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Editor's Note

In this issue you will find an assortment of goodies. There are reports on three centenary conferences from last year, including the international gathering at Melikhovo. The latter celebration was covered by an able team of reporters led by Carol Flath, and in the extensive summary of papers and events the work of each contributor is marked by his or her initials at the beginning and end of each section. You will also find a discussion by Laurence Senelick of approaches to Chekhovian detail in recent productions of *Uncle Vania*; a short, somewhat abridged appreciation of Chekhov written by a Russian writer towards the end of the Soviet period; reviews by John Freedman of a new biography of Chekhov and a recent Russian production of *The Seagull*; a Peta Tait review of an Australian presentation of *Cherry Orchard*; two book notices about new editions of Chekhov's stories and plays; a select bibliography of important books and articles on Chekhov written over the last few years; and finally, for dessert, the amusing menu for the banquet at last spring's conference in North Carolina.

Chekhov A Century Later: The Centennial Conference in Melikhovo, June 25-29, 2004

Carol Apollonio Flath, with Radislav Lapushin, Douglas Clayton, Irina Gitovich, Leonard Polakiewicz, and Natalia Zhivolupova

On June 25-29, 2004, over eighty scholars, representing some twenty countries, came together at Chekhov's Melikhovo estate outside of Moscow to commemorate the centennial of the author's death. The conference, "Chekhov: A Century Later," was sponsored by Moscow State University and the Chekhov Commission of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and hosted by the Chekhov Museum in Melikhovo. Participants stayed in the nearby "Zvezdochka" children's summer camp resort, and in the evenings were able to enjoy the fresh country air, local flora and fauna, idyllic views of pastureland and lake—in which the occasional scholar was spotted taking a morning dip—and the invigorating spectacle of children at play.

On the evening of June 25, conference participants were treated to a piano concert celebrating the close cultural ties between the Melikhovo Museum and Italy, featuring the flawless artistry of Italian pianist Andrea Bacetti.

On the morning of June 26, host Vladimir Kataev and local officials formally welcomed the conference participants and introduced a new generation of promising *Chekhovedy*: winners of the Russian national competition of student and graduate student theses. The scholarly program occupied the rest of the day, with ten papers presented in two plenary sessions.

First Plenary Session (RL). A.P. Chudakov began the program with his talk, "Reform of Genre." According to Chudakov, Chekhov not only transformed the genre of the short story, but also created on its basis a "new syncretic genre," free of limitations and conventions, that broke with the canons of all existing prose genres. The significance of Chekhov's reforms for the subsequent development of literature has not been limited to the prose genres. Chudakov offered the example of Anna Akhmatova, who, although she rejected Chekhov, utilized his descriptive techniques and use of symbolic detail in her own poetics. Chekhov's discoveries entered so deeply into the artistic language of the age that they were adopted by the next generation of

writers, as it were, independently of their will. Chudakov suggested that “Akhmatova’s riding crop and glove were cut from the same material as the umbrella in Chekhov’s story “Three Years.”

If Chudakov’s Chekhov is an initiator of new forms in art, for I.N. Sukhikh he represents the culmination of the classical paradigm. In his presentation, entitled “Chekhov’s Prose: Two Subjects, Two Plots” (*dva predmeta, dva siuzheta*), Sukhikh argued that, when situated in its proper historical context, Chekhov’s world is more traditional and conservative than it has seemed both to his contemporaries and to many present-day scholars. So, for example, Chekhov’s plots appear “episodic” against the background of Gogol’s and Turgenev’s; compared with Pushkin’s *Belkin Tales* or Turgenev’s novels, his stories seem devoid of action. But when compared to the experimental writing of Daniil Kharms and the other members of the Oberiu group, Chekhov’s prose offers what amounts to an almost classic example of plot development, and his chronotope appears integral and harmonious if compared, for example, with that of L. Dobychnin.

So who, after all, is Chekhov: the culmination of a classical paradigm or the progenitor of a new one, modernist and avant-garde? The two papers stimulated a polemical discussion that ended on a conciliatory note with Chudakov’s suggestion that the same question is also continually raised in discussions of Pushkin.

In “Chekhov’s Prophecies,” V.B. Kataev addressed Chekhov’s philosophical place in the classical paradigm. In recent years, according to Kataev, Russian criticism has tended to identify two distinguishing features—prophesizing and sermonizing—as characteristic of Russian classical literature. On this ground Chekhov clearly yielded to his great predecessors Gogol, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. On the one hand, he didn’t seem to teach or preach (his accusers have in mind the absence of an overtly expressed Christian or, more precisely, Russian Orthodox Christian message in his works). On the other hand, such an approach exposes Chekhov as a bad prophet of social trends as well: not only did he not predict the phenomenon of Russian revolutionary “demons,” but at the end of the 1880s he was overheard to say that there would never be a revolution in Russia. Kataev suggested that criticism should focus on the uniqueness of Chekhov’s philosophical position and the distinctive nature of his predictions rather than on any “mistakes” he might have made. “Chekhov moved from ontology to epistemology,” noted Kataev. “He did not draw his insights on human behavior from a single source. He preferred to show that a single question can give rise to a number of different answers.” The same thing can be said about Chekhov as a prophet. Chekhov’s predictions are no less (and no more) insightful than those of, for example, Dostoevsky or Rozanov. They are simply different. No one, according to Kataev, was better able than Chekhov to anticipate and to depict in his works the kinds of catastrophes—great and small—that can ensue when each individual insists on clinging to his own version of the “truth,” not hearing what others have to say and refusing to accept that “we are all to blame.”

Peter Henry’s plenary talk, “*Traduttori-traditori*: On the English Translations of A.P. Chekhov’s Works,” provided numerous examples of the difficulties—some of which seem irresolvable—facing the translator of Chekhov into English (RL).

Second Plenary Session: (CAF) The six papers in the second plenary session covered broad territory: textual analysis; contemporary theater; world-view and philosophy. The speakers shared an attention to the centennial as a time for taking stock. Moscow theater expert T.K. Shakh-Azizova opened the session with an overview of the present-day theatrical scene. She indicated many similarities between current trends and those of Chekhov’s time, which also represented a transitional point—even a point of crisis—between centuries and worldviews.

In a close analysis of “Na puti.” Douglas Clayton (Ottawa, Canada) identified a “sculptural myth” based on the Pygmalion story that resonates with previous literary treatments, including Baratynskii’s “Skul’ptor.” In this original approach to Chekhov’s work Clayton raised important—and controversial—questions about the role of eros in artistic creation. Panel chair A. Chudakov’s question as to whether the writer’s utilization of the myth represented a conscious strategy on Chekhov’s part stimulated animated discussion.

It might be said that two very different papers—those of S. V. Tikhomirov (Moscow) and Leonard Polakiewicz (Minneapolis, USA)—led to similar conclusions, or rather, aporia. Tikhomirov offered a profound analysis of the classic question of the presence or absence of the transcendental or divine dimension in Chekhov’s work. Citing the endings of several important stories (including “A Boring Story” and “Ward Six”), he identifies the “vicious circle”

(*zakoldovannyi krug*) as a recurring pattern, in which the protagonist's explicit questions about the existence of a greater world, immortality, eternal truth, etc., lead to a dead end and turn in on themselves. Tikhomirov's ambitious and meticulously argued paper anchored highly abstract concepts in the concrete details of Chekhov's plots and drew unexpected but utterly convincing connections between the author and Nietzsche and Kafka. Polakiewicz discussed Chekhov's views on life imprisonment and the death penalty, focusing primarily on the stories "Pari" and "Rasskaz starshego sadovnika." Chekhov's adherence to the basic values of human dignity and freedom, and his opposition both to life imprisonment and the death penalty led to the dead end that "if it is immoral to free a murderer, it is equally immoral to send him to his death."

Two speakers (Moscow scholars I.E. Gitovich and A.P. Kuzicheva) addressed the important topic of biography. Irina Gitovich, who throughout the conference served as an advocate for a rigorous historical approach to literary scholarship, raised the uneasy question of genres in biographical work. Given the inevitable element of human creativity in dealing with historical fact, which approach would have the greater claim to legitimacy—artistic or historical? Which approach, and which generation (contemporaries or later scholars), is better able to capture that elusive quality, the "personality" of the author? On reflection, one might expand this question of temporal and intellectual distance into the area of space: does *distance* give a foreign biographer (or even scholar) any advantages over the "spatial contemporary" of Chekhov? Kuzicheva surveyed the achievements of the last century and noted that, in spite of the wealth of biographies currently available, a complete, "integral" biography still remains a goal for the future. The two papers stimulated a lively and broad-ranging discussion. Although one issue, at least, may be considered closed (Olga Knipper's faithfulness, recently challenged by biographer Donald Rayfield, and defended in a polemic in these pages [Summer, 2003, and Spring, 2004], was resoundingly proven by the formidable assembly of experts present, eloquently led by Harvey Pitcher), it can safely be said that the broader philosophical and generic questions remain. Chekhov scholars can only be grateful for this state of affairs. (CAF)

The majority of papers were presented on June 27, in four concurrent day-long sessions.

Section 1: "Dramaturgy, Theater" (CAF)

The year 2004 marks the centennial not only of Chekhov's death, but also of the premiere of his last play. This may explain the abundance in this section of studies addressing aspects of *The Cherry Orchard*. These included a fascinating discussion (by L.A. Davtian of Moscow) of different approaches to staging the mysterious "sound of the breaking string," and an anomalous and wildly fanciful presentation by self-proclaimed post-modernist Moscow writer A. V. Korolev, placing Chekhovian motifs in a purely imaginary African setting. The bafflement this talk aroused in a number of attendees was amply counterbalanced by the scholarly rigor and high quality of the majority of papers presented.

The international Chekhov was the subject of three papers. Ham En Jun (Seoul, Korea) described Chekhov productions on the Korean stage, and Li Lian-shu (New York and China) gave a comprehensive picture of the Chekhovian stage in China. Brian Friel's original reworkings of (and sequels to) Chekhov's works were the subject of Petersburg scholar G.V. Kovalenko's presentation.

The musical theme at this session was represented by Moscow scholar E.I. Streltsova, who discussed Chekhov and Tchaikovsky's unrealized project to write an opera based on Lermontov's "Bèla."

The current Russian stage was the subject of several papers, ranging from seasoned veterans of the critical world to a young observer (Lucy Stringer, Vermont, USA) presenting her first paper. Particularly worthy of note was Moscow scholar's Margarita Odesskaia's discussion of "remakes" of Chekhov's works over the last decade. Like many other participants of the conference, Odesskaia took advantage of the occasion of the centennial to situate the latest productions in a broader context. In discussing productions of the 1960s-80s, for example, she suggested that the adventuresome directors of that time managed to retain the integrity of Chekhov's text while making it relevant to the specific conditions of Soviet life of the time: these were "the first experiments in intertextuality."

In an insightful and innovative paper entitled "Chekhov's Antidrama and Antimelodrama: Innoculation Against the Diseases of the Contemporary Theater," Svetlana Evdokimova (Providence, USA) discussed Chekhov's struggle with prevailing melodramatic

conventions of his time. In the process of this struggle Chekhov created a novel form of "anti-drama." Although his own early experiments rely on melodramatic effects, in his mature plays he "squeezes out" or completely reinterprets the elements of melodrama in his plays. Chekhov criticized the "theatricality" of contemporary theater, which stemmed, according to him, from melodramatization of the scene. His artistic project was to "prosoitize" theater instead. His prosoization of theater is based on what could be called a "minus-device," that is, the suppression of that which traditionally constituted the theatricality of the play: dramatic plot and effects. Chekhov's creation of his "anti-drama" or "anti-melodrama" was motivated by his desire to cater his plays to the tastes of the intelligentsia and to secure a new audience for himself.

Irkutsk Chekhov specialist A. S. Sobennikov raised fascinating questions about the treatment of fate and chance in Chekhov's plays. He divided characters into two groups: those who believe that human will can affect fate (Masha Shamraeva, Voinitskii, Tuzenbach, Lopakhin) and those who adhere to patriarchal or religious world views (Sonia, Marina, Anfisa, Varia, etc.). The concept of fate in Chekhov's works, argued Sobennikov, is closely tied to the refrain of (unrealized) "happiness" (*schast'e*), which figures prominently in all the major plays. Counter to Aristotle's prescription for drama, in which the key moment is a transition from happiness to unhappiness (or vice versa), such moments are absent in Chekhov's works.

In a witty and highly original analysis of the motif of suffering in "The Chorus Girl" and *The Seagull* as "artistic manifestos," Vladimir Golstein (Providence, USA) documented a surprising, but utterly convincing pattern in Chekhov's "tragic comedy of errors." The victimizers (the wife in "The Chorus Girl," Masha and "other masters of the dramatic art" in *The Seagull*), by performing the role of suffering victim, get all the sympathy, whereas those who truly suffer endure in silence. Medvedenko "is that same chorus girl, victimized by everyone, including his wife, dressed though she is in mourning." (CAF)

Section 2: "Literary Connections, Allusions, Quotations" (DC)

Seventeen papers were presented in this section, covering a wide range of topics that might be summarized by the formula "Chekhov and" In addition to the papers scheduled, there was an unannounced paper by Marina Leventinovna Orlova (Melikhovo) on Gogolian reminiscences in Chekhov's letters. A lively discussion centered on the question of parody and parodicity in response to papers by Alla Strakhova (St. Petersburg) on "'A Patriot of his Homeland' and Turgenev's 'Asia,'" and Ekaterina Vinogradova (Moscow) on *Drama na okhote*. Petr Dolzhenkov (Moscow) traced Gogolian motifs in 'The Steppe,' especially in the image of Solomon, who even resembles the earlier writer physically. Another paper on links with nineteenth-century literature provoked a lively discussion: though interesting, the paper presented by Aleksandr Krinitsyn (Moscow) on moralism in Dostoevsky and Chekhov suffered from a lack of distinction between moralism and morality. Franca Beltrame (Trieste) contributed a thoughtful and stimulating paper on "The Duel" and dueling in the Russian tradition. Also of note was a fine paper by Alla Golovacheva (Yalta) on Dickens's "Christmas Carol" and "Gooseberries."

The literary relationship between Chekhov and his contemporaries also attracted a number of contributions, ranging from the poetry written on the occasion of his death (unlike the cases of, say, Dostoevsky or Tolstoy); misrepresentations of Chekhov in memoir literature; to the playwright O. Dymov (I.I. Perelman, 1878-1959), an epigone and critic of Chekhov.

Finally, there was a fine crop of papers on Chekhov and twentieth-century Russian literature. Particularly worthy of mention was Olga Shalygina (Moscow) on Chekhov and "poetic prose"; Shalygina defended a challenging thesis as to the importance of rhythm and the pause in, for example, Boris Pasternak's prose. Elena Zubareva (Moscow) delivered a lively paper on "Kashtanka" and "Faithful Ruslan." Margarita Goriacheva (Moscow) discussed "The Black Monk" and B. Akunin, while Anna Shcherbakova gave a fine paper on the importance of Chekhov's titles for post-modern writers.

This marathon of presentations took place in a delightful atmosphere of collaboration and collegiality. New working relationships were established, and the work of the section holds promise of further discoveries and challenges in the years to come. (DC)

Section 3: "Biography, Personality, World View, Reception" (Irina Gitovich)

Section 3 featured a wide variety of themes and methodological approaches loosely related to its title. Unlikely neighbors under this subject heading included papers on: the position

of women in penal servitude, citing *The Island of Sakhalin*; the image of the South and the concept of the East in Chekhov's works; translations of his writing into Persian and the inadequacy of this ancient language for conveying its meaning; the interpretation of Chekhov's personality by Anglo-American scholars and the reception of Chekhov's letters in the social consciousness of Russians in the 1920s; the psychology of nihilism (a psychoanalytical approach to "A Boring Story"); and the use of Chekhov's name in a polemic involving the journal "New Way". This section was well represented by scholars from a number of different countries, including the Far East and Central Asia.

Questions of biography and the philosophical and historical context of Chekhov's time were relevant in practically every paper. Paris scholar Jacqueline de Proyart, for example, in her discussion of the concept of the "south" in Chekhov's work, was essentially posing the question of the sociology and psychology of the author's perception of space. Chekhov's observations concerning women in penal servitude on Sakhalin, as discussed by R.D. Kluge (Tübingen, Germany), could be situated in the larger historical context of social opinion in Russia during that time. This paper stimulated considerable discussion, with a lively exchange of opinions. Malgorzata Swiderska (Łódź, Poland) gave a rich paper posing, for the first time in Chekhov scholarship, the question of methodology and "imagology" in analyzing German culture and the image of the German in Chekhov's works; here, too, the broader literary and social consciousness of the author's time is relevant to a discussion of "self and other" ("*svoi-chuzhoi*"). Her paper was very well received. S. Elushich (Nikshich, Chernogoriia) offered an idiosyncratic analysis of Chekhov's hero in "A Boring Story," applying a style of thinking characteristic of a different historical period.

In an interesting paper examining the literary politics of the journal "New Way" as relevant to Chekhov, Ia. V. Sarychev (Lipetsk) demonstrated a thorough awareness of the specifics of the historical context. L.E. Bushkanets (Kazan) gave a fine paper situating Chekhov's letters in the social consciousness of the beginning of the twentieth century, demonstrating the best qualities of the scholar and the traditions of the Russian school of literary scholarship: breadth of erudition, mastery of a clearly understandable language of the historical context, and harmony of theme and methodology. Her paper generated lively discussion.

The papers presented in this section offered a colossal range of methodologies for studying Chekhov's work and its reception. Given these differences and the conflicting influence of various methodological schools, it would be worthwhile to conduct a special conference to address questions of methodology in Chekhov scholarship.

A number of papers represented an expansion of interest into new territory, such as the relevance of Chekhov's work in the Russian concept of "The East." The time has come to establish a special branch of scholarship for analyzing the question of the translation of Chekhov, for it is through translation that Chekhov makes his influence felt on other cultures. Such work would take place at the intersection of literary scholarship, linguistics, and psychology. (IG)

Section 4: "Poetics, Style, and Problems of Scholarship" (NZh)

The nineteen papers presented offered a variety of scholarly approaches to Chekhov's works and addressed different aspects of poetics and stylistics. The papers themselves and the discussion that ensued demonstrated a range of qualitatively differing scholarly techniques and shared a common, if as yet not overt, interest in examining the question of methodology itself.

American scholar Carol Apollonio Flath (Durham, USA.) offered a principally new close reading of Chekhov's story "The Grasshopper." In spite of the large number of analyses of this story by Russian and foreign scholars, many observations in the paper had the force of revelation. The underlying layer of the story's poetics was analyzed as a complex interweaving of blurred metaphors and a precise conceptual system that work together to create the distinctive musicality of Chekhov's writing. Flath's observations will make it impossible for twenty-first century Chekhov scholars to take seriously a number of previous readings, for example, those that present a simplistic view of Chekhov's heroine as merely a satirical figure, as an expression of the author's "misogyny" or "distrust of aesthetes." This multilayered analysis renders obsolete the customary, "horizontal," interpretations of Chekhov's text.

Two papers in the section utilized a Bakhtinian phenomenological approach, a method that is somewhat peripheral to contemporary literary scholarship, but that represents a challenging and rewarding system for studying the philosophical aspects of poetics. The first, by Petersburg scholar Andrei Stepanov (currently at Turku, Finland), demonstrated new

applications of Bakhtinian speech genre analysis to Chekhov's works. Although Stepanov focused more on posing the question than on presenting ultimate conclusions (customary in application to Dostoevsky's poetics), the system has rarely been used in Chekhov scholarship. The Bakhtinian approach proved justified here. Equally successful was the application of the Bakhtinian concepts of the "hero's word" and the "word of the story" and the dialogic principle in South Korean scholar U Wong Que's paper, "Irony in A. P. Chekhov's Poetics of 'Objectivity.'" The Bakhtinian model of the "double-voiced word" served as a precise instrument for analyzing Chekhov's writing techniques, in particular, the author's utilization of ironic "diglossia" in his stories.

Another paper worthy of note dealt with the "creation of a new generic structure." L.E. Tagil'tseva of Novosibirsk suggested that the well-known story "The Chameleon" represented a new generic, organic synthesis of "epos and drama."

It should be noted that all participants in the section felt the need for establishing new (or reestablishing forgotten, old) philological approaches. This may explain the particular attention they paid to papers addressing the problem of conceptualizing or perceiving the "world of objects" in Chekhov's writing. (The concept of the *"predmetnyi mir,"* introduced into Russian literary scholarship at the very beginning of the twentieth century by Fedor Sologub, was, as is well known, activated in Chekhov scholarship over thirty years ago by A.P. Chudakov in his work under that title.

Two papers by Petersburg researchers—T.Iu. Il'iukhina ("Smells in Chekhov's Prose") and the young scholar I.Iu. Silacheva ("Principles of Depicting Material Objects")—addressed the problematics of descriptions of the material world in Chekhov's early work. N.F. Ivanova of Novgorod Velikii gave an interesting paper about the growing inability of contemporary readers (and scholars) to understand adequately and visualize many "realia" in Chekhov's world of objects. This is due both to linguistic processes—the aging of the lexicon (a number of words originally in the active vocabulary have become archaic)—and the contemporary reader's diminished capacity to visualize the world (including the world of nature [plants, birds, etc.]) in its full richness of detail.

O.M. Skibina (Orenburg) also dealt with the difficulties the contemporary reader encounters in attempting to understand the world of Chekhov's texts, specifically, in the context of secondary education. The paper's theme set it slightly apart from the others, but it stimulated a lively discussion among the section participants due to its relevance to the important question of the relationship between the contemporary cultural situation (which is still being identified as "post-modern") and the classical heritage. The gradual "loss" of Chekhov in the present-day school classroom is painful also because of its broader implications: the perception among Russians today of a potential threat to their own cultural uniqueness (understood almost as a loss of spiritual autonomy).

But even with the calmer scholarly papers, the "objective" Chekhov gave rise to different conclusions and stimulated lively polemical discussion. One such polemic centered on Chekhov's poetics in "My Life." Two participants addressed the novella: N.V. Zhivolupova (Nizhnii Novgorod: "The Concept of Holiness in the Plot of 'My Life'") began with methodological observations, suggesting that an adequate understanding of the novella's meaning is possible only if Chekhov's philosophical position is taken into account and identified as a stance of agnosticism. Zhivolupova argues that this allows both a new interpretation of the author's famous definition of life in a letter to O. Knipper ("a carrot and nothing more is known") and a unique Chekhovian conception of holiness during that period. V. Linkov ("The Paradox of Chekhov's Novella 'My Life'") argued, contra V.B. Kataev, that the novella does contain unambiguous truths, for example, Misail's thoughts on suffering. Animated discussion demonstrated both the intellectual independence of the session participants and the difficulties in interpreting the best-known episodes in Chekhov's prose.

The work of the section was distinguished by a high energy level, a firm faith in Chekhov as an artist and thinker, and a commitment to a common quest for the truth (to the extent that that is possible) that welcomes a diversity of well-informed opinions in an atmosphere of mutual respect. (NZh)

(CAF) On the evening of June 27, the scholars were rewarded for their intensive work with a memorable concert. Undergraduate students in Moscow State University's new degree program in music performance performed "Music of Chekhov's Time." The concert by the

young singers and pianists, who were proudly introduced by Dean A. P. Lobodanov—himself a friend of Melikhovo and admirer of Chekhov—provided the emotional high point of the conference. The audience was visibly touched, and its enthusiastic reaction to the beautiful music left no doubt in anyone's mind as to the bright future of these young performers, and of Russian music itself.

On June 28, the conference participants went on a daylong tour of notable sites in the area: newly renovated churches and monasteries, including the Davydova Pustyn' Monastery, and the town of Serpukhov, with its marvelous art museum. Admirers of "The Lady with the Dog" will note that this apparently thriving provincial town is rumored to be that very "S-" where Anna Sergeevna dwelt, unhappily, with her lackey of a husband. In the evening, conference participants celebrated the centennial with *shashlyk*, music, and toasts on the back lawn of Chekhov's house. In a fortunate coincidence, the scholars were able to enjoy the Zvezdochka children's resort's boistrous lakeside celebration of Ivan Kupala night, which conveniently followed the Chekhov commemoration.

The plenary session in the morning of June 29 offered the participants a sensational feast of new Chekhovian insights and discoveries. Appropriately, a musical theme dominated. British scholar Rosamund Bartlett introduced her three new centennial books on Chekhov: a collection of translations, a "life in letters," and a fresh biography structured on the concept of Chekhovian places and spaces. It can only be hoped that her productivity is representative of a general increase in energy among Chekhov scholars worldwide during the centennial year.

A high point of the conference was surely composer and librettist A. V. Medvedev's fascinating discussion of his experiences working with Dmitrii Shostakovich on a libretto for an opera based on Chekhov's "The Black Monk," originally conceived in the 1920s as part of an operatic diptych with Gogol's "The Portrait." Shostakovich particularly valued the works of these two authors, and was drawn to the psychological—and musical—complexity of Chekhov's story. Although Shostakovich cherished the plan for the opera for his entire professional life, and although the libretto of "The Portrait" was completed and, with music by Shostakovich's close colleague M. Vainberg, premiered in Czechoslovakia in 1983, the "Black Monk" remained in a more preliminary form as a collection of plans and notes, along with a completed final scene. In addition to the many recollections—interesting in and of themselves—of his work with Shostakovich, Medvedev offered numerous insights and quotations relating to the theme of "Chekhov and music," ranging from the musicality of his poetics to the author's personal encounters with contemporary musicians such as Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, and Chaliapin.

Bartlett's bold claim in her talk that preceding translators have not managed to convey adequately the musicality of Chekhov's language posed a thematic question echoed, or possibly even countered, by Radislaw Lapushin's multi-faceted analysis of the ostensibly simple phrase "*rosa na trave*" in "The Lady with the Dog." Lapushin's lyrical and poetic presentation of his insightful paper served as the culmination to, and even illustration of, many of the conference's previous discussions of the role of sound, rhythm, and melody in Chekhov's poetics.

This already rich plenary session culminated with British translator and scholar Harvey Pitcher's memorable reading from the memoirs of Lev Rabenek. Rabenek was the hitherto little-known Russian student, the "third man" (along with Olga Knipper and the German Dr. Schworer) present in the Badenweiler hotel room at the time of Chekhov's death on July 2/15, 1904. Pitcher rediscovered the memoirs, which were originally published in a limited circulation Russian émigré journal (*Vozrozhdenie*) in Paris in 1958, during the 1970s. It is impossible to imagine a more fitting end to this centennial conference than Pitcher's reading, to an enthralled and hushed audience, of this new account of the familiar story of Chekhov's death one hundred years ago. His full translation of "Chekhov's Last Moments," by the way, appears in the July 2 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* for 2004.

At the close of the conference, participants of all nationalities and ideological and scholarly profiles joined together for a common cause. Inspired by Vladimir Kataev's description of the sad state of the Chekhov gravesite in Novodevich'e Cemetery, the conference participants delegated Irina Gitovich to draft an open letter to Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov, calling upon him to take immediate action to restore the grave. Some NACS members, including a group of contributors based in North Carolina, made financial donations to the cause.

The Melikhovo conference was a memorable event, featuring a wide variety of scholarly work representing numerous countries and academic areas of specialization. Under the expert and sensitive leadership of organizer Vladimir Kataev, participants demonstrated a high level of

scholarly rigor, an eagerness to share ideas, a collegial and congenial spirit, and, most of all, a passionate commitment to the work of Chekhov. (CAF)

Uncle Vania's Mother The Importance of Detail in Chekhovian Performance

Laurence Senelick, Tufts University

Interpretations of Chekhov's plays that appear on the printed page have the option of setting forth a conspectus of opinion, whether they do so or not. They can make their arguments circumstantially and at length. The interpretation of Chekhov on stage is more limited and more prone to misrepresentation. A director is constrained to offer one interpretation and one alone, without the benefit of footnotes; since the theatrical experience is a collaborative one, the talent of the actors, the concepts of the designers and a mass of contingent circumstances conspire to present the audience with a discrete and exclusive vision of a play, which occludes alternative interpretations.

However, even within these constraints, Chekhov may be illuminated, depending on how well he is studied. One of the basic tenets of the great Czech director Otomar Krejča was that "The theatre can grasp Chekhov more efficiently than can the intellectual disciplines which are reduced to relations between words, to the history and life of concepts. Evidently the theatre knows that concepts live their own evolution, their own relationships." Unlike the literary critic, the director, the actor and the scenographer must undergo a kind of testing. Indeed, Krejča insisted,

The text of a play exists only in the interpretation it is given. To stage a play implies for a director not only a reading of it, but also a questioning of himself. Before being judged by the spectator, he is judged by the author. Every time I entered Chekhov's world with my 'certainties,' I had the impression that his characters were X-raying all my acquired experiences and carrying them, enlarged, towards the horizon surrounding us. Brief, reproachful relationships were created: the two worlds interpenetrate, and Chekhov's glaring light obliges us to ask ourselves honest and stubborn questions about the true values and meaning of human existence.¹

Part of the problem is that Chekhov is now imbedded in our cultural memory. We take him for granted. Presumably, his characters and tropes are now so identifiable to a literate playgoer that one can manipulate them like Shakespeare's. (I recognize the fact that nowadays there is no longer such a thing as "the common reader" or "the general public.") One can say, with Famusov in *Горе от ума*, «Ба! Знакомые все лица» ("These are all familiar faces"). Familiarity with Chekhov should breed not contempt but a deeper understanding of his multifaceted art. As Krejča insists, the author's piercing honesty should prompt self-examination of intentions and means among actors and directors. But this involves intense scrutiny of the text. Whether or not a director has interrogated himself in relation to a text may be less important than a profound familiarity with that text and its contexts. Let me offer a pair of contrasting examples.

Two years ago I saw a production of *Uncle Vania* at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Mass., staged by the Hungarian director Janos Szász. It should be pointed out that directors from nations formerly under Russian control often wreak strange distortions on Chekhov, as a way of repudiating the erstwhile Soviet cultural hegemony. This has certainly been the case with Krejča in Czechoslovakia, Eimuntas Nekrošius in Lithuania, and Robert Sturua in Georgia. Even before the play began, it was clear that Szász had taken considerable liberties with it.

A glance at the program showed that he had suppressed the character of Vania's mother. Now the role of Mariia Vasil'evna is not a very gratifying one for an actress; she has few lines and

¹ Otomar Krejča, "L'infini tchékhovien est impitoyable," *Théâtre en Europe* 2 (avril 1984): 68.

doesn't appear at all in Act Two. Nevertheless, she is crucial to the play's structure. In refashioning *The Wood Goblin* into *Uncle Vania*, Chekhov stripped his cast down to the smallest number in any of his full-length plays. By limiting the *dramatis personae* to eight (if we exclude the workman), Chekhov could present what Viacheslav Ivanov might call dyads of each character to illustrate contrasting reactions to circumstances. Take the Serebriakov/Waffles dyad: the Professor, fond of his academic honors and perquisites, is an old man married to a young woman too repressed to betray him, yet he jealously tyrannizes over her. Waffles, whose pompous language aspires to erudition, and whose wife abandoned him almost immediately after their wedding, responded with loving generosity. His life, devoid of honors, is devoted to others. He feels strongly the opprobrium of being a "freeloader," while the Professor is oblivious to his own parasitism.

Astrov and Vania are the only two "educated persons in the district," who started with exceptional promise, but grew disillusioned. Astrov's disillusionment was gradual, over years of drudgery as a country doctor; he has turned into a toper and a cynic, but can still compartmentalize vestiges of his idealism in his reforestation projects. Vania's disillusionment came as a thunderclap with the Professor's arrival; its suddenness negated any possibility of maintaining an ideal. They are two variants on the theme of "crackpots" (*chudaki*).

Sonya and Elena are both unhappy young women on the threshold of wasted lives; both are tentative and withdrawn in matters of the heart. Of the old women, Marina is earthy, stolid in her obedience to the natural cycle, her life narrowly focused on the practical matters of barnyard and kitchen. Mariia Vasil'evna is equally static and narrow, but her eyes never rise from the pages of a pamphlet; she is totally blind to what goes on inside her fellow-men. Her reading and Marina's knitting are both palliatives. One, meant for the betterment of all mankind, is sterile, while the other, meant for the comfort of individuals, is not. Thus, what Osip Mandelshtam called the propinquity of the characters brings out their salient features. To eliminate any one of them creates an imbalance.

The other clue to Szász's dismissal of Chekhov's textual clues was the setting. In *Uncle Vania*, the physical progression of the stage set serves as an emblem of the inner development of the action. The play begins outside the house, with a tea-table elaborately laid to greet the Professor. The eruption of these dining-room accessories into a natural setting suggests the upheaval caused by the Petersburgers' presence.

The second act moves indoors, its sense of claustrophobia enhanced by the impending storm and Elena's need to throw open the window. The dining-room too has been usurped by the Professor, who has turned it into a study *cum* sickroom, his medicine littering the sideboard. No family gathers to share a meal: midnight snacks, a clandestine glass of wine, *tête-à-têtes* rather than group encounters are standard. In Act Three, the Professor thrusts the family into unfamiliar surroundings when he convenes them in a rarely used reception room. Cold, formal, empty, it suits the Professor's taste for his missing podium and further disorients the others. Anyone can wander through, like Vania who intrudes upon Astrov and Elena with his bunch of roses, another property rendered useless by circumstance.

Finally, in Act Four, we move, for the first time, to a room actually lived in, Vania's combination bedchamber and estate office. The real life of the house has migrated to this small, cluttered area where day-to-day tasks are carried out, where Astrov keeps his drawing table, Sonya her ledgers. There is even a mat for peasants to wipe their feet on. Vania has no personal space that is not encroached on, and none of his objects bespeaks a private being. Once the Professor and Elena, the disruptive factors, are gone, the family comes together in this atmosphere of warmth generated by routine. The more inward the play moves in terms of locale, the more the sense of oppression mounts. And this is abetted by Chekhov's use of weather and seasons.

Szász's solution was a permanent set, a vast barn with a metal roof on which the rain could pelt noisily and at one point come crashing through to drench Vania. At the back was a bar, and throughout the play, scruffy workmen, like refugees from Chekhov's one-act *Along the Highway*, would enter and drink. The only furniture was a table, a few chairs and hay-bales. Now a unit set is not uncommon these days: it is economic, avoids long stage-waits, and suits a post-Brechtian aesthetic for simplicity and emblematic stage-pieces. It seems to have first been applied to *Uncle Vania* in the Chichester Festival production of 1963 with Laurence Olivier and Michael Redgrave. In Szász's case, however, the insistence on rustic squalor raised questions about the logic of behavior and ran directly against Chekhov's insistence that Vania be presented as natty. The author described

him to Stanislavsky as “an elegant cultivated man. It is counter to the truth to say that our country squires walk around in boots that stink of grease.” And when Chekhov heard that a provincial theatre had depicted Uncle Vania as a landowner on the skids, i.e., dirty, tattered, in greased boots, he lost his temper, according to the testimony of his friend the actor Vishnevsky,²

Considering that for many years Chekhov was taken to be a playwright of understatement and grayness, it is ironic that Szász, like so many contemporary directors, leaves nothing unsaid. Whatever is implicit in the text becomes explicit in the production. After so many tepid and pallid stagings of Chekhov, boisterousness can be tonic, but it is becoming its own kind of cliché. The language is now studded with four-letter words that would never have got past the Tsarist censor or even a genteel audience of *fin de siècle* intelligentsia. Szász’s characters behave brutally to one another and to themselves. When Vania delivers his soliloquy about his wasted life, Szász had the actor pour a bottle of vodka down his trousers. As an émigré physician seated next to me remarked, that was absurd, since 1) it would smart terrifically, and 2) no Russian would waste vodka like that.

In the last act, when Chekhov has Astrov and Elena part with nothing but a pencil and a snatched kiss as souvenirs, Szász had them rogering away on a bale of hay, just as the family enters to speak their farewells. Setting aside the ho-hum of simulated sex, this novelty makes Chekhov into a clumsy constructor of plays. The author had already provided an intrusion on a private moment: Vania’s act-two entrance with the autumn roses in time to see Elena in Astrov’s arms. To repeat and inflate this entrance—to make the whole family witness an adulterous copulation and yet have no one respond to it—is to turn a moment of frustration (one of the play’s themes) into one of vacuity.

As postmodern deconstructions of Chekhov go, Szász’s was moderate. It was not as extreme as Nekrošius having the characters undergoing cupping throughout the play, and reducing Astrov’s diagrams to the size of a postage stamp. And one has to admit that many spectators, especially those unfamiliar with the play, were taken with the ART production. However, these and similar liberties often outrage critics and audiences, who invoke images of sacrilege and rape. At the Chekhov working group in St. Petersburg last summer, one veteran Australian Slavist even proposed that laws be passed to prevent such manhandling of Chekhov’s plays. He was a minority of one, but less extreme versions of his position are easy to find.

For instance, the Russian director Mark Rozovsky complains, “Nowadays anybody feels free to violate Chekhov, one might say, with special intensity, special sadism... ‘Help yourself!’” Rozovsky’s objection to the “Anything Goes” approach derives from a belief that “in the theatre the artist had, has and will have the right to create independently, but not irresponsibly.”³ He insists that the director is obliged to analyze Chekhov’s language, style and world view so thoroughly that the production will exist as a “spiritual continuum in harmony with the author’s work.” The prime motive should be to “carry out the author’s intentions.” But what were the intentions of an author who was notoriously laconic in giving instructions? Even Stanislavsky tripped over this stumbling-block.

The problem, Krejča realized, was that once a decision is made in rehearsals, it forecloses other decisions, and leads the production down a particular path. No single production can express everything that is in a Chekhov play, and therefore the choices may produce lopsided or overly partial interpretations. The only solution is for a director to return again and again to the same plays. This rarely happens. Besides Krejča, only a handful of directors have managed to revisit the Chekhovian *oeuvre* over the course of a career. When they do, the result can be illuminating.

I had experience of this last May in Petersburg. The prominent director Lev Dodin was exhibiting his new production of *Uncle Vania*. Dodin had a long and rich experience as a Chekhov director, with controversial stagings of *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. His version of *Platonov*, which had opened in 1998 and was still playing in a revised form, was a brilliant reinterpretation of that “loose, baggy monster” (to borrow Henry James’ description of a Dickens novel). Dodin had the benefit of working with actors who had been members of his company for years; not only were they better trained and more nuanced than the American repertory troupe, but they vibrated to his

² К. Станиславский, *Моя жизнь в искусстве* in *Собрание сочинений*, ред. О.Н. Ефремов *et al.* (Moscow: Искусство, 1988) I, p. 300; and А.Л. Вишневский, *Клочки воспоминаний*, ред. А.Л. Слонимский (Leningrad: Academia, 1928), pp. 72-3.

³ Марк Розовский, *Чтение «Дяди Вани»*, (New York: Слово-Word, 1996), p. 305.

direction like strings under the bow of a virtuoso violinist. They also had the inestimable advantage of speaking the original text unmediated by translation.

Dodin, too, employed a unit set, in this case a neutral box of wooden walls, with doors and windows; whether we were inside or outside was indicated by the lighting and the placement of a few items of furniture. The spareness bespoke neutrality, rather than imposing an alien concept on to the locale. Within this bareness, what the characters said and did became more prominent, less encumbered by the detritus of either naturalism or symbolism.

As a result, many details in the relationships surfaced in ways which even I, who has seen whole dynasties of *Uncle Vania*, found fresh and revealing. The sexual bond between the Professor and Elena was illustrated at the top of Act Two, as he palpated her breasts and she found his groping both arousing and disgusting; it was clear that his physical attraction to her was not reciprocated, and that she had been seduced more by his mind and celebrity. When Sonya went to find out if piano-playing was allowed, Elena threw herself into miming playing a rhapsody on the table. And when Sonya returned with her “Нельзя” the curtain did not fall immediately. Instead, Elena angrily brushed the medicine bottles off the table and then, shamefacedly, put them back in order. It was a vivid revelation of the inhibitions she constantly berates herself for.

The casting also aided the illumination of the text. This Vania, played by the same actor who played Platonov, was vigorous and good-looking; the waste of his talents was all the more palpable. Astrov, on the other hand, was an ordinary enough fellow with, indeed, a ridiculous moustache; hence, it was his manner that produced the allure for Sonya and Elena. The Professor was not a ridiculous pedant, but rather a terrifying elder statesman, whose mere presence could put a chill on an event; obviously, a dangerous man to cross in faculty meetings. Even Telegin and Marina benefited from Dodin’s clear-eyed approach: the former was prone to short-lived bursts of anger at his wretched situation, while the latter was eager to see Sonya and Astrov brought together. Manipulatively, she would push Sonya forward, stage-manage their positions, and, in the last act, use her offers of food and vodka to prolong the Doctor’s stay in hopes he might propose.

The most graphic example of the difference between the two productions was, however, the use of Vania’s mother, Mariia Vasil’evna Voinitskaia. Remember that Szász eliminated her entirely, transferring some of her lines to the nanny. For Dodin, she was a crucial element in Vania’s predicament. Foolish though she might be (on her first entrance, she fixated affectionately on the Professor’s abandoned galoshes), her foolishness derived chiefly from Serebriakov’s Svengali-like hold on her. Her love for her son was genuine, and her chastisement of him derived in part from true disappointment that he was not a luminous personality.

In Dodin’s Act Three, she personified what Aristotle would call the *peripeteia* or turning-point in the drama. After his diatribe against the Professor and his ridiculous claims to be a Schopenhauer or Dostoevsky *manqué*, Vania exclaims (in my translation): “What a damfool thing to say! I’m losing my mind... Mommy, I’m desperate! Mommy!” and Mariia Vasil’evna replies sternly («строго»), “Do as Alexander says!” («Слушайся Александра»).

In most productions, Sonya immediately chimes in with her exclamations and Vania makes his exit, promising they will remember him. Dodin, however, had paid close attention to the text. How the characters refer to one another is very symptomatic. Both Voinitsky and Serebriakov have addressed Mariia Vasil’evna with the distancing *maman*; now, under pressure, Vania refers to her as “my old mother” («старуха мать»), and, at his most intense moment of despair, calls her “Mommy” («Матушка»), an affectionate form at odds with her pedantic manner.

So, Dodin had Vania at that moment throw himself at her feet and put his head in her lap like a child. The decision was now Mariia Vasil’evna’s. Instinctively, she raised her hand to caress his head, but her eyes sought out the indignant Professor at the other end of the room. She wavered, torn between maternal feelings and her blind faith in intellectual celebrity. When at last she uttered the severe words, “Do as Alexander says,” it is the crushing blow. The second-person singular verb form of the injunction keeps Vania in his childish state, but also serves as a slap in the face. It prevents his finding any kind of solace in family affection and forces him to his act of desperation. At this point in the performance, when Mariia Vasil’evna made her decisive remark, the audience audibly gasped.

In the retelling, this may seem forced and melodramatic. In action, at that moment, it shed a powerful light not only on the characters’ intentions but on Chekhov’s themes. The conflict between natural feeling and intellectual aridity is ever-present in his works. This moment, which is so easily

elided both in reading and on stage, suddenly opened up a whole range of significance within the play. It came not from imposing an alien guise of novelty on *Uncle Vania*, but from probing the text so deeply that hitherto overlooked sense could be made of even the slightest words. Szász's production aimed a glaring and unforgiving spotlight on the play, which focussed our attention on its target and blotted out peripheral detail, whereas Dodin's production lit the play from within, providing a more natural and more equitable illumination of all its facets.

Dear Anton Pavlovich

Viacheslav P'etsukh

Translated by Mark Swift, Auckland University

Translator's note:

Viacheslav P'etsukh epitomizes Saul Bellow's remark that writers are readers moved to emulation. He overtly builds upon, and engages in polemics with, Russian literary tradition. P'etsukh's allusions to Chekhov and his transposition of Chekhovian themes and characters to settings of contemporary Russia have been noted in Russian and Western criticism (Lyudmilla Parts, "Chekhov, Literature, and the Intelligentsia in Viacheslav P'etsukh's Stories," *SEEJ*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (2002): p. 301–317). His essay on Chekhov is from the cycle "Rassuzhdeniia o pisateliakh" (in *Veselye vremena*. Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1988; reprinted in *Tsikly. Rassказы*. Moscow: Kul'tura, 1991).

[...] We are so partial to our giants of literature that we want to know everything about them, as brides want to know everything about their grooms. Despite scolding by chaste scholars of literature, for some reason we still want to know, say, not only Tolstoy the philosopher, but also Tolstoy the aristocrat; not just Dostoevsky the revolutionary, but Dostoevsky the family man as well; not just Chekhov the writer, but also Chekhov the man. More precisely, we want to know not just "for some reason," but because the persona of a major writer expands and illuminates his artistic legacy more fully than the most through commentaries. In any case, one gains a certain respect for the frankness of ancient philosophy when one realizes that Socrates, Heraclitus and Diogenes lived as they thought; by the same token, one's understanding of the writings of Bacon and Wilde is significantly enriched by the knowledge that the former was imprisoned for bribery, and the latter, as is said, for a crime against morality.

Until quite recently I could no more imagine the living Chekhov than I could see the fourth dimension. However I tried to picture an animate Anton Pavlovich, one of flesh and blood, coat, shoes, pince-nez, at best it didn't seem right that someone could simply bump into him on the street or say, "Hey, you." This inability to imagine the living Chekhov is apparently explained by the school literature textbook, which stated, "Chekhov's character comprises a striking combination of emotional tenderness and grace with courage and strength of will," as well as by Chekhov's prose itself, and by scholarly tradition, which painted the picture of a gentle melancholic, a kind quasi-ascetic, and a person of such extraordinary morality that Knipper called him a man of the future, and many of his fellow writers seriously maintained that he emitted a sort of radiance. Such extreme virtue is disturbing in principle, not edifying or even alluring, but precisely disturbing. We are used to people who are either dishonest or somewhat honest—they won't send you a mail bomb, of course, but they'll pinch your books. Such mean arithmetic morality, incidentally, is natural enough and understandable, since even the most

fortunate society is not free of conventions and prejudices that clearly deviate from ethical norms. And yet here is a man who lived 44 years in the "kingdom of thievery and good intentions," where a human being was valued less than a cigarette butt, and his entire life he not only did nothing shameful, but he methodically, ubiquitously and constantly created good: he built schools for peasant children at his own expense; he treated patients free of charge; he supported beginning writers in every way; he collected donations for the hungry; he refused the title of "Academician" when Nicholas II deprived Gorky, then under surveillance, of the same title, something which, except for Chekhov, only two Academicians, Korolenko and the mathematician Markov, had the courage to do; and, finally, he undertook the arduous journey to Sakhalin, which brought him neither fame nor wealth, in order to stick Russian society's nose in the tragic plight of convicts [...].

In a word, Chekhov, more than any writers of his time, lived by the dictates of the ancient philosophers; that is, he lived as he wrote, in complete accordance with his formula: "Everything about a person should be beautiful: face and clothes, heart and thoughts." He lived so purely that had he simply described his own life, it would have been great literature. There is nothing one can fault him for! There is nothing in his biography that could ease the pain of one's own frailties and shortcomings. And as predicted, this amazing man, who is hard to imagine, this magnificent artist, who both lived and wrote beautifully (incidentally a great rarity), continues to knock at the door with his conscientious little hammer. What's more, he also had the discretion not to impose himself into the company of the supervisors and home room teachers of humanity...

It would appear that we've had no terribly unfortunate writers, though many of them like to complain about their fate. Chekhov, too, did not always regard his life favorably, though his very first story was accepted and published, he never knew severe want, he was esteemed great in his lifetime, the best people of his age were his friends, he loved beautiful women and was loved by beautiful women, he saw paradise (Ceylon) and hell in the form of Sakhalin. Finally, his whole life he was, as if deliberately, surrounded by artistic prose, which oozed out of the pores of ordinary life, so that one didn't have to invent anything--just observe and write. Of course, perhaps it is an attribute of the author's eye to discern the artistic essence in the most mundane circumstances, or perhaps it is a peculiarity of Russian life to immerse a writer in pure literature; in any case, Chekhov's heroes accompanied him through life. He lived alongside "the man in a case," traveled to autopsies with Ionych, drank tea with congenial artillery officers, treated lovely young women from impoverished noble families, and attended the parties of grasshoppers. He even died artistically, in a literary fashion: a few minutes before his death he drank a glass of champagne, said "I'm dying" in German, though he spoke practically no German, turned onto his right side and died. At that moment the bottle of champagne frighteningly popped its cork, and a dreadfully large, velvety moth flew in the window and beat against the glass in panic.

And he was brought home from Badenweiler in a railway car used to transport oysters and was buried in Novodevich'e cemetery next to Olga Kukaretnikova, the widow of a Kuban Cossack, probably a "pecheneg."

What remains decidedly unclear is that our understanding of Chekhov the writer is still deficient, even though he is the most intelligible "ace" of all "the aces of our literary deck of cards," to use Pisarev's expression. Our misunderstanding of Chekhov has a long history: when critics were still so ingenuous that they wrote in the first person plural, when one of the most widely read authors was Ignatii Potapenko, when Boborykin was considered a living classic, and when the most promising literary trend was rampant populism, the slogan of which was "Forward, without fear or doubt" [...], the critic Mikhailovsky wrote of Chekhov: "I know of no sadder sight than this talent wasted to no purpose." Critics of the time regularly rebuked Anton Pavlovich for his alleged lack of social concern. Unlike other writers of democratic bent and meager talent, who could describe even a stool with Slavophile leanings and in political leaflets, it was said that he did not raise pressing social questions ... but wrote about the individual in every way he saw fit.

The grievances leveled at Chekhov in all likelihood appear strange to the modern reader. To the modern temperament, to demand from Chekhov what devotees of the strict social agenda demanded of him is as absurd as to expect a microscope to pound nails. We now understand something that was obscure even to serious criticism a century ago: the most socially relevant fiction is that which first and foremost is artistically superior. This is obvious now because entire

generations of exposé writers are long and deservedly forgotten: Druzhinin, with his penchant for burning social issues, remains in our literary history only as the founder of the Literary Fund and Lukin only as the inventor of the adjective "punctilious," while Chekhov, "the priest of unprincipled writing," has been unerringly placed on his rightful pedestal in our literary consciousness.

The misunderstandings between Chekhov and his critics stem from their respective conceptions of the artistry of literature or, more precisely, its essence and purpose. The critics ingenuously regarded literature as a means for correcting social disorder (though Herzen also warned that literature is seldom medicine, but always pain); Chekhov, meanwhile, regarded literature as only two or three writers other than himself did--roughly speaking, as a means of spiritual enlightenment, and so a means of cultivating a fundamental life that would be independent of social disorder, for the individual embodies everything, both causes and consequences. In other words, Chekhov understood that literature is an exceptionally refined instrument, designed not for removing warts, but for performing operations on the soul, and only artistic mastery can ensure the success of this operation, for only that which captivates and enchants can be truly constructive or truly destructive. Indeed, one can cover an entire ream of paper with the denunciation, "Nicholas the Bloody, Nicholas the Bloody," but that ream would hardly have as much seditious and subversive force as the succinct portrait of Emperor Nicholas II penned by Chekhov: "They wrongly say that he's sick, stupid, wicked. He's just an ordinary officer of the Guard. I saw him in Crimea..." And so, the socially relevant in literature is that which is artistically superior, and Chekhov was possibly one of the most socially oriented authors of his time. With all the force of his gift, he continually picked away at the same sore spot, bound by nerve impulses to that distant future when each one of us will understand there is no other way but for everything about a person to be beautiful: face and clothes and heart and thoughts. We later formulated this mission differently, but its essence didn't change in the least [...].

The modern reader is generally more astute than the critics of Chekhov's time, but most readers are still of the opinion that Chekhov's prose is severely pessimistic, that he is a voice of misery and mockery, "the poet of twilight moods," a philosopher of doom. Yet Chekhov is a writer of great personal and social optimism, which is especially evident in his drama, but less obvious in his stories and novellas, because Chekhov's prose is imbued with a love for Russian life and the Russian people, a love not expressed by the verb "to love," but by the verb "to pity," which 99% of the Russia population of the time used to denote love. And Chekhov's optimism is not on the level of "Maybe tomorrow, if we're lucky, the price of matches will come down"; it is a sense of the future, characteristic of a man for whom the smell of manure in springtime is not disturbing but invigorating. As the high heavens are ever present in Tolstoy, so the distant horizon, enticing and soothing, runs throughout Chekhov's prose. Even one of his most doleful stories, "The Penny Whistle" ("Svirel"), is bright with love for man, such faith in man and such hope for a favorable outcome, that the apocalyptic discussion between Meliton Shishkin and Luka Bednyj, it seems, conveys more optimism than some industrial epic.

In the way that some fields of mathematics are complete, Chekhov brought much to completion in the genre of the short story. The short story prior to Chekhov was part ethnographic sketch, "a blend of landscape and scenes from everyday life," something that could equally be an excerpt or half-finished, a category of literature with no definite rules of form and content. Chekhov's contribution to the development of the genre may have been only slight, but this "only slight" contribution was the crucial, constructive detail, which defined the architecture of the story the way leaves and flowers defined Art Nouveau. Chekhov developed what Thomas Mann later called "the productive moment," a turning point at which the quantity of what has been narrated is miraculously transformed into the quality of revelation. It happens approximately this way: a man decides to collect a million postage stamps and one fine day has indeed acquired that million; he spreads the stamps out on the floor of his room, lays down on them--here is the productive moment--and shoots himself.

Everything done since Chekhov in the realm of the short story has enriched the genre only decoratively or can be credited as original contents; but how long has it been already that, contrary to the biblical wisdom, new wine has not been spoiled by old skins... .

[...] The memoirs of Chekhov's contemporaries, curiously enough, paint a rather muddled picture: Potapenko maintained that Chekhov never had any friends, to which, incidentally, an appropriate objection from Ostrovsky comes to mind: "But how do you expect

him to talk, if he's a millionaire?" Izmailov recalled that Chekhov was unreliable, because on one occasion he didn't travel across Moscow to treat his maid for a migraine; someone called Anton Pavlovich a coward; another found him arrogant, since a defect of vision made it easier for him to see with his head held high; someone else accused him of Philistine bigotry since he, for example, hesitated to marry an actress, who at the time was held in the same esteem as a concubine, and because he did not allow his sister Mariia Pavlovna to work in Suvorin's *New Times*, saying, "You will not work with him--such is my will." But that's just the rub--all of these rebukes are selected like trees from a forest; they stem from that same sense of consternation in the face of incomparable morality, which can tempt even the most benevolent person because resolute strength is awkwardly disturbing.

Chekhov's moral conviction was strong because it was acquired and developed through extended effort, and so ran deeper and was more principled than a ready-made and adopted morality. After all, Anton Pavlovich emerged [...] from the common folk [...]. Consequently, much desperate work was required for there to emerge what finally emerged from a typical boy [...] who was beaten for giving a dog a crust of bread, who was forced to sing in the church choir and to work in his father's colonial goods shop, who spent two years in both the third and fifth grades, who was taught to be obsequious, liked to have dinner with rich relatives, and who poisoned cats with turpentine. Now it is hard to imagine the scope of that inner effort, the result of which was a man so pure, only a sharp eye can discern that he was nonetheless a living person and not a walking monument to himself; a person of flesh, who suffered at least two incurable illnesses, in his carefully cleaned jacket, worn shoes and pince-nez on its blue strap, which left marks on the bridge of his nose resembling vinegar.

It's awkward to confess this, but it's easier to picture Chekhov the man when you realize that he didn't know how to spend money and always complained, "I have less money than talent for verse," that he, like many mortals, knew how to appreciate feminine beauty, elegant clothing, delicious food, comfortable sprung carriages--not as a philanderer, a dandy, a gourmet and fussy person, but as a cultured person who respects life and beauty in all its manifestations. It's easier to imagine the living Chekhov when one knows that his jokes were not always apropos, that he was an incurable dreamer, now planning a trip to Australia, now a sanatorium for village teachers complete with musical instruments and lectures on meteorology; that he loved to speculate what life would be like in 500 years; that at parties he would sing anthems, hymns and Easter *heirmoi* in his pleasant bass, and at Monte Carlo, pencil in hand, he tried to unravel the secret of roulette; that he ordered for chic effect "Colombo" to appear beneath "Gusev," though the story was written in Moscow; that he feared death and at difficult moments could complain about life [...]. And interestingly enough, this Chekhov no longer intimidates, but simply demonstrates that he continues the artistic work of his fortunate life by his fortunate character, inoffensively teaching successors that a respectable person can emerge from any raw material, that impeccable morality is not at all burdensome, but advantageous and easy.

An absurd, but enticing, fantasy: Chekhov, as before, still lives in Yalta, reading, writing "for the drawer," working in his garden and chuckling through his moustache at the "dog's comedy of our literature." And in a moment of brutal self-loathing and confusion, when the chance to speak your mind to an all-knowing person is dearer than life itself, you take a sheet of paper, a pen, and begin: "Dear Anton Pavlovich!..."

It may be that literature has no special practical significance, and that its didactic return is very slight. Yet still it would appear that less blood has been spilled and fewer injustices committed, that more good has been accomplished and we are more loving to the earth and to each other, thanks to an inextinguishable little flame shining over Russian life--Chekhov.

Two Reviews by John Freedman

Character Study

(This review first appeared in *The Moscow Times* on 2 July 2004)

Andrei Konchalovsky's production of *The Seagull* has not really even begun yet but it is already luring us out of our world and into its own.

The curtain and the walls in front of it are covered in a monotone, earth-colored material reminiscent of gunny sack. The rustic and utterly neutral impression they impart encourages us to cleanse our minds of whatever preconceptions we may have brought with us to the theater. When the lights dim, the curtain flies up hurriedly and in total silence, revealing the sharp contrast of a gorgeous, photography-like view of a lake and the wood beyond it (designed by Ezzo Friggerio). A breathless hush hangs thickly but transparently over the empty stage.

This silence, almost physiological in its totality, is jarring. The complete absence of any sound whatsoever challenges us to be ready for whatever may come. Konchalovsky now has us where he wants us—he has thrown us into a state of blank expectation and has handed us the opportunity to start from a clean slate. It is a wonderful way to approach a play as famous and familiar as Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Maybe these suffering writers and actors and the no less tormented friends and family members who surround them will turn out to be something slightly different from what we expected. Maybe we won't see a mere rerun of a play we have seen so many times.

In short, perhaps there is a discovery or two ahead of us. And there is; there are.

But what is striking is this: the discoveries come one after another even though Konchalovsky offers us a relatively traditional reading of the play. Nothing is turned inside out or upside down. Nothing, or almost nothing, is added or thrown away. Konchalovsky's triumph was to make the play breathe anew. For the most part, Chekhov's characters, now 108 years old, stand before us as if for the first time.

Perhaps it ultimately is to the advantage of the show that it must struggle through some difficult moments in the early going. There is something human and recognizable in that, in imperfection and the struggles that go with it. This is a production that rides on the people it portrays, not on a concept or an interpretation grafted onto the play by the director.

Konchalovsky, 66, a well-known filmmaker who has worked extensively in Russia and the United States, and whose long line of credits includes "A Romance About Lovers" (1974), "Sibiriade" (1979), "Tango and Cash" (1989) and the TV miniseries "The Odyssey" (1997), knows a thing or two about character and how to reveal it. In *The Seagull*, his Moscow-debut stage production, he creates a space and an atmosphere in which he allows his actors to emerge as distinct personalities. He plays with tempos and rhythms, as in the suspended silence of the beginning, or in the comically bustling entries and exits of some secondary characters. Without going far afield, he provides new perspectives, as, for example, when he relocates the second of Chekhov's four acts on the lakefront beach where the characters sunbathe and practice their tennis swings.

In these surroundings and this context, Irina Rozanova's Arkadina, the popular provincial actress whose strong personality centers the play, emerges as few have before her. Playful, petulant, childlike – at times even childish – she is almost painfully vulnerable and laughably, attractively silly at the same time. If she is cruel to her son Treplev at times – as she most certainly is – it is forgivable for she is always ruled by her own flaws, weaknesses and sincerity, rather than by malice.

Treplev, the young would-be writer, has inherited his mother's traits in spades. As played by Alexei Grishin, he is hardly more than a little boy, excitable, irritable when provoked, and quite unprepared to function in the world at large. His life is pulled and pushed by his volatile relationships with his mother, his mother's lover, the famous writer Trigorin (Alexei Serebriakov), and his sweetheart Nina Zarechnaia (Iulia Vysotskaia), who eventually runs off with Trigorin before seeking refuge from her own sorrows as an actress in various provincial theaters.

Watching over the passions, intrigues and scandals that tie these people together and rip their lives apart are Arkadina's aging, soft-headed brother Sorin (Anatolii Adoskin), the caustic but insightful doctor Dorn (Evgenii Steblou) and the melancholic Masha (Olga Miloianina), a young woman who is in love with Treplev but marries the bumbling school teacher Medvedenko (Iurii Cherkasov) in a despairing effort to obliterate all traces of her unrequited affections.

The duo of Rozanova's Arkadina and Serebriakov's Trigorin gives the production its broad, solid base. Arkadina's frivolity and Trigorin's reserve meet on the grounds of their selfishness, their willingness and eagerness to indulge their whims for the sake of their art.

Serebriakov convincingly plays Trigorin as a writer of genuine talent, an artist who knows so much about his own character that he easily grows tired of himself and his art.

Chekhov's doctors – he was one himself, of course – are always extraordinary personalities, sarcastic and wise, rude and understanding all in one. Steblov's interpretation of Dorn feathers well all of the possible nuances. Downright spiteful as he repeatedly goads Sorin for having lived too long and wanting to live more, he flaunts his own health, jogging and practicing tennis, and then turns on a dime and cynically sounds off about being too old for love. Meanwhile, he is the only one in the whole constellation of people who truly sees the potential for talent and innovation in Treplev's writings. He recognizes the telltale signs of poetry when he sees them.

In the early scenes, Grishin's Treplev and Vysotskaia's Nina both seem trapped in imitating youth rather than embodying it. Grishin can be shrill and schematic in his enthusiasm, while Vysotskaia resorts to an unnatural singsong voice and the coquettish turning in of her toes to affect the image of an innocent girl.

But that is all forgotten when they come together in their furtive, final scene of farewell. He is still bound wholly by his past love; she has moved on into a hard life of tragedy and toil. The actors – two very different individuals now – click here, each of them tapping into an emotional depth, spiritual maturity and capacity for self-awareness that throw their shared and individual predicaments into the sharpest possible focus.

Konchalovsky's handling of *The Seagull* displays a tremendous feeling for the paradoxes and the nuances of Chekhov's characters. Beautiful to look at thanks to Friggerio's set and the exquisite period costumes by Rustam Khamdamov, this production goes far beyond surface appearances and explores the conflicting, flawed, multifaceted qualities of people who do their best to live together even when that seems impossible. The fact that someone like Treplev – weak, sensitive and susceptible to the corrosive effects of the world around him – is unable to continue playing the game, is another of the harsh realities that Chekhov insisted we see and that Konchalovsky delivered with taste and wisdom.

Side Shows

(An adaptation of the review of Rosamund Bartlett's *Chekhov: Scenes from a Life*, London: Free Press, 2004, which first appeared in *The Moscow Times* on 20 August 2004.)

One of the litmus tests for any production of Anton Chekhov's classic play *The Seagull* is what tack the actor playing Trigorin takes. Trigorin is a middle-age short-story author whose considerable popularity snares him the worshipful attention of the young wannabe actress Nina Zarechnaia while ensuring him of the animosity of Treplev, an earnest young experimental playwright who has no doubt that Trigorin is a hack and a lout.

Trigorin himself is ambiguous on the topic. He suggests that when he dies people will stand over his grave and say he wasn't bad at describing landscapes, but Ivan Turgenev was a better writer. Trigorin also muses that if he could just fish all day, he would be happy never to write another word.

So it is that one of the great defining factors every time someone performs *The Seagull* is this: Is Trigorin interpreted as a hack or a real artist? In the fifteen years that I have committed the ongoing sin of writing theater criticism I have seen about every kind of Trigorin one can imagine. I have seen him played as a dunce, a boor, an oaf, a crank, an aesthete and an underestimated genius. In a production by Lev Dodin I even saw him played as an intelligent, energetic man half the age of the cowering, jealous Treplev.

Ignoring the occasional bizarre directorial quirk, however, I long ago noticed one thing that almost always holds true: the more talented and complex Trigorin is assumed to be as a writer, and the more genuine and sincere he is depicted as a person, the more the production rings true. Now, having read Rosamund Bartlett's unorthodox, fascinating and highly readable biography, *Chekhov: Scenes From a Life*, I finally know why that is.

Like Trigorin, Chekhov was an ardent fisherman and, as Bartlett convincingly suggests, he was an avid reader of Leonid Sabaneev's classic tome of Russian ichthyology *Fishes of Russia: The Life and Fishing of Freshwater Fish*, which was reissued in 1882, shortly after Chekhov began his literary career writing humorous feuilletons under the pseudonym of Chekhonte. Six years later on a summer day, "the day after he caught six crucian carp," Chekhov set out on a journey through Ukraine, from which he returned "thinking he was going to give up writing." Needless to say, Chekhov didn't carry out the threat. Instead, he grew increasingly popular and, according to Chekhov's brother Alexander, an eye-witness to the incident, when his photograph was hung in a St. Petersburg store window, it drew crowds of giggling girls.

Chekhov knew firsthand what it meant to be besieged by curious, adoring young women. After he moved to Yalta in 1899 because his advancing case of tuberculosis made it impossible for him to remain in the cold, damp climate of Moscow, his house became a pilgrimage shrine for female fans. Sometimes Chekhov was happy to draw them into his confidence (as Trigorin does with Nina Zarechnaia); sometimes he was intent on escaping their presence (as Trigorin ultimately does).

So was Trigorin a self-portrait of the writer as a middle-aged man? Of course not. Not any more than all of Chekhov's famous doctors --Astrov in *Uncle Vania*, Chebutykin in *Three Sisters*, Dorn in *The Seagull* -- were self-portraits of the writer who was educated as a doctor and continued to practice medicine free of charge almost until his death in 1904 at the age of 44. Life and art are too slippery, they refract too many shades of the same color for us ever to draw such simplistic conclusions. But the tantalizing relationships still stand, and there is no doubt that a little knowledge of a writer's biography can help us see his or her works a little more clearly, just as a careful reading of those works can shed a little bit of light on the writer's life. If nothing else, they make us linger and ask a few probing questions before rushing on to something else.

This is where Bartlett's book comes in so beautifully and so subtly. Bartlett herself is a careful and astute reader not only of Chekhov's stories and plays, but of his and others' letters, of seemingly dry official documents, of clues left in the broad historical canvas of Russia at the end of the 19th century. She digs out "insignificant" facts, ferrets out odd legends, cocks an ear to occasional innuendo and spies the occasional literary reference, all of which, when taken together, gives us an amazingly lifelike picture of the person who also happened to be a writer.

The soul of art and perhaps the heart of life is digression and Bartlett is a master at wandering off on tangents. Whether it is by offering a leisurely, but detailed, account of the British invasion of the Crimea at the time that Chekhov's parents were married; a history of how Yalta became a popular resort; or a chronicle of the Russian presence in Siberia, Bartlett constantly colors in the blank areas around the margins of Chekhov's life.

The book, in essence, is a geographical biography. Each of its chapters tells the story of Chekhov's interaction with a place -- Taganrog, where he was born; Moscow, where he became a doctor and a writer; St. Petersburg, where he became a star in the literary firmament; the Crimea, where he drew his inspiration in his youth; Europe, where he sought in vain to escape the advancing ravages of tuberculosis and eventually died in Badenweiler at the Hotel Sommer with his wife, his doctor Josef Schwoerer and a young Russian student by the name of Lev Rabenek in attendance.

The common features of a traditional biography -- torrid love affairs; famous influences; great deeds attempted -- appear in Bartlett's narrative only insofar as they have something to do with the places Chekhov wished to, longed to or was compelled to stay. As such, we rarely find details about Chekhov's sister Masha, one of the most important figures in the writer's life, while even the actress Olga Knipper, Chekhov's wife from 1901 on, seems to be a slight presence. Both spent most of their time living at great distances from Chekhov. Meanwhile, some of the finest and most enlightening pages are devoted to the kind of incidental acquaintances and neighbors that never make their way into conventional life stories.

Here are the kinds of second-tier characters that Bartlett brings into focus: Father Vasiliï, whose terse, no-nonsense sermons young Chekhov heard in his youth; the Lintvarëv family from whom Chekhov once rented a dacha, allowing him to indulge in fishing trips on the Ukrainian River Psël; even the great poet Alexander Pushkin, who in his popular poem *Ruslan and Liudmila* 40 years before Chekhov's birth, immortalized a mulberry tree in Chekhov's hometown of Taganrog erroneously as an oak.

Some of it, like Father Vasiliï's sermons and the curt diary entries Chekhov's father used to keep, strikes us as indispensable to an understanding of this writer whose style was so

economical that he never fulfilled his dream of writing a full-length novel. No less revealing, however, are such frills as the detailed biographies of Chekhov's dogs Schnap, Tuzik, Sharik and Kashtanka.

Chekhov: Scenes From a Life may not always be the place to go for the basic "who-where-when," but I have never read a book that brought me closer to Anton Chekhov.

The Cherry Orchard, November 2004, 45 Downstairs, Melbourne Australia.

Director Kate Wild.

Reviewed by Peta Tait, La Trobe University.

Emotional Memories for Chekhov

Gaev: "In you I salute an existence devoted for over a hundred years to the glorious ideals of virtue and justice." (Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, translated Ronald Hingley OUP 1999, 251.)

Chekhov is among Australia's top ten most produced playwrights—Shakespeare tops the bill. In this year of the anniversary of Chekhov's death there have been the usual number of productions; two professional productions of *The Cherry Orchard* in Brisbane and Melbourne, and two with student-actors. *The Seagull* was part of this year's program at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney, and *Three Sisters* at Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts. Our relatively self-contained theatre cultures are dispersed by distance, and I did not see the Queensland (State) Theatre Company's *The Cherry Orchard* in Brisbane. But I did see the Melbourne production in a small city venue, and found it fitting as a memorial production.

The occasion of a Chekhov play production becomes like a visit to the extended family and anticipating everyone's moods beforehand. The fine detail of interactions between the characters dominated this extremely well-acted, if conventionally rendered, interpretation of the play. Theatre critic, Helen Thomson, sums up: "There is not a weak link in the cast, which gives an uncluttered and moving interpretation of a text (in a fluid translation by David Lan) that requires performative subtlety" ("*Denham's a Joy in Wild's Interpretation*", *The Age*, 15 November 2004, A8). The staging, in a long tableau between two sections of audience seating, was slick and polished, with historical dress but a minimalist set (Glendon Fletcher). It was framed at one end by a large opaque window (overlooking the cherry orchard). The emotional tones of this production were fully developed and ranged from live cello and violin music that established a mood of sad longing and nostalgia at the beginning through to comic interludes. There were some surprises in the performances if not in the play's interpretation; Ania's (Simone Ray) innocent goodness and adolescent playfulness arose out of a seemingly youthful naturalness that I had not encountered before. If Liubov (London-based Virginia Denham) was a little haughty and overwrought, she was elegantly charming, sympathetic and her restrained despair once the orchard was sold carried the weight of this event. Gaev (Phil Roberts), however, proved to be intense and brooding as if troubled by inner demons, and Charlotte (Eleanor Howlett) seemed militaristic with her austere German accent. Lopakhin's (Paul Denny) shifts from optimism to frustration to disbelief as he failed to convince the family to subdivide the orchard were palpable. His meandering incredulity at his own purchase followed on logically, and his snappy business-like manner as the family departed explained his success. Despite her temper and sharpness, Varia (Melissa Chambers) seemed touchingly vulnerable as the hopelessness of the finances and Lopakhin's inability to propose became apparent. The substantial stage presence of accomplished actors playing Firs (John Flaus) and Simeonov-Pishchik (Reg Evans) made these characters especially endearing. Trofimov's (Angus Grant) expansive smiling revolutionary romanticism was seductive, and Epikhodov's (Thomas Milton) ineffectual ineptitude and self-absorption were thoroughly convincing.

From my perspective, Chekhov's brilliance as a dramatist remains his exploration of how emotion—that inherently unstable condition—underlies all experience as foundational to being and self. In dramatic analysis, however, this becomes an exploration of the social meanings of emotions as the plays reveal interactions between characters. The process of turning drama into theatre, with an actor's and a director's interpretations, further complicates a character's emotional qualities. Hence the durability of Chekhov's drama even when productions follow orthodox historical interpretations. The myriad of possibilities for emotional expression always offer a source of fascination (or disappointment) with each new production. In particular, as the emotional pivot of the family, how will Liubov be on the occasion of this visit? (Vanessa Redgrave's Liubov at London National Theatre in 2000 far exceeded my expectations.) Fortunately, in this Melbourne production, there was a profusion of slippery and nuanced emotional connections and interactions. It confirmed that Liubov is incapable of subdividing the orchard because it is part of her identity and sense of self, since there are no neat subdivisions in emotions and memory. Nor perhaps for us in our nostalgic attachment to Chekhov's characters a hundred years on.

NEW BOOKS

The Norton Critical Edition of Anton Chekhov's Selected Plays

In November W. W. Norton published *The Norton Critical Edition of Anton Chekhov's Selected Plays*. It is edited and translated by Laurence Senelick, and includes the five major plays - *Ivanov*, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, along with three one-act farces -- *The Bear*, *The Wedding* and *The Celebration*. Each play is heavily annotated and accompanied by variant readings from alternative versions, including manuscripts and censor's copies. The translations closely follow Chekhov's careful repetitions of words and phrases, which bind the plays together, as well as his jokes and literary allusions.

This is followed by the largest collection in English of Chekhov's commentary to these plays as they appear in his letters.

The section on criticism includes essays by leading European and Russian scholars, most appearing in English for the first time: George Calderon, Naum Berkovsky, Boris Zingerman, Jovan Hristic, Z. Paperny, Patrice Pavis, Lev Shestov, Maria Deppermann, Jurij Striedter and Andrey Bely. There is also a section of directors on Chekhov, with discussion of the plays by great directors of the past century: Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Otomar Krejča, Jean-Louis Barrault, Giorgio Strehler, Peter Brook, Peter Stein, Anatoly Efros and Mark Rozovsky

Chekhov: The Comic Stories

Originally published in 1998, this paperback edition of *Chekhov: The Comic Stories*, selected and translated by Harvey Pitcher and published by André Deutsch, contains 13 stories newly translated for this volume. By the time he was 28, Anton Chekhov had published more than 500 short works of fiction, about half of them comic stories and farces. These early works, written to pay the bills and dashed off while he was "chasing two hares at once"--his medical career and his literary pursuits--show a young man eager to entertain but already beginning to shape his highly original view of the world. This collection contains simple sketches that are like verbal cartoons or comic strips; outrageous parodies and stories with a comic twist; satirical and subversive sketches that anticipate the anti-authoritarian attitudes of his later work and excursions into the absurd that foreshadow his unconventional approach to stage dialogue.

The Chekhov Centennial in North Carolina

Carol Apollonio Flath

On April 2-3, 2004, a conference was held at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to commemorate the Chekhov centennial. The program featured a stimulating combination of scholarly papers and student performances.

Seven scholarly papers were presented. In "Verbal and Visual Representations: Landscape in Chekhov and Levitan," Paul Debreczeny (UNC-CH) addressed the many biographical and artistic connections between the two creative artists. Debreczeny, who is completing a scholarly biography of Levitan, accompanied his talk with a rich analysis of a number of Levitan's most famous paintings.

Daria Kirjanov (New Haven) presented "Prayer and Remembering in Chekhov's 'The Bishop'," a fascinating analysis of the passage of time and the religious theme in this important story. Particularly interesting was her discussion of the influence of Bishop--later monk--Mikhail Gribanovsky (his religious booklet *Nad Evangelie* on "inner and outer prayer," as well as the example of his life) on Chekhov's story. Kirjanov suggests, convincingly, that a photograph of the dying monk with his elderly mother played a key role in Chekhov's conception of the characters in his story.

In a paper particularly relevant in this centennial year, Galina Rylkova (University of Florida), addressed the circumstances of Chekhov's death, and the many layers of fiction, fact, and myth that have accumulated around the subject. By commenting on a combination of significant real-life events (the death of Chekhov's brother Nikolai, for example), fictional portrayals of death (notably that of the professor in "A Boring Story"), memoir sources, and even post-facto film depictions, Rylkova raised important questions about the complex relationship between fact and myth.

In a delightful and life-affirming presentation entitled "Echoes in the Void: Desire and Longing in a Text-Messaging World," New York playwright and critic Brook Stowe (Queens College) demonstrated that Chekhov's theme of the endless search for love is as alive today as ever. The new efficiencies of electronic communication have not led to any change in the essentially Chekhovian connections (and missed connections) that make us human.

Cathy Popkin (Columbia University) gave a witty and intelligent presentation on the somber theme of "Somebody Else's Pain: Chekhov's Epistemology of Empathy." Testing the boundaries of medicine and literature, she examined the complex and fragile psychology of Vasil'ev, the protagonist of "An Attack of Nerves."

In "To Live or Not to Live," Radislav Lapushin (University of Chicago) gave a thought-provoking analysis of the questions raised in the finale of Chekhov's story "At Home". The high intellectual quality of his presentation was matched by the eloquence of his delivery.

The featured speaker was Professor Vladimir Kataev (Moscow State University), who spoke on "*The Cherry Orchard* as an Element of National Mythology." Commemorating both centennials—Chekhov's death and the premiere of his last play—Kataev gave a subtle analysis of *The Cherry Orchard's* nature as a prophetic work that has transcended its own time and place.

The scholarly papers, all offering new insights into Chekhov's works, represented a remarkable and rare commonality of theme, and led to stimulating discussion, both during the sessions themselves and during the remainder of the weekend's events.

The Duke/UNC conference offered a unique balance of mature scholarship, youthful exuberance, and artistic and culinary performance. The scholarly presentations were followed by

original performances by students of both universities. These included student-written scenes based on Chekhov's short stories "The Chorus Girl" and "The Work of Art," performances of scenes from *The Three Sisters* by talented acting students of Duke Professor Jeffrey West, and a short concert by the Duke Russian Chorus. The crowd reacted enthusiastically, and at times with visible emotion, to these young artists' vibrant tributes to Chekhov's legacy.

After the theatrical performances and the keynote lecture, participants enjoyed a stroll through the Duke Gardens, where, in honor of the centennial, the cherry trees were in full bloom.

In the evening, Duke students entertained the participants with an original staging of Chekhov's early story "The Siren's Song." A large team of gifted and energetic students under the leadership of Duke's Lillie Ris and Jonathan Marshall worked on this memorable production, which included an unforgettable catered-and-cooked banquet for fifty attendees, with a lavish menu based on the foods described in the story. [The menu is reproduced at the end of this issue. R.L.]

The weekend events coincided with a new production of *The Seagull* in neighboring Carrboro, N.C.

About one hundred people from the academic community and the community at large attended the conference. The weekend's events served as the culmination of a celebration of Chekhov's work ("The Year of Chekhov") that continued through the academic year at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Participants met once a month to discuss Chekhov's work, to watch current films, and even to stage impromptu performances of scenes from his plays. On February 21, Duke's Blackburn Literary Festival featured a panel discussion of Chekhov in the English-language tradition, with writers Joyce Carol Oates and Robert Morgan and scholars Carol Flath (Duke) and Paul Debreczeny (UNC-CH).

"The Year of Chekhov," which was organized by Carol Flath of Duke and Christopher Putney of UNC-CH, enjoyed the support of a number of generous organizations, including: The Robertson Scholars Collaboration Fund, The Duke/UNC Center for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, The Blackburn Literary Festival, The Office of the Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies at Duke University, Duke University Stores, the Regulator Bookshop, and The Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill Departments of Slavic Languages and Literatures.

CHEKHOV at COLBY (A summary)

Ralph Lindheim

On a pleasant, mostly sunny, early fall weekend on the campus of Colby College in Waterville, Maine, not one but two centenary conferences devoted to Chekhov were convened by their organizers, Julie de Sherbinin of Colby College and Michael Finke of Washington University in St. Louis. These conferences, in turn, were but two of the events of a Chekhov Centenary Festival held at the college through September and October. Two films--*Chekhovian Motifs* (2003), directed by Kira Muratova, and *Four Funny Families* (2004), directed by V. Ulea (Vera Zubarev)--and a one-act play--Carol Rocamora's *I'll take your hand in mine...*, based on the Chekhov-Knipper letters and touchingly performed by Kim Gordon and Richard Sewell--served to kick-off the conferences. The next day, Thursday, October 7th, the North American Chekhov Society held four double sessions, at which more than 25 papers were read. One session was devoted to *The Cherry Orchard*, in celebration of the hundredth anniversary of its premiere, and other panels were devoted to Chekhov and Death, The Legacy of Chekhov's Drama, and Chekhov and Film. In addition, two sessions were focussed on the study of individual stories by Chekhov--stories such as "Khoristka," "Duèl'," "V rodnom uglu," "Po delam sluzhby," "Sluchai iz praktiki," and the so-called "malen'kaia trilogiia." The presenters were a wonderful mix of younger and older scholars, all of whom, if I may be permitted a very personal note, demonstrated an impressive enthusiasm for the writer they commemorated. The day ended with a video presentation, *Brace*

Up!, of an avant-garde performance based on Chekhov's *Three Sisters* by the Wooster Group of Manhattan.

On Friday and Saturday the National Endowment for the Humanities sponsored a symposium addressing the issue of *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon*. The symposium marked the impact of Chekhov on American culture by bringing together, as the organizers wrote, "prominent scholars, translators, theater practitioners, writers, public critics and specialists in the medical humanities to discuss their perspectives on Chekhov's life and writings, assess Chekhov's significance for their particular disciplines, and present their own new work."

Professor Savely Senderovich of Cornell University and Professor Robert Jackson of Yale University, two teachers who have devoted a large part of their academic lives both writing on Chekhov and influencing a generation of American scholars and critics, opened the symposium with a session on Chekhov's Poetics. Professor Senderovich, in his paper "Two Opposing Approaches to the Problem of Incidental Detail in Chekhov's Poetics," corrected Aleksandr Chudakov's interpretation of Chekhovian details, noting that they only seem to be irrelevant and pointing to the hidden meanings they insinuate. Professor Jackson's paper, "'Rothschild's Fiddle' Revisited," elucidated the story's rich exploration of the Eastern Orthodox model of crisis, repentance, and redemption, a pattern accomplished by the return from exile through memory and suffering of Chekhov's prodigal hero. The next panel devoted to Chekhov and American Literature featured presentations by three American academics, Katherine O'Connor of Boston University, Andrew Durkin of Indiana University, and Julie de Sherbinin from Colby College. In her paper, "Writing in English with a Chekhov Muse," Katherine O'Connor mentioned Katherine Mansfield's version of "Spat' khochetsia" but went on to introduce many of us to the delightful play, *Talking Things Over with Chekhov*, by John Ford Noonan. Andrew Durkin's "Hunters off the Beaten Track: The Dismantling of the Pastoral Myth in Chekhov and Crane" compared Chekhov's parodic treatment of pastoral with Hart Crane's rejection of his pastoral tradition, and Julie de Sherbinin's paper, "American Iconography of Chekhov," commented on a series of pictorial images of Chekhov and the aspects of his personality and creativity that these images projected and even created.

The afternoon session began with an informal translators' roundtable moderated by Carol Flath of Duke University. The celebrated wife and husband team, Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pevear, and Peter Constantine talked with each other and with the audience, giving away not only the secrets of the way they worked but also some revealing disclosures about the various writers they translated. They, of course, commented on the works of Chekhov, noting which of his works they especially liked or disliked and isolating the features of Chekhov's prose that were easy to convey in English and those difficult to capture simply, directly, economically. Later in the afternoon four novelists and critics, James McConkey, Claire Messud, Francine Prose, and James Wood offered generous and lively testimonies and discussions about how Chekhov had affected, if not influenced, their writing, their teaching, and, in some particularly moving comments, their lives. Some of the works they singled out were *Sakhalin Island*. "The Lady with the Dog," and "Rothschild's Fiddle."

In the evening, *Gull*, a new adaptation of Chekhov's *Seagull* was presented at Strider Theater on the Colby campus. The production by LightBox, a theater company known for its ensemble work and its sensually heightened productions, was directed by Ellen Beckerman. She also participated in a discussion with the audience following the performance.

The first session on Saturday morning was titled: "Doctor/Patient, Author/Reader: Conflicting & Conflating Identities." Conevery Bolton Valencius, a Senior Fellow at the Dibner Institute for the History of Science and Technology, M.I.T., spoke on *Sakhalin Island* as a typical example of medical geography, a type of scientific discourse popular in the nineteenth century that fell out of favor at the end of that century but was rehabilitated at the end of the twentieth century. This type of scientific writing emphasized the accumulation of facts and figures about the environmental factors informing on, if not actually determining the physiological and psychological and, ultimately, moral condition of the human beings living in the studied

surroundings. Absolutely central to the methodology of Chekhov's study of Sakhalin and to this type of discourse, which sought to isolate and organize medical knowledge, was the technique of careful observation and measurement of the local facts and features. But, of course, what Chekhov's study exposed was the failure of medical geography, that is, the senseless discrepancy between what actually existed on the island and what would exist under a Russian penal system governed by science. In his paper, "Heal Thyself, Hide Thyself: Why Did Chekhov Ignore His TB?," Michael Finke explored the reasons, both conventional and idiosyncratic, that Chekhov concealed his medical condition. And in part the myth he created for and of himself, the image of the man "squeezing the slave out of himself drop by drop" played a role in his evading a medical examination by another doctor that would have revealed certain facts about his past and that of his family, which he preferred to keep buried. Professor Cathy Popkin of Columbia University presented the session's last paper, "Doctor without Patients/Man without a Spleen: Chekhov's Practice." She began by noting the many pseudonyms Chekhov used at the beginning of his career, postulating that their number was related to the many activities in which Chekhov as a young and healthy man was engaged. Such a plurality of identities may, she suggested, be generated by the lack of a fundamental identity. And perhaps one of Chekhov's most important last stories, "The Bishop," reiterates at the beginning, middle, and end of the story, where the hero divests himself of all that he had acquired in his spectacular rise in the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church, the value of the lack of a distinct, separate identity.

The second Saturday morning session began with a videotaped interview of Dr. Robert Coles (Department of Psychiatry, Harvard University), the title of which was "Anton Chekhov and William Carlos Williams." Coles, who was too sick to attend the conference, began by recalling his introduction to Chekhov, when the story "Aniuta" was recommended to him by the poet and doctor, William Carlos Williams. This short prose classic together with such later works as "Ward No. 6" at first taught Coles and later continued to remind him of how much doctors had to learn from their patients and how much the ill, the sick, and the weak had to teach all who are more fortunate. The strength of Coles's memories and the vibrancy of his words in the light of the disease that was in the process of sapping his energy brought tears to the eyes of many viewers. The session concluded with an extended conversation directed by Richard Kahn, M.D. and Professor Michael Finke to initiate an exchange of ideas among the teachers and critics of Chekhov and medical practitioners in the audience, an exchange that will, it is to be hoped, continue and become even more fertile in the future. The stories mentioned by Dr. Coles and later stories, "Po delam sluzhby" and "Sluchai iz praktiki," were the focus of this first discussion.

Saturday's afternoon sessions were preceded by a lecture by Laurence Senelick of Tufts University, who, in connection with his recent translations of Chekhov's plays, reprised the topic of Chekhovian details sounded in the opening session. He taught us all how important it was to respect what Chekhov intended these details to convey and then to communicate these details, especially the recurring words, phrases, and images, as cleanly and simply and insistently as did their creator. After a short coffee break, the panel on Chekhov and drama was initiated by Svetlana Evdokimova of Brown University who read a paper titled "Chekhov's Trouble with Theatre: The Undramatic Drama." She was followed by Spencer Golub, also from Brown, who gave a dazzling performance of his paper entitled "Incapacity," which consisted of a philosophical reverie, both self-flattering and self-disparaging, by the marginalized character in *The Cherry Orchard*, Epikhodov. In an overwhelmingly self-conscious monologue the character reflected on his own capacity and incapacity, and speculated about the others in the play who, for a myriad of reasons, paid him little or no attention or showed him little concern. Sharon Carnicke (University of Southern California) in her paper, "The Nasty Habit of Adapting Chekhov's Plays," looked at the profusion of adaptations of Chekhov flooding the English-speaking stage. She conceded the need for these versions, which are produced mostly by writers and playwrights who know no Russian and thus should honestly not be advertised as translations. Yet she also noted the danger they pose: the hardening of the view established in the 1920's that Chekhov, unless modernized and adulterated, will prove box office poison and, concomitantly, the threat that Chekhov's own voice and vision will be lost. And in the paper, "The Sound of a Distant Thunder: the Chekhovian Subtext in *The Coast of Utopia*," Anna Muza, (UC-Berkeley) discussed the Russianness of the first play in Tom Stoppard's recent trilogy. Attention was drawn to the "borrowings" from Chekhov, the stereotypically Russian features of his drama as well as specific

allusions to the major plays, but greater emphasis was placed on his influence on Stoppard's exploration of philosophical problems, those of historical change and the phenomenological ambiguities of perception and experience.

The last session, devoted to performance practice, began with Michael Heim (University of California at Los Angeles), the subject of whose paper was perfectly reflected in its title, "Translating Chekhov's Plays: Collaboration between the Translator and the Director and the Actors." He also mentioned he tried to craft for American audiences a linguistic medium that gave them the impression that they were listening to another language, but one that was nevertheless comprehensible. Carol Rocamora (Tisch School of the Arts, New York University) in her paper, "Must There Be a Cherry Orchard in *The Cherry Orchard?*: Directors' Perceptions of Chekhov," recalled both the problems she had to face during her production of the play in Philadelphia and some inventive solutions. The festival closed with a paper by Alexander Popov of the Moscow Art Theater. In his short and lively paper, "Cherries Dried, Pickled and Jammed: American and Russian Students Study Chekhov," he contrasted Russian and American approaches to Chekhov's theater and theatricality and pointed out that Americans take a too serious approach to Chekhov. They worship in the church of Chekhov and too often fail to recognize how much fun it is "to play at Russian doom and gloom," how much Chekhov allows them to display their thespian skills and gifts.

The Chekhov centenary conferences concluded with a gala reception and banquet in the impressive new wing of the Colby College Museum of Art. Nice wine, short speeches, and good cheer marked this closing event, which was attended by many of the participants in what was surely, as the President of Colby College, William Adams, remarked at the opening of the symposium, "the largest group of Chekhov specialists ever to meet in Maine."

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Jerome H. Katsell, "Vishnevyy sad: Razmyshlenie o smerti."

Andrei Kirillov, "Vishnevyyi sad A. P. Chekhova: V poiskakh utrachennoogo vremeni."

Radislav Lapushin, "To Live and Not to Live: (The Finale of Chekhov's 'V rodnom uglu')."

Ralph Lindheim, "The Cherry Orchard: Chekhov's Praise of Folly."

Marina Madorskaia, "Overcoming the Resistance of Chekhov's Drama: Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42nd Street*."

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~ The Siren ~
A Russian Feast

~ Drinks ~

An assortment of sparkling water, sparkling cider and wine,
to captivate the palate and heighten one's senses.

~ Appetizers ~

Savory pieces of herring, to be eaten with relishes of onion and mustard, or enjoyed alone.

Complemented with light, delicate slices of smoked fish, and delectable caviar.

Platter of vegetables, raw, marinated and grilled. Perfected with smooth buttermilk and cucumber dipping sauce.

Mushrooms, gifts of nature, served in two ways to satisfy.

Select white mushrooms, pickled and stewed with a tantalizing white wine sauce.
Large balsamic-marinated mushrooms, stuffed with delicious smoked ham, havarti cheese and caramelized onions.

Tasty spinach & cheddar triangles, rich pastry stuffed to overflowing with spinach and aged white cheddar cheese.

~ Entrees ~

Delectable salmon pie. Butter oozing out like teardrops, rich and succulent eggs, salmon, onions, mushrooms...

Authentic Borsch, made in the true Ukrainian style.
Beetroot, ham, sausages, sprinkled with fresh parsley and dill and topped off with rich sour cream.

Rich, succulent duck, roasted to perfection.

Roast beef, thinly sliced and cold peppered,
with a creamy horseradish sauce and grainy mustard.

A platter filled with delicious Vegetarian delights:
cheese tortellini, grilled vegetables, marinated mushrooms,
baked spinach & cheddar triangles with baked green olives in pastry.

~ Dessert ~

Rich, addictive chocolate concerto cake and smooth, heavenly tiramisu.
Fresh fruits, to be eaten dipped in raspberry yogurt sauce.