play, even Chebutykin admits that the best course for Andrei is to leave, "leave and keep going, don't ever look back" (XI, 295). This is, indeed, the course Chebutykin himself adopts at the end of the play. Andrei's

escape from responsibility through love thus seems to lead only to an entrapment from which he would be only too happy to flee by the end of the play. His predicament stems not so much from Natasha's nature as from his own desire to avoid experience by hiding behind a very illusory kind of love.

Chebutykin's problems turn equally on love. He had at one time known a real love for the sisters' mother. That has long been in the past, but the only vaguely positive way he can deal with immediate experience is by the illusion that this love can be sustained through his relationship with the sisters, particularly Irina. His other protective screen is his growing insistence that nothing and nobody really exists and that therefore nothing matters. In his first appearance at stage center, he is talking sheer nonsense about a remedy for baldness and duly noting down this trivia. Shortly thereafter in Act I he displays his tender—almost sentimental—affection for Irina by presenting her with a silver samovar on her name day. The fact that the silver samovar is the traditional gift on the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary surely suggests that he is honoring the memory of the woman he loved and is exploiting the occasion of Irina's name day for this purpose. During the first two acts he alternates between these two poles—the attempt to sustain a lost love and an abiding interest in trivia. The chief sign of the latter is his constant reading of old newspapers, a device for distracting himself from the actuality of the present moment.

In Act III his failure to handle his experience reaches a crisis when, drunk, realizing he is responsible for the death of a woman who was under his care, he retreats into a pretense that nothing and nobody exists. It may be a measure of his feeling that he so retreats, but I would suggest that he associates this recent death with that death in the past of the woman he loved. Death has denied him his love, and the recent event vividly reminds him of his own earlier loss. Within moments of this breakdown he smashes the clock that had belonged to the sisters' mother. This may of course suggest that he is trying to destroy time itself, which separates him from his love, but

he is also deliberately destroying a material object that belonged to her; it may also be a gesture of denial—a denial that his love ever existed. He tries to cover this by suggesting that perhaps there was no clock to break, and he accuses the others of refusing to see that Natasha and Protopopov are having an affair. The assumption is that if others don't see what's right before their eyes, why shouldn't Chebutykin refuse to recognize anything in the world that may hurt him? In any case, what comes out of this episode is our discovery that Chebutykin cannot deal with a death that takes away his love. His final stance in the play—“The baron is a fine fellow, but one baron more or less, what difference does it make?” (XI, 294)—is a pathetic indication of the lengths he is driven to in trying to cope with a love long since lost.

Solënyi is the only character in the play who turns away from love—turns away so completely that he commits himself to murder instead. He has an uncanny knack for turning a situation that is initially friendly into one of enmity. In Act II Tuzenbakh attempts to bury the hatchet with Solënyi, who immediately denies that there is any animus between them, thus provoking an argument and indirectly testifying to the correctness of Tuzenbakh's view of their relationship. Their discussion ends with Solënyi's “Do not be angry, Aleko” (XI, 271), which distorts Tuzenbakh's friendly overtures into a rivalry, presumably over Irina. Dissatisfied in his exchange with Tuzenbakh, Solënyi seizes upon the first opportunity for further quarrel. Chebutykin enters, regaling Irina with an account of a dinner given in his honor. He is particularly pleased with the *chekhartma* (lamb). Solënyi insists that *cheremsha* (an onion) is totally disagreeable. The pointless argument ends with a victory on Chebutykin's side when he says: “You've never been to the Caucasus and have never eaten *chekhartma*” (XI, 271). Chebutykin is the clear victor here, because Solënyi prides himself on being a reincarnation of Lermontov, the nineteenth-century poet whose setting is regularly the Caucasus Mountains. To suggest that Solënyi has never been there totally undercuts his stance as a hero in the Lermontov mold.

Having lost the argument with Chebutykin, Solënyi himself proceeds to avenge himself in the best Lermontov tradition by picking a quarrel with Andrei over the number of universities in Moscow.

It is true that he declares his love for Irina toward the close of Act II, but one senses that he expected a cool reception from her. In any case, the scene ends with what seems to be Solënyi's real message—that he will brook no rivals. To put it another way, Solënyi employs his declaration of love to establish a hostile relation with Tuzenbakh. We might also view the episode as a parody of the opening scene in Act II, where Vershinin declares his very real love to Masha. The initial exchange between Masha and Solënyi in the first act suggests that we are to view them as polar extremes in some sense. Solënyi's first speech implies a $1 + 1 = 3$ equation: "With one hand I can lift only fifty-five pounds, but with two hands I can lift a hundred and eighty—two hundred, even. From that I deduce that two men aren't twice as strong, they're three times as strong as one man . . . or even stronger . . ." (XI, 244). Masha's opening speech implies a retort to Solënyi: "In the old days, when Father was alive, there'd be thirty or forty officers here on our name days, there was lots of noise, but today there's a man and a half . . ." (XI, 247). In view of the fact that the only officers present are Solënyi, Tuzenbakh, and Chebutykin, Masha's equation is apparently $3 = 1.5$. Solënyi immediately picks up on this banter, if that's what it is, and compares one man philosophizing with two women trying to philosophize, the latter being equal to sucking one's thumb. Masha thereupon cuts him off: "And what is that supposed to mean, you terribly dreadful man?" (XI, 247). This exchange between Masha and Solënyi in the opening moments of *Three Sisters* is a vitally important one because, on the question of love, they represent polar extremes within the play: Masha is willing to take a chance on love; Solënyi can only capitalize on love as a pretense for a duel.

The wooing scenes between Vershinin and Masha are masterpieces in Chekhov's whimsical art. The process is initiated in the first act as Ol'ga and Irina laugh together over recollections of

Moscow. It is Masha who suddenly pins down a real moment of connection in their lives when she recalls that they used to tease Vershinin as the lovesick major. In the first of his rather protracted philosophical speeches, Vershinin offers a justification for existence in response to Masha's statement that the sisters' lives will go unnoticed. She immediately responds to his attention by announcing she'll stay to lunch after all. This exchange initiates that special relationship between them. Shortly after this, Vershinin offers Masha another view with which she must be wholly in sympathy: ". . . if I were to begin life over again, I wouldn't get married. . . . No! No!" (XI, 254). This is the precise moment Chekhov chooses for Kulygin's entrance.

In Act II, Vershinin's speech on what life will be like in two or three hundred years is clearly directed toward Masha; indeed, his philosophical ramblings are primarily a way of wooing her. She understands this and laughs softly during his speech. Tuzenbakh is clearly not privy to this particular form of lovemaking. He believes he is engaged in a serious discussion with Vershinin and cannot understand why Masha is laughing. Vershinin, of course, has no reason to ask. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that in his musings about the future Vershinin almost never responds to Tuzenbakh's attempts to join in the discussion. Indeed, Chekhov revised the text of *Three Sisters* at a number of points to eliminate Vershinin's responses to Tuzenbakh's remarks.^v In the first act Tuzenbakh announces Vershinin's arrival to the assembled company; Vershinin ignores the introduction and proceeds to identify himself by name. In his first monologue on the future, Vershinin dismisses Tuzenbakh's attempt to enter the discussion with a curt "Yes, yes, of course" (XI, 251). In the musings about life in two or three hundred years in Act II, Vershinin suggests the theme and Tuzenbakh offers his opinion about the future. Vershinin is apparently ruminating on his own views as Tuzenbakh speaks—the stage direction reads: "*After a moment's thought*" (XI, 266). His subsequent remarks bear no relation to Tuzenbakh's; we get the distinct impression that Vershinin has not

the slightest interest in a debate, thus emphasizing the real motive for his musings, to converse indirectly with Masha. The ostensible discussion continues with Masha's observations on the necessity for meaning in life:

It seems to me a man must believe, or search for some belief, or else his life is empty, empty. . . . To live and not know why the cranes fly, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky. . . . Either you know what you're living for, or else it's all nonsense, hocus-pocus.
(XI, 267)

In effect, her words confirm her need for the kind of reassurance Vershinin has been offering her, that what man is presently doing is creating the possibility for future happiness and understanding. Vershinin's next line—"Still it's a pity our youth has passed" (XI, 267)—is almost a reproach to Masha: since youth has passed and each of them is set in his respective relationship, their mutual happiness is impossible for any protracted period of time. Masha greets his reproval with the famous line from Gogol': "It's dull in this world, gentlemen." Tuzenbakh, not comprehending the private dialogue, answers with a paraphrase of Masha's reference to Gogol', expressing his frustration over a conversation he was never meant to follow. Chebutykin does apparently follow at least the drift of the conversation—love—as he notes that Balzac was married in Berdichev. Irina, either consciously or unconsciously, picks up on this drift as she repeats Chebutykin's observation. Tuzenbakh, now attentive to one strand in the discussion—what can we do with our lives?—announces he's leaving the service. Having argued that life will always be pretty much the same, he now asserts that he will change the direction of his own. This is an important aspect of that contradiction of position so characteristic of Tuzenbakh and Vershinin. It is highly ironic that Vershinin consistently denies there is any happiness for us now, while achieving at least a momentary

happiness with Masha. Tuzenbakh, on the other hand, argues that he is happy right now, in his love for Irina, while he is denied any return of that love. Masha, characteristically, disapproves of his determination to change, feeling herself denied any such opportunity.

In the third act, Vershinin's musings on life in the future are a direct response to Masha's arrival on the scene. After Chebutykin's rather shocking references to Natasha having an affair, perhaps partly to distract everyone's attention from the assumption that he and Masha are, too, Vershinin launches into a peroration on what his daughters have yet to go through in their lives. When Masha enters, he almost immediately shifts theme from daughters to life in the future, as though the topic had already become a secret code between them. His musings are intermixed with his laughter and expressions of happiness. Everybody has fallen asleep except Masha and Vershinin, making clear that his philosophizing is a way of talking about love. The episode ends with their strange love duet from Chaikovskii's *Evgenii Onegin*.

Near the end of the third act Masha has her frank talk with her sisters. O'lga refuses to listen; Irina listens most attentively as she presumably longs for a love of her own. Despite Ol'ga's disclaimers, Masha's confession of love brings the sisters closer together than they have been at any point in the play thus far and prepares the way for their final scene of coming together in the finale.

In the fourth act Masha speaks to Chebutykin of her love, implicitly comparing her own position with his at an earlier time:

MASHA: . . . Did you love my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN: Very much.

MASHA: Did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN *after a pause*: That I don't remember any more.

MASHA: Is mine here? That's the way our cook Marfa used to speak of her policeman: mine. Is mine here?

CHEBUTYKIN: Not yet.

MASHA: When you take happiness in snatches, in little pieces, and then lose it as I am, little by little you get coarse, you become furious. . . . (XI, 293)

The ambiguity in Chebutykin's reply to Masha's question about her mother is remarkable. Is he trying to protect the honor of the woman he loved? Did she perhaps not return his love? Or is his reply part of his attempt to deny the past experience itself? We have no way of knowing. Masha's use of "mine" must refer to Vershinin, and Chebutykin so understands it. If he thought she were speaking of her husband, he could not reply "Not yet," for he has just seen Kulygin go in the house. Masha's remarks on happiness contain little joy, and yet she is admitting she has now known love, and the indications are that it will not turn her away from experience as it has Chebutykin. We shall see more of this in the finale.

As far as love is concerned, Irina would seem to be in the best position of the three sisters. She is unattached; two suitors pursue her; and yet she is unhappy because there is an imaginary third lover, whom she associates with Moscow. It is the dream of going to Moscow that animates her in the first act, and although it is not clear why Moscow is so important to her at this point, it does become clear by the end of Act III. Still, there are hints, even in the opening scene, that it is love Irina seeks. When Tuzenbakh reports the arrival of the new battery commander, it is Irina who pricks up her ears, inquiring "Is he old? . . . Is he interesting?" (XI, 244). Her desire to work looks like a second choice, and Tuzenbakh is at his most pathetic as he tries to ingratiate himself with her by sharing her desire for work: "That longing for work, Oh Lord, how well I understand it!" (XI, 245). Tuzenbakh seems to use the work theme to promote his standing with Irina in very much the way Vershinin talks of the future to woo Masha. Irina's cry at the end of Act II—"To Moscow! To Moscow! To Moscow!"—suggests that it is an appeal to love, if we look at the context out of which it arises. Solënyi has just made his rather

ridiculous and thoroughly repulsive declaration of love to her; Vershinin has just returned bearing the news that his wife didn't poison herself after all; Kulygin is unable to find his wife; Natasha has just left with Protopopov; Ol'ga makes her first appearance in the act, complaining of professional responsibilities and of Andrei's gambling losses. Each situation suggests an abortive love relationship, including the absence of a love for Ol'ga. If all this is what provokes Irina's cry, it may well mean she is looking to Moscow for the kind of love that is simply unavailable to her here.

Her association of Moscow with love becomes explicit in the third act when she says: "I always expected we would move to Moscow, and there I would meet my real one. I've dreamed of him, I've loved him. . . . But it seems it was all nonsense, all nonsense . . . (XI, 285). In the final lines of Act III she agrees to marry the baron, but still wants to go to Moscow: ". . . only let's go to Moscow! I beg you, let's go! There's nothing on earth better than Moscow! Let's go, Olia! Let's go! (XI, 288). These words come after Masha's declaration that she loves Vershinin and would seem to suggest that though Irina has agreed to marry Tuzenbakh, she looks forward to finding her real love elsewhere, as Masha has.

Ol'ga has had the least opportunity to find happiness through love, and yet Ol'ga seems to cope with her situation better than the other two. She has very nearly reconciled herself to a single life even at the opening of the play, and during the course of it she expresses her love in an entirely different fashion. We see her love in her readiness to help with both clothing and lodging for those who have been left homeless by the fire; we see it in her comforting Irina in the third act; and in the way she silently acquiesces to Masha's love for Vershinin, as she steps aside to allow them their last moment alone together.

Finally, we must compare the situations at the opening of the play and at its end to gather some measure of just what the intervening experience has meant for the sisters, how it has altered their conceptions of human possibility. Harvey Pitcher has observed

that the fourth act is very nearly an “inversion” of the first.^{vi} He lists any number of actions and situations that occur in Act I and again in altered form in the fourth. He makes a convincing argument for seeing the finale as a negation of most of the positive elements that appeared in the opening, but I think that in addition to such negations, we see a number of positive elements in the finale that invert the hopeless and desperate attitudes of the opening. In one sense, the play moves from both naïve faith and despair to a heightened awareness of possibilities in life and a more solidly rooted ability to endure. At the opening, the sisters are both physically and temporally separated: Ol’ga is primarily oriented to the past as she recollects the death of their father a year ago and comments on how the last four years at the high school have aged her. Irina disclaims any interest in this past, as she remarks to Ol’ga: “Why talk about it?” (XI, 243). She also shares some of Irina’s naïve faith in a future in Moscow, but even Moscow is in part a past orientation; certainly for Ol’ga it must be, since she is the eldest and would have the clearest memory of what their life had been like there. Irina’s Moscow, on the other hand, is the land of the future; she can look only forward to Moscow and to going to work. Masha, who restricts her observations to an occasional whistle, is not particularly concerned in either Ol’ga’s sense of the past or Irina’s hopes for the future; she is, as she sees it, buried in a present without hope. When Ol’ga suggests that Masha can come up to Moscow every summer to visit them, Masha’s only comment is to whistle, as if, knowing her own present, she recognizes Ol’ga’s wishful thinking as a mere whistling in the wind. Perhaps Masha’s only departure from a present orientation is her remark about her mother: ‘Just imagine, I’ve already begun to forget her face. Just as they won’t remember us. They’ll forget” (XI, 250). But even here she seems to exploit both past and future to affirm the worthlessness of present existence. Thus, at the opening the sisters are totally at odds, as they contemplate three different perceptions of reality. Perhaps the only common strain here is their shared dissatisfaction with the present.^{vii} Spatially, there is

some sense of their occupying a restricted area, particularly with Ol'ga, who either sits at her desk correcting papers or walks to and fro about the room. Even Masha seems initially restricted to her couch. Temperamentally, they are also separated from one another here, each involved in her own activity—Ol'ga correcting, Masha reading, Irina lost in thought, their dresses dark blue, black, and white.

Ol'ga's opening speech is full of strands connecting past, present, and future:

Father died exactly a year ago on this very day, the fifth of May, your name day, Irina. It was very cold then, snow was falling. I thought I couldn't bear it, you lay in a dead faint. But a year has passed and we remember it easily; you're wearing a white dress now, your face is radiant. *The clock strikes twelve.* And the clock was striking then. *Pause.* I remember, when they were carrying Father, there was music playing and they fired a volley at the cemetery. (XI, 242-3)

The play opens with the recollection of a death, just as it will end with the news of a death at the present moment. At the same time Ol'ga's recollection is associated with birth; it is also Irina's name day. Ol'ga's reflections next focus on the difficulty of facing the loss of a father whom both Ol'ga and Irina presumably loved, but, as if in anticipation of their stance at the end of the play, Ol'ga notes that they did survive the calamity. In short, Ol'ga's speech is a kind of summary of their reactions to calamitous experience: it is both unendurable and endurable, and calamity itself is mixed with elements of joy. The contrast between the weather a year ago and the weather today ("sunny and bright") underscores a recurrent cycle of anguish and joy. The funeral music of the military band of a year ago will be transformed at the end of the play into music that is played "so gaily, so eagerly, and one so wants to live" (XI, 303).

The process of redressing natural relationships, which were at the very least strained in Act I, gets under way near the end of Act III. First there is Masha, who refused to join in the sisters' conversation at the opening. In Act III she draws the sisters together, although against Ol'ga's better judgment, in her frank discussion of her love for Vershinin. This is followed by Andrei's confession to at least two of his sisters that he is desperately unhappy, which constitutes a considerably more honest response to the family than his rapid departure from the scene as early as possible in Act I. The setting in Act IV is the garden attached to the house. On the one hand, it is true that Natasha dominates the house, but at the same time, if we recall that sense of the sisters' confinement in the living room of Act I, there is a compensatory feeling of openness in Act IV. The garden is unquestionably preferable to the living room now, and one is uncertain whether the sisters have been evicted or liberated — perhaps a combination of the two. The final tableau certainly contrasts the separation the sisters felt in the opening scene with their physical closeness at the end — “*The three sisters stand nestled up to one another*” (XI, 302). But the physical closeness reflects a far more basic sense of unity. Harvey Pitcher has quite justly commented on this scene: “The sisters feel perhaps closer to one another now than they had ever done before.”^{viii} In the departure of the regiment and the death of Tuzenbakh, they give themselves to one another as they have not done earlier. They give themselves to their love for one another and discover a strength in this to endure.

Masha has the first of the sisters' final speeches, and I would like to look at her words, not as they are printed in texts today, but as they appear in Chekhov's original version of the speech, which, unfortunately in my view, has never been restored to the play. This speech was cut at the request of Ol'ga Knipper, who found the lines difficult to speak.^{ix} It would appear that Chekhov silently acquiesced. I've indicated the deleted lines by brackets:

Oh, how the music is playing! They are leaving us, one has really gone, really and forever; and we'll stay here alone to begin our lives anew. I shall live, sisters! We must live. . . . [*Looks upward.* There are migratory birds above us; they have flown every spring and august for thousands of years now, and they don't know why, but they fly and will fly for a long, long time yet, for many thousands of years—until at last God reveals to them his mystery. . . .]^x

The reference to migratory birds connects a series of images that run through the play and that have two reference points for their meaning. The first is the rather familiar metaphor of birds' flight as man's passage through life. Irina is the first to use the image in Act I: "It's as if I were sailing with the wide blue sky over me and great white birds floating along" (XI, 245). Chebutykin picks up on this metaphor in Act IV when he tells Irina: "You have gone on far ahead, I'll never catch up with you. I'm left behind like a migratory bird which has grown old and can't fly. Fly on, my dears, fly on and God be with you" (XI, 291). Chebutykin makes the metaphorical meaning clear here: he may be too old a bird to continue the flight himself, but Irina must of necessity be engaged in her passage through life. Shortly after this Masha refers to the birds, apparently with reference to Vershinin: "When Vershinin comes, let me know. . . . *Walks away.* Migratory birds are leaving already. . . . *Looks upward.* Swans, or geese. . . . My dear ones, my happy ones . . . (XI, 294). Like Chebutykin, Masha here refers to others whose lives go on, but in her final speech her "we must live" is connected with the bird imagery so that it becomes a positive image for her as well; her life—the life of all the sisters—will go on.

There is a second reference point for her speech, however, and that occurs in Act II when Tuzenbakh, as well, invokes the image. It comes in the midst of that scene in which Vershinin muses about the future, as a way of wooing Masha—a scene in which Tuzenbakh is largely left out of the proceedings. He says: "Migratory birds, cranes,

for instance, fly and fly and whatever great thoughts or small may wander through their heads, they'll go on flying, knowing neither where nor why, They fly and will fly whatever philosophers may appear among them; and let them philosophize as much as they like, so long as they go on flying . . . " (XI, 267). Masha's last speech is equally a tribute to Tuzenbakh. In paraphrasing his lines she both acknowledges his conception of experience and reconciles it with her own point of view, that eventually we must have some understanding of why we do what we do. Irina's betrothed—whatever the degree of affection she may have had for him—has just died. Masha has just parted with the man she loves, but she transforms their shared sorrow into a virtual panegyric to Tuzenbakh and finds in it a reason why the sisters must go on living.^{xi} In any case, the sisters have clearly come a long way from that point a year before the play began when death seemed unendurable,

In Ol'ga's final speech she answers that remark of Masha's in Act I—"they'll forget us, too"—when she says: ". . . They'll forget us, forget us, forget our faces, our voices, and how many of us there were, but our sufferings will be transformed into joy for those who live after us, happiness and peace will reign on the earth and they will remember with a kind word and bless those who are living now" (XI, 303). Essentially, she is reiterating Masha's appeal that we must go on living because the experience is worth the effort, and reaffirming that the purpose will be revealed in the future. But whether it is or not, the continuation of living is essential.

The sisters' final speeches are interspersed with Chebutykin's nihilistic observations on the total indifference of the universe to anything that happens. The interchange may be read as an utterly ambivalent attitude toward the nature of experience, or it may be read as a final tribute to the sisters' faith. They have not retreated to Chebutykin's fatalism, though their experience of love has been no more encouraging. The final interchange between Chebutykin and the sisters may suggest not an either/or response to life, but a

measure of their capacity for endurance. After all, love is largely a matter of faith.^{xii}

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NOTES

ⁱ *Chekhov: A Study of the Major Stories and Plays* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), p. 289. Hahn also offers a representative discussion of Natasha's role in ruining the sisters (p. 301).

ⁱⁱ Harvey Pitcher, *The Chekhov Play: A New Interpretation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 123.

ⁱⁱⁱ A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow: Ogiz, 1944-51), XL, 253. Further references to the play will be cited by volume and page number in the text.

^{iv} *Literaturnoe nasledstvo; Chekhov*, ed. V. V. Vinogradov et al. (Moscow: Akademiia nauk, 1960), LXVIII, 69.

^v In *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* two earlier redactions of the play are included (pp. 1-87; see esp., pp. 27, 30, and 41.)

^{vi} *The Chekhov Play*, pp. 119-20.

^{vii} See J. L. Styan, *Chekhov in Performance: A Commentary on the Major Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971), p. 162, for some further comments on the sisters' temporal orientation.

^{viii} *The Chekhov Play*, p. 151.

^{ix} See A. R. Vladimirskaiia's introduction to the two earlier redactions of *Three Sisters* in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, pp. 13-14.

^x *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, p. 86.

^{xi} To delete the majority of Masha's final remarks may be a tribute to Chekhov's admiration, even love, for Ol'ga Knipper, but I see no reason why modern directors need bow to the actress's difficulties. They might well consider restoring this crowning link in the play's bird imagery.

^{xii} Many of the views expressed in this essay have emerged from interchanges between director, actors, and myself during work on a production of *Three Sisters* in Seattle in the summer of 1978 by the Intiman Theatre Company, Margaret Booker, artistic director.