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Conference Update

Chekhov on Page and Stage: December 2-4, 2010, Columbus, OH

Angela Brintlinger reports on the planning for the Chekhov Sesquicentennial Conference to be held on the campus of Ohio State University. Preliminary funding has been secured, and she and her colleagues are now ready to construct the program.

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Please contact members of the program committee with ideas for papers and panels. Proposals should include a 150-word abstract of the paper plus a 2 page CV and are due by **September 1, 2009**. Details about funding for this celebratory conference will be forthcoming and are contingent upon constructing an exciting and varied program.

Plans for the conference include a section on "Chekhov, Medicine and Public Health" (organized by Brintlinger); "Cinematic Stagings of Chekhov" (organized by Ignatieva); "Writing under the Influence of Chekhov" (organized by Herman); and "Reading and Writing Chekhov" (organized by Rylkova). Evdokimova has offered to organize a section on "Bridging the Gulf," about how literary and theater scholars can work with each other to unite the page and stage.

The conference will feature film viewings as well as stagings of scenes from Chekhov, including a reprise of a scene from the OSU Theater Department's Spring 2010 production of *The Three Sisters*. The organizers plan to publish a collection of selected essays from the conference in Russian and English. In the spirit of cross-cultural collaboration, they hope also to match up translators to our American "Chekhovians" for publishing Chekhov-influenced works in Russian in such journals as *Inostrannaia literatura* and *Chekhoviana*.

Editor's Note

In addition to the conference update, which introduces this issue, you will find an essay on Chekhov's last play by Stuart M. Tave, a review of recent productions of *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanina*, a report on a performance of a ballet based on *The Seagull*, a book review of an important collection, and an exchange of letters. But before beginning the essay on *Cherry Orchard* it should be pointed out that it originally appeared in a fascinating book, *Lovers, Clowns and Fairies: An Essay on Comedies* (Chicago & London, 1993), along with essays on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Man and Superman*, *Volpone*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Tristram Shandy*, and other works. In his preface Professor Tave explains why he begins with Shakespeare's play and then succinctly introduces the central groups in the play and the roles they play in the comedies he discusses:

I have found it useful to begin with *A Midsummer's Night Dream* because its tale of love, foolishness, and happiness has the familiarity of a long accepted line of recognizably similar works, before and after, and there is a value in beginning with a ready experience. . . .

There is a vocabulary which runs throughout and, the hope is, gains weight as it goes, so that the familiar observations about the individual works have additional interest as they develop less noted relations with other works. The vocabulary comes almost entirely from the works themselves and from the qualities of their casts of characters and the events those meet as they move through their stories. The lovers in pursuit of their desires meet with difficulties in their course, problems they must overcome, some presented by other characters or forces, some within themselves. There are restraints upon them, sometimes appearing as disabling laws or illnesses. They do not see well, know how to understand what it is they should do, which is a problem with their eyes, their vision. Their course of love may take them on a journey, to another place, to the freedom or the remedy, where they hope desires will be fulfilled, but in their blindness they may lose themselves in what is sometimes a darkness, a dream, a shadow; and the awakening may require time, short or long as it is a measure of the difficulty of change. That turn of time may be painful, for the end of the blindness can be a humiliating, a mortifying experience, a moment of shock, that demands a giving up of an old life and self to permit the beginning of a new. But the ability to move, whether it be an impressive moral and intellectual change or a lucky chance that improves youthful fortunes, does tend to distinguish lovers from clowns. Clowns too have their hopes, sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, and our response to them will vary accordingly; but usually theirs are not such aspirations as we can sympathize with as we do with the young lovers, because, contrary to their own estimation, clowns are incompetent and unfitted for what they want. They are usually defeated, self-defeated, and even where they succeed it is in spite of themselves because they are incapable of change, of eye-opening. Those characters who are effective agents in promoting or hindering the movements of the lovers and clowns are here called fairies because, in their most powerful forms, they have a more than mortal power, in the first example Puck, an agent of a magical king. The fairies have the ability to control the lives of human creatures, may stand outside the human limiting conditions of time and space. These superior spirits, with their often undetected, sometimes literally invisible, opportunities of observation, command an effective insight, an ability to read minds, and are thereby able to predict and direct the actions of the mortals, reveal truths. They have the power to play with others' fortunes, have sport, sometimes stage a play with their unknowing cast; they can be excellent in mimicry to deceive, mislead, trick, make mischief, wild in their freedom, pushing the limits of life; they can be malicious, devilish. They have the magic which can change the vision, blind the eye with the potent charm; they know how to enchant, bewitch. From their height they can make fools, enjoy the spectacle, laugh at mortals who do not see the truth. But in other appearances they are helping figures, good fellows, who are capable of providing the solution to the problems of the mortals, having the power to remove difficulties, overcome laws, remedy illnesses, provide for happiness; and, in their most interesting way of doing this, they know how to return the blinded mortals, administer the counter-charm, the eye-opener, and lead lovers to the truth at the end of the journey.

The power by which this happens may not be fully explicable. It can manifest itself as a magic, a dream, perhaps a chance, a strangeness that tries and reshapes lives by taking them into another realm with other laws. It works by the transfiguring of minds (all together, where that is possible). Like the administering fairies these forces of change are variable forms which usually lead to the desired end; but then that is sometimes a mixed happiness, and like the fairies these forces go by paths of uncertainties, of shifting meanings, taking the mortals through mocking turns before allowing them to reach the end. In their course the characters may find that they have interchanged roles, that they have mistaken what they thought were their proper roles and are, it appears, proper subjects of laughter under the limits of the human condition on earth: lovers, clowns and fairies enter the dance and move in the circle. And, even if the mortals do not understand that story about themselves, we are instructed in the wisdom to know that it is about us.

(pp. xiv – xvii)

Professor Tave admits that toward the end of his book, where he places his reading of *The Cherry Orchard* with a few references to other works he discusses, the comedies are more “problematic” than those placed first. Yet the paradigm formed by his three groups of comic figures and their interactions still proves valuable in reflecting on Chekhov's comedy and responding to it.

The wrong time to give a dance

The Cherry Orchard

Stuart M. Tave

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The Cherry Orchard must be a most difficult play to produce. It had problems in the first effort, with Stanislavsky, who wept when he read it, insisting to Chekhov that it was a “tragedy,” Nemirovich-Danchenko complaining to him that whatever it was it had too many weeping characters, Chekhov upset that it was being advertised as a “drama” and not the “comedy” he said he had written. But at every level of production, right to the prop-man, it must be a difficult act to get together (or maybe prop-men delight in these things, I don’t know). The amount of dropping and breaking that goes on is astonishing. A character like Epihodov, who is called “two and twenty misfortunes,” on his first entrance drops a nosegay, then stumbles against a chair and knocks it over, in a later act evidently invites himself to play billiards and breaks a cue stick (offstage, fortunately) and in the last act, to help the family in its departure, puts a trunk down on a cardboard hat box and crushes it. “There, now, of course—I knew it would be so.” A bit after that he rather charmingly even loses his voice with suppressed emotion. “I’ve just had a drink of water, and I choked over something,” but that’s the actor’s problem and the character certainly gets no sympathy from anyone else (IV, 69, 76). He does have difficulties with small objects, external and internal, but these are part of a large drama in which he plays his role heroically. “There! (*as though triumphant*),” as he hits the chair, “There you see now, excuse the expression, an accident like that among others. . . . It’s positively remarkable (*goes out*)” (I, 5). Destiny behaves mercilessly to him but he accepts. “Every day some misfortune befalls me and I have long ago grown accustomed to it, so that I look upon my fate with a smile,” “if I may venture to express myself, I merely smile at it, I even laugh” (III, 58). There is a comforting tragedy in this endless confrontation at the highest level, but it does require the proper equipment:

I’m a cultivated man, I read remarkable books of all sorts, but I can never make out the tendency I am myself precisely inclined for, whether to live or to shoot myself, speaking precisely, but nevertheless, I always carry a revolver. Here it is . . . (*shows revolver*). (II, 29)

If this were Ibsen (or another Chekhov play) we and the prop-man might be certain that the gun would go off in the last act, but we can feel easy with Epihodov, because the gun probably doesn’t work, or he doesn’t know how it works, and if he did try to shoot himself he’d surely miss; and that’s well, because otherwise he might hurt himself and we wouldn’t want that.

The prop-man has to keep track only of the objects he himself actually needs, but for us the distinctions among onstage and offstage things, and breakings which are not, or not fully, physical, and losses which are not reported or felt or perceived by the

characters, are less easy to separate. In the first act Anya does lose her hairpins as she stands there and Dunyasha breaks a saucer, and in the next act Madame Ranevsky (Lyubov Andreyevna) drops and scatters her money. But then in the act following Pishchik loses his money, falls into a fright and tears and sweat, and then gleefully finds it himself, behind the lining of his coat, so that we don't need to see that scattering, except in his wits. We do need a little table for Lopahin to tip over accidentally, and the candelabra which he almost upsets, when he has bought the cherry orchard and can pay for everything; but then to start the play he has missed a (naturally) unseen train. Well, we do need Firs's stick with which Varya tries to hit Epihodov, but misses, at the very moment triumphant Lopahin is entering to announce his purchase and take the blow. "Very much obliged to you!" "I haven't hurt you?" "Oh, no! Not at all! There's an immense bump coming up, though!" (III, 59-60). And though it is an offstage event we do need sound effects for Trofimov falling down the stairs. But the thermometer which in the last act is said to be broken doesn't have to be repaired for each performance. We can't expect to be shown the recipe for the preserved cherries which they used to send to Moscow and Harkov by the wagon-load—"That brought the money in!"—soft and juicy, sweet and fragrant—" . . . They knew the way to do them then . . . " "It's forgotten. Nobody remembers it" (I, 16). The villa at Mentone which Madame Ranevsky lost to debt, in preparation for her present difficulties in hanging on to real estate, is in another country. And then there are *some* people who get lost, notably aged and faithful Firs; with all the careful inquiries which the characters make about him, each assured that someone else has taken care of or will take care of him, he does get forgotten and left alone, in a locked room, to conclude all. At the other end of life, there was once a little boy, Madame Ranevsky's son Grisha, who drowned in the river, "such a pretty boy he was, only seven" (I, 11), for whom she still weeps when she is reminded of that. We can all agree that the accidental death of a child is a sad event, must be wept for, but of course this happened a while ago and we have never known him, and, in this family, he does seem to have been one more object that slipped through their fingers somehow. That wayfarer who wanders in and out, a self-proclaimed Russian brother, not quite knowing if he's on the road to the station, or so he says, has come to the right place, for his brief moment. The harp-string that snaps, half way through the play and again at the very end—what is it? in the sky? in the pits? somewhere far away—in another play might be a kind of easy and obvious reaching for an effect, but here it seems just right, at home. The prop-man better get that distant, mournful, dying sound right (Chekhov was insistent). And among other cosmic effects he will need two pair of old goloshes, one a wrong pair, not Trofimov's, to be thrown in from the wings by Varya, then the right pair for her to find after that, so he can march off into the future. Trofimov had lost them and they'd been worrying us. In this play that delayed finding and recovery is almost a note of hope.

It must be a difficult play for the actors. There must be twenty-five or thirty moments for tears, varied occasions and kinds of tears, some happy, some bitter, most just tears—in tears, through his/her tears—and only a few of the family or servants or friends are exempted from them (Chekhov was angry at Stanislavsky for taking all these stage directions too literally). Then too there is a great deal of laughter, if not quite as much as the tears yet very close to that (not counting all the joyfullys, gleefullys and gailyys), sometimes in the same speeches as the tears, to be produced both individually and, several times, in a chorus of "(*All laugh*)."

There are specifically noted directions for

excitement, wonder, triumph, despair, ecstasy, anxiety, anger, horror, and calls to sigh, scream, shake the fist, clutch the head, kiss, embrace, dance, shout dance-calls, hum, sing, play a guitar (and call it a mandolin), play imaginary billiard games, start reciting a poem about a sinful woman, listen to a little Jewish “orchestra,” do parlor tricks, smoke a cigar, eat, drink, fling things, swing things. The contrast between the little that happens and the large emotional activity and the stage-busyness is wonderful. Maybe actors delight in these things (again I don’t know), but then in that broken dialogue, the odd sequence of speeches, remembering one’s cues cannot be easy; and the cues must be fed just right because if they are not, then, in a special and peculiar way, one will be throwing off the other actors, who in turn have to keep the thing moving in the right way or there will be a complete breakdown. It seems that this might be an easy play in which to ad-lib if there were a hitch, but I should think that this is not so at all. The words have got to be right. The rhythm has got to be right: time is so important in this play. The most common stage direction, and it is certainly common, has to do with rhythm: “(a pause).” Maybe it’s a little less common than one or another variation of tears, but then they too have to do with the syncopated rhythms. The *ritardando* of the three dots, three dots, that pace the dialogue is a continual notation. (In this chapter, contrary to normal practice and necessarily so, three dots are part of the quoted text unless otherwise indicated.)

There must be a certain problem in keeping things moving on the stage. Sleeping is an important activity. We begin with Lopahin yawning and stretching, having fallen asleep over his book, and so missing the train he was supposed to meet at the station. Anya arrives, without his help, staggers in exhaustion, later ends the act falling asleep as she sits down, returns to a half-sleep to say a few words. Pishtchik is the best performer in this mode, on two occasions actually falling asleep while he is talking (I, 19; III, 47). Yasha is a great yawner, five, six times. It is one of the few reassuring comforts at the end of the last act, as Gaev leaves his lost home, that he sleeps better now, though one would think he’d already been doing well at that, or at least yawning well. But there is a limit to what can be done on the stage with sleeping so there is rather more of dreaming. When Lopahin, who knows he has some difficulty with language, peeps in at the door at Varya and Anya and moos like a cow and disappears, Anya is reminded by his expressiveness that he loves Varya; she wonders what they two are waiting for, and everyone is congratulating Varya, but Varya knows there is really nothing to it: “It’s all like a dream.” She has another dream, “I keep dreaming all the time,” of marrying Anya to a rich man and then going off by herself on a pilgrimage (I, 10). Anya has her own way, speaking in Act I “*dreamily*” of the past, in the last act “*dreamily*” of the future (II, 71). And between she echoes Madame Ranevsky.

LYUBOV: (*dreamily*). There goes Epihodov.

ANYA: (*dreamily*). There goes Epihodov. (II, 40)

Lyubov tells Lopahin he is well aware of her hopes for him and Varya, “I dreamed of marrying her to you” (IV, 73). He doesn’t understand it himself, he confesses, and he’s ready, but his dreams have run in other directions. “My God, the cherry orchard’s mine! Tell me that I’m drunk, that I’m out of my mind, that it’s all a dream (*stamps with his feet*),” “I am asleep, I am dreaming!” though one mustn’t have the impression that he is happy, or not that only, because he ends with tears for his own miserable, disjointed life (III, 61-62). But the money keeps coming to the last, even Pishtchik repaying him 400

roubles, almost a third of the debt he owes. Lopahin is amazed. “It’s like a dream” (IV, 72).

It is a puzzling matter for these characters to locate themselves and they can’t work it out. If in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* every character is a member of a class, a definitive classification, with political, social, economic, cultural, linguistic coordinates, and no possibility, or desire, of moving from that order; and if in that play any confusions of class are delightful because they are seen to be minor and temporary aberrations which will be set straight, in this play there is hardly anyone who has not been declassified and, far from liberated, has not been permanently confused by that loss. Old Firs is, naturally enough, the most lost. He remembers how things were before the calamity.

GAEV: Before what calamity?

FIRS: Before the emancipation (*a pause*).

He was the head footman before the emancipation came: “I wouldn’t consent to be set free then; I stayed on with the old master . . .” Poor fellow, his new master doesn’t know much of mastering either. “The peasants knew their place,” Firs says, “and the masters knew theirs; but now they’re all at sixes and sevens, there’s no making it out” (II, 41, 37). He has an impossible job now trying to get the servants to do their work, feckless and uncaring as they are. Dunyasha drops things, forgets things, no longer a peasant, not a lady, a useless combination of both:

I am so nervous, I’m always in a flutter. I was a little girl when I was taken into our lady’s house, and now I have quite grown out of peasant ways, and my hands are white, as white as a lady’s. I’m such a delicate, sensitive creature, I’m afraid of everything. I’m so frightened. (31)

One can hardly blame her—in a house where she is impressed into dancing with the guests, to fill out the party.

My young lady tells me to dance. There are plenty of gentlemen, and too few ladies, but dancing makes me giddy and makes my heart beat.

Like her dreaming betters, and going them one better, she can say “I am lost in reverie (*plays with her fan*)” (III, 57-58). Yasha, Madame Ranevsky’s valet, has been entirely spoiled by the mistress, in Paris, is mad to return there from the uncultured Russia he now cannot bear (he no longer wants to see even his old mother—he’s the one genuinely contemptible character in the play), trifles in his stupid and callous way with Dunyasha, is insubordinate with Gaev.

Lopahin is the one former peasant who has made a significant move, is a rich man; in his white waistcoat and brown shoes he feels like a pig in a bun shop and, for all his money, “come to think, a peasant I was, and a peasant I am.” In reality, he says, hard in his self-judgment, he’s just another blockhead, like his father. “I’ve learned nothing properly. I write a wretched hand. I write so that I feel ashamed before folks, like a pig” (I, 4; II, 36). There is, offstage, an indeterminately large number of people who in their way are moving up too. They are the customers Lopahin has in mind when he plans the redevelopment of the cherry orchard, clearing out the old buildings, this house too, which is really good for nothing, and cutting down the orchard. Now that the railway runs close by, if the cherry orchard and the land along the river were cut up into plots and leased for

summer villas the family could make 25,000 roubles a year out of it. (That must mean a thousand renters because it would be 25 roubles for a three-acre plot from summer visitors; it must also be then 3,000 acres, so it's not a little estate we're talking about here). It's a perfect situation with that deep river (yes, *that* deep river). There used to be only the gentlefolk and the peasants in the country, he says, but now there are these summer people; all the towns are surrounded now by these summer villas. And in another twenty years there'll be more people and they'll be everywhere. At present the summer visitor only drinks tea in his verandah, but maybe he'll take to working his bit of land too, this new member of the landed class, and that Lopahin thinks will make Lyubov's orchard a success (I, 15-17). Lopahin himself, it turns out, is the one who will make a lot of money from this subdivision (and no doubt it will be called Cherry Orchard Estates, after the fashion of developers, who christen their creations for the beauty they have destroyed). He is a good fellow, Lopahin, and he would help Lyubov and Gaev, he even begs them, would do that job not for his but their benefit. They can't understand what he means.

LYUBOV: Cut down? My dear fellow, forgive me, but you don't know what you are talking about. If there is one thing interesting—remarkable indeed—in the whole province, it's just our cherry orchard. (15)

That's not just a silly response (Matthew Arnold tested an age by asking how interesting it was). But here it's a hopeless case. Lyubov married out of her class, below it, and has now descended into worse. Gaev, still being taken care of, like a boy, by Firs, is going to become a bank clerk, but that won't last.

There is a flotsam, drifting, quality to these people who cannot locate themselves. That wayfarer who wanders from nowhere to nowhere and frightens them is their brother. Varya wants to spend her life going from one holy place to another; "I would go on and on . . . What bliss!" (I, 10). Domestically the wandering is done by Charlotta Ivanovna, the ungoverning governess, who begins the second act, when plans to save the estate are formulated, with her own musing, with no identity card.

I haven't a real passport of my own, and I don't know how old I am, and I always feel that I'm a young thing.

Of course she is not a young thing, young things have a future, with love, marriage. But not she:

where I came from, and who I am, I don't know . . . Who my parents were, very likely they weren't married . . . I don't know (*takes a cucumber out of her pocket and eats*). I know nothing at all (*a pause*). One wants to talk and has no one to talk to . . . I have nobody.

She does have the cucumber so we needn't worry about her survival.

Also, Charlotta Ivanovna does have one admirer of her talents, the magic charm upon him:

PISHTCHIK: (*wonderingly*). Fancy that now! Most enchanting Charlotta Ivanovna. I'm simply in love with you.

CHARLOTTA: In love? (*shrugging her shoulders*). What do you know of love, guter Mensch, aber schlechter Musikant! (III, 49)

That's true enough and it is a fair account of most, all, of the men—good men, but love is not the kind of music they can make. There is a remarkable number of such affairs going, one cannot say in progress. Epihodov is ineffectively in love with Dunyasha (“He does love me, he does love me so!”), but she is ineffectively in love with Yasha (“I’m passionately in love with you, Yasha; you are a man of culture—you can give your opinion about anything (*a pause*)”; and Yasha agrees, “(*yawns*). Yes, that’s so. My opinion is this: if a girl loves anyone, that means she has no principles (*a pause*)” (I, 8; II, 31). Yasha will steal a kiss, but he is in love with no one but himself and is happy to get away at the end. Not much hope in the cast of that incomplete *ronde*. Madame Ranevsky does not have a history which indicates past or future success, or sets much of an example for her children. Her marriage was a disaster, to a man who drank himself dead, made nothing but debts. Then to her misery she loved another man (and little Grisha had to die to punish her for that sin). That pitiless, brutal lover wore her out with his illness, dried her soul, in Paris robbed and abandoned her, brought her to a try at poison and suicide (II, 34-35). And now that he is sick and poor and begging for her again she will be going back to him, which does seem like a generous act—and she is a generous woman, in the sense of one who throws away money, throws away herself—but it also seems like a seeking which can never be happily satisfied. “I love him, that’s clear. I love him! I love him!” is neither a clear nor a convincing cry, not even to herself. He is, as she says, a millstone about the neck and she is going to the bottom with him, “but I love that stone” (III, 53-54). Anya and Trofimov appear to be the one traditional young pair who offer a hopeful possibility, both eager, looking to the future; but, as with the others, it is an appearance only, all the more frustrating because of its conventional signs of an expected reality. Madame Ranevsky would gladly let Trofimov marry Anya, “I swear I would,” but “you must do something with your beard to make it grow somehow (*laughs*). You look so funny!” (53). He has no wish to be a beauty, he says, and his sort of beardless immaturity isn’t a sign of youth. When she sees him in the first act, and he had been the tutor of her Grisha, she looks at him in perplexity until he has to introduce himself. “Can I have changed so much?”

LYUBOV: . . . But, Petya? Why have you grown so ugly? Why do you look so old? [my dots]

TROFIMOV: A peasant-woman in the train called me a mangy-looking gentleman.

LYUBOV: You were quite a boy then, a pretty little student, and now your hair’s thin—and spectacles. Are you really a student still? (*goes towards the door*).

TROFIMOV: I seem likely to be a perpetual student. (I, 21-22)

(I have a special fondness for Trofimov, I must admit. The professor has always been a comic figure, at least since Aristophanes hung up Socrates in a basket, but Trofimov must be one of the first examples of the graduate student as comic character.) Not a promising candidate for young love, and, still worse, he is above love. He preaches that to Anya, contemptuous of how Varya is afraid that he and Anya will fall in love: “With her narrow brain she can’t grasp that we are above love” (II, 43), and he repeats his line to Lyubov: “Such triviality is not in my line. We are above love!” “And I suppose,” she says, “I am beneath love,” a fine, pointed, deserved retort, with a bit of truth in it for herself too (III, 52). We expect the man who declares himself to be above love, above the trivial human

mode, to fall at last, having grown to the point of self-knowledge and so fulfilling his humanity—but not here, because Trofimov will never grow up, will fall only downstairs.

The pervasive uncompleted love affair is of course between Varya and Lopahin, introduced as a hope in the early part of the first act, and a hope near the very end of the last act, but more in the minds of others and not much of a hope for the participants. Both express willingness, no one else raises any objections or sees the match as anything other than appropriate, neither he nor she understands why it doesn't come to a marriage. They are caring, hard-working people, which makes them quite different from the others around them and gives them something in common, but if they are both the same kind in that regard it is a type that works because it doesn't know what else to do, can't do anything to a satisfying end. "But I can't do without work, mamma," she says, "I must have something to do every minute" (III, 51). "I can't get on without work," he says, "I don't know what to do with my hands, they flap about so queerly, as if they didn't belong to me" (IV, 66). That's something less than a human being who is able to love and to find another touch for his hands. Varya offers an explanation, that he's absorbed in business, and what she says is plausible, but there is no question of definite reason. The thing just doesn't happen. She is not the marrying kind, looks like a nun, wants to go to a nunnery, she says, but she won't do that either, hasn't any vocation. He is very good with money, and he is a good man, as she says, but he is not very good with people, freely offers money to Lyubov, without understanding her enough to see why she won't take it, freely offers money to Trofimov and can't see why he won't take it, usually says the wrong thing. He says Moo. It just can't happen. At the final moment when it seems it may finally happen, with the traditional family arrangement to leave the two lovers alone for the understood specific purpose of the proposal, there is not much warmth to work with; the thermometer is broken, and anyhow there is three degrees of frost; and though there is champagne on hand it isn't very good champagne and it too is the wrong temperature, and besides Yasha has drunk it all up. And besides, Madame Ranevsky has never been a successful matchmaker, not for anyone. Lopahin had remembered, as the play began and he waited for her to return, what a splendid woman she is, a good-natured, kind-hearted woman, and how she comforted him when he was fifteen and his father punched him in the face and made his nose bleed. He can see her now—she was a slim young girl then—as she took him to wash his face and brought him to the nursery: "'Don't cry, little peasant,' says she, 'it will be well in time for your wedding day' . . . (*a pause*)" (I, 4). When will his wedding day be? He'll have a bloody nose all his life. If he was ever in love it may have been then, with her, maybe still now.

There is a remarkable amount of kissing that goes on in this play, and of course one must understand that the conventions of the society call for that, but none is a lover's kiss. There are no lovers, no lovers who can ever come together, no marriages, no real possibility of a marriage. Like the other things which are disappearing, forgotten, lost, dropped, broken, the family has fallen and will fall further as this old, interesting, beautiful home is going. They are losing the garden; one can get up in the morning and run into the garden; "The birds are singing in the garden." And "What a ravishing orchard! White masses of blossom, blue sky . . ." (I, 8, 10, 21). It is a thing worth weeping for, worth saving. What we need is a character of some competence, of some power and ability to understand and control, take charge, establish a way to the future. There are no bad people around, no devil or anything like that—an identifiable unfriendly

force would be something of a relief, someone to overcome—only nice people, so if there were one good fairy this problem could be solved. Partly solved? A little solved? There are candidates for the position too.

Lopahin is certainly one—he is the central character, Chekhov said—because he is the one character who has an ability to be successful, and has been successful in a remarkable way as the peasant boy, son of a serf, who is now rich and growing continually richer. Everything he touches turns to money, which is both rewarding and unfortunate. He sowed three thousand acres with poppies in the spring and in the last act, the first time we hear of it, casually, he has cleared 40,000 roubles in profit. “And when my poppies were in flower, wasn’t it a picture!” That’s pleasant to hear, that enjoyment, picture of profit, picture of beauty. “After all, I am fond of you,” Trofimov says, “you have fine delicate fingers like an artist, you’ve a fine delicate soul.” That’s more difficult to believe, but still pleasant to hear, does credit to them both (IV, 67, 66). Lopahin is the only character who has a specific and practical device to save Madame Ranevsky and the family property, not only save it but convert it into a source of income and put an end to their continually deteriorating fortune which is about to become the final disaster of dispossession. He sees the cherry orchard becoming the good place, “happy, rich and prosperous . . .” (I, 17). The major difficulty is his utter inability to convince those he would help, because, apart from their inability to accept him as their saver, his solution requires the end of what it is that they desire to save. They cannot understand him, he cannot understand them. It is an insoluble problem. He is incapable as a lover and incapable as a man of any power to direct the lives of others, not the man above but, in his own unhappy characterization, a pig.

Trofimov is more than ready to volunteer as the director of the lives of others. One of his deficiencies in that role, in common with Lopahin, is that his solution leads to the loss of what is to be saved, and with him it is a superior approval and pleasure that the cherry orchard will go.

What does it matter whether the estate is sold to-day or not? That’s all done with long ago. There’s no turning back, the path is overgrown. Don’t worry yourself, dear Lyubov Andreyevna. (III, 52)

For him the cherry orchard was never a good worth saving, has always been an instrument of oppression. That, like Lopahin’s project, is a potentially hopeful sign, a replacement of an old and dying order by the coming of the new. Trofimov has the message. “One must give up glorification of self. One should work, and nothing else.” Self-knowledge and effective power, that’s how the bright comic heroes hope to achieve their desire. “One must die in any case,” says Gaev, but not Trofimov, the hero who is not defeated by death but is reborn to a fuller life in a better world.

Who knows? And what does it mean—dying? Perhaps man has a hundred senses, and only the five we know are lost at death, while the other ninety-five remain alive.

He has the vision of the mythic comic hero, rather like his contemporary Don Juan of *Man and Superman*, the development to the truth, to a mythic perfection.

Humanity progresses, perfecting its powers. Everything that is beyond its ken now will one day become familiar and comprehensible; only we must work, we must with all our powers aid the seeker after truth.

He detects, in the vast majority, the difference between the high pretense and illusion of their fine talk and the reality of their lives. So much talk of grand things that only exist in novels: in real life there are none of them. "I am afraid of serious conversations. We should do better to be silent." All this in a very long speech (II, 38-39).

And from a man who does nothing. Himself above the triviality of love, he can, from his superior vision, undeceived, tell Lyubov, "You mustn't deceive yourself; for once in your life you must face the truth!" True enough—these people say so many true things—but with little meaning as coming from him. He thinks he sees what is wrong with her, but he is blind to her feelings and to himself. "What truth?" she asks:

You see where the truth lies, but I seem to have lost my sight, I see nothing. You settle every great problem so boldly, but tell me, my dear boy, isn't it because you're young—because you haven't yet understood one of your problems through suffering? You look forward boldly, and isn't it that you don't see and don't expect anything dreadful because life is still hidden from your young eyes?

Her appeal for understanding is touching, sentimental and self-deceiving, too, but touching.

You're bolder, more honest, deeper than we are, but think, be just a little magnanimous, have pity on me. I was born here, you know, my father and mother lived here, my grandfather lived here, I love this house. I can't conceive of life without the cherry orchard, and if it really must be sold, then sell me with the orchard (*embraces TROFIMOV, kisses him on the forehead*). My boy was drowned here (*weeps*). Pity me, my dear kind fellow. (III, 52-53)

He's a decent fellow and he says, sincerely, "You know I feel for you with all my heart." But it's poor language, words, not music, because he doesn't see her, and she hears his shallowness. "But that should have been said differently, so differently." She wants to make it up to him, "Don't be hard on me, Petya . . . I love you as though you were one of ourselves," because it will be too painful if they go on telling truths to one another. She would gladly let him marry Anya, but he, for all his talk, does nothing, as lover or man: "only, my dear boy, you must take your degree, you do nothing—you're simply tossed by fate from place to place. That's so strange. It is, isn't it?" And then there is that infertile beard, so funny. Her own immediate anxiety is the sale of the cherry orchard, going on at the moment, and her decision to go back to Paris and her faithless lover, so that she is deficient in credentials for what she is telling him, doesn't want to hear his truth about her love and must tell him truths about himself. "You're twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, but you're still a schoolboy." "Possibly," he says, with the neutral equanimity of an intellectual. That's a bit much for her restrained anger:

You should be a man at your age! You should understand what love means! And you ought to be in love yourself. You ought to fall in love! (*angrily*). Yes, yes, and it's not purity in you, you're simply a prude, a comic fool, a freak.

Now that truth, the accurate classification of comic fool, does upset him, quite upsets him:

(in horror). This is awful! The things she is saying! *(goes rapidly into the larger drawing-room clutching his head)*. This is awful! I can't stand it! I'm going. *(goes off, but at once returns)*. All is over between us! *(goes off into the ante-room)*.

She shouts after him, trying to call him back. "Petya! Wait a minute! You funny creature! I was joking! Petya!" And the next we hear is the sound of "*somebody running quickly downstairs and suddenly falling with a crash*." Anya and Varya scream but there is a sound of laughter at once. What has happened?

ANYA: *(laughing)*. Petya's fallen downstairs! *(runs out)*

LYUBOV: What a queer fellow that Petya is!

He comes back and Lyubov invites him, "Come, Petya—come, pure heart! I beg your pardon. Let's have a dance! *(dances with PETYA)*" (II, 53-55). Nobody will be following this talker as he runs off into the future, downstairs, falling with a crash. He has equal difficulty at the end as his departure for the future is delayed. "The devil only knows what's become of my goloshes; they're lost . . . I can't find them" (my dots). Lopahin wants to give him money for his journey but he is too proudly self-sufficient for that, but "*(anxiously)* but where can my goloshes be!" Varya flings in goloshes from the next room. "Take the nasty things!" "Why are you so cross, Varya? h'm! . . . but these aren't my goloshes." He still won't take the money for the journey. "I am an independent man" (IV, 65-67). It is Varya who does at last manage to see his goloshes, with tears, "And what dirty old things they are!" He puts them on: "Let us go, friends!" (77).

The value and effectiveness of Trofimov's words are defined for us by Anya's admiration. We are above love, as he tells her, and

To eliminate the petty and transitory which hinders us from being free and happy—that is the aim and meaning of our life. Forward! We go forward irresistibly towards the bright star that shines yonder in the distance. Forward! Do not lag behind, friends.

ANYA *(claps her hands)*. How well you speak! *(a pause)*.

And he goes on and on, to his own rather oversized new garden. "All Russia is our garden."

If you have the house keys, fling them into the well and go away. Be free as the wind.

ANYA *(in ecstasy)*. How beautifully you said that! (II, 43-44)

Lyubov too has complimented him on his exposition of the ninety-five senses that remain after death. "How clever you are, Petya" (39). We know, we have seen it in Jack Tanner, for example, what it means when someone is admired for speaking so well (a Great Communicator, as we now say). It can only mean that no one there is hearing what is being said, because there is no substance to distract the mind. The scene in which Trofimov has his longest, grandest speeches, about life after death and humanity progressing and perfecting its powers, is in Act II, where the decision is to be made on how to solve the problem of the cherry orchard. Trofimov finishes his irrelevant

apocalypse, and then Lopahin makes his, happily shorter, grand-vision speech, on how he works from morning to night, money passing through his hands, and “I see what people are made of all round me.” And

Sometimes when I lie awake at night, I think: “Oh! Lord, thou has given us immense forests, boundless plains, the widest horizons, and living here we ourselves ought really to be giants.”

He too, this hard-working man, has his romance or myth of more than mortal power. “You ask for giants!” Lyubov says; “They are no good except in story-books; in real life they frighten us,” which, for the moment, takes her closer to the truth, away from an illusion. No giants. Who advances, who goes there?

(EPIHODOV *advances in the background, playing on the guitar.*)

LYUBOV: (*dreamily*). There goes Epihodov.

ANYA: (*dreamily*). There goes Epihodov.

GAEV: The sun has set, my friends.

TROFIMOV: Yes. (40)

That sets off another speech-maker.

GAEV: (*not loudly, but, as it were, declaiming*). O nature, divine nature, thou art bright with eternal luster beautiful and indifferent! Thou, whom we call mother, thou dost unite within thee life and death! Thou dost give life and dost destroy!

“Uncle!” “Uncle, you are at it again.” Yes, he knows. “I’ll hold my tongue, I will.” Poor Gaev, hasn’t he as much right as the others to talk great nonsense? In the perfect stillness that follows him the string snaps. What more is there to be said? There’s more, there’s always more to be said. Along comes the wayfarer, slightly drunk, and he “(*Declaims*) My brother, my suffering brother! . . . Come out to the Volga! Whose groan do you hear? . . . ” (40-41). Another speech-maker in the grand manner, declaimer, making his comment on the significance of the others. He is rather more effective because he at least gets from his talk something he wants, taking money from his audience.

Gaev gets sat on almost every time he opens his mouth, which is not infrequently, and really he does deserve better treatment because he is the one character who is aware, when he is reminded, though he can’t control it, that he talks too much and to little purpose. If an effective command of language is a mark of the effective figure there is none here, but then language here is hardly a means of communication. Each character seems to be living along a line of his own and not often getting through to anyone else, sometimes not really interested in getting through, rarely understanding anyone else. “What do you say?” We begin with Lopahin reading, not reading, a book, not making head or tail of it, falling asleep over it; with Dunyasha reporting a proposal from Epihodov, “He’s a harmless fellow, but sometimes when he begins talking, there’s no making anything of it. It’s all very fine and expressive, only there’s no understanding it” (and as Anya says, “It’s always the same thing with you”); with Firs crossing the stage and, we are told, as he goes “*He says something to himself, but not a word can be distinguished*” (I, 5-7). Firs is deaf, doesn’t hear, mishears, and he can’t be understood. “What is he saying?” Lyubov asks (I, 18). But then she doesn’t hear or understand very well either. “I don’t quite understand you,” she says to Lopahin (15). He tells her in plain

Russian, he says, “and you seem not to understand it” (II, 33). She covers her ears not to listen to what Trofimov says (III, 54). Fine speakers may get compliments but they do not get hearers, and some are just not properly appreciated. Epihodov, that cultivated man, reads remarkable books of all sorts and has a sense of the delicacies of language, “excuse the expression” and “speaking precisely,” but never quite a sense of meanings. “But of course, if one looks at it from that point of view, if I may so express myself, you have, excuse my plain speaking, reduced me to a complete state of mind.” (58).

Lopahin has his device to overcome the present difficulty and reach to the future, Trofimov has his, even Gaev has his and a multiple move it is that Gaev has. He has been in the District Court and, in talking to people he met, of one thing and another (of course), he believes it will be possible to raise a loan on an I.O.U. to pay the arrears on the mortgage; Lyubov will talk to Lopahin and he will help; and Anya will go to Yaroslavl to the Countess, her very, very rich old aunt.

So we shall all set to work in three directions at once, and the business is done. We shall pay off arrears, I’m convinced of it (*puts a caramel in his mouth*). I swear on my honour, I swear by anything you like, the estate shan’t be sold (*excitedly*). By my own happiness, I swear it! Here’s my hand on it, call me the basest, vilest of men, if I let it come to an auction! Upon my soul I swear it!

Anya is restored to happiness. “How good you are, uncle, and how clever! (*embraces her uncle*). I’m at peace now! Quite at peace! I’m happy!” (I, 25). But three directions at once are not the most promising path to a goal and, except for this one evanescent moment with Anya, no one, including Anya, even thinks Gaev is capable of anything useful. Gaev himself is speaking only to be speaking, and to say something comforting to Anya, a caramel for her mouth, because he’s a nice man, but he doesn’t expect anything to happen. He has just before offered his best diagnosis and prognosis:

Yes (*a pause*). If a great many remedies are suggested for some disease, it means that the disease is incurable. I keep thinking and racking my brains; I have many schemes, a great many, and that really means none. (23)

There are no remedies for this expiring family and its house and orchard. Pishtchik, in his good old horsey way, knows all about medicines. He takes away Madame Ranevsky’s pills.

You shouldn’t take medicines, my dear madam . . . they do no harm and no good. Give them here . . . honoured lady (*takes the pill-box, pours the pills into the hollow of his hand, blows on them, puts them in his mouth and drinks off some kvass*). There!

Lopahin is alarmed, he must be out of his mind. Doesn’t bother him: “I have taken all the pills.” “What a glutton!” Lopahin says, and “(*All laugh*)”. Like the other devices they do no harm and they do no good. Firs remembers how “His honour,” whoever he was, stayed with them in Easter week, ate a gallon and a half of cucumbers. He mutters. “What is he saying?” (18). Makes no difference. But then perhaps they should listen to Firs, because he has had a proven nostrum. “The old master, the grandfather,” he says, “used to give sealing-wax for all complaints. I have been taking sealing-wax for twenty years or more. Perhaps that’s what’s kept me alive” (III, 55-66). Pishtchik has no faith in medicines, but he does have several large philosophical ideas of his own about how to

overcome all difficulties, miscellaneous ideas, sort of, he's picked up, vaguely, in the main it would seem from his daughter Dashenka, a clever offstage thinker (" . . . she says . . . various things"), or from anonymous people he has met briefly, out there. "Nietzsche, the philosopher, a very great and celebrated man . . . of enormous intellect . . . says in his works, that one can make forged bank-notes" (I, 19; III, 47). "A young man in the train was telling me just now that a great philosopher advises jumping off a house-top. 'Jump!' says he; 'the whole gist of the problem lies in that.' (*Wonderingly*) Fancy that, now! Water, please!" (IV, 72). Actually Pishtchik ends up better than the others, not by any of his deep thoughts or plans, which may be his best trick.

Among all these advocates and heralds of a new life there is, it happens, one character who is capable of producing that trick. "These clever fellows are all so stupid," Charlotta Ivanovna says at the beginning of Act II (30), the act in which they will present their big speeches. Charlotta, who doesn't know who she is, is the best performer, does card tricks, ventriloquism, impersonations, appearances, disappearances. Pishtchik is her best audience, spellbound in the wonder and fancy of it; he sees the real Puck: "Mischievous creature! Fancy!" (III, 48-50). Unhappily, all this magic is inconsequential, domestic vaudeville, while the cherry orchard is at that moment being auctioned away offstage. In the next and last act she produces a miracle. While Anya is talking to her mother, dreamily, of the wonderful new worlds which will open out before them, Charlotta enters softly humming a song. "Charlotta's happy; she's singing!"

CHARLOTTA: (*picks up a bundle like a swaddled baby*). Bye, bye, my baby. (*A baby is heard crying: "Ooah! ooah!"*) Hush, hush, my pretty boy! (*Ooah! ooah!*) Poor little thing!

A happy mother, a pretty new baby boy, a new life, the future—it is startling, where can it have come from? Clever Charlotta throws the bundle back. Just a throwaway trick, another illusion. The reality is that Charlotta, who doesn't know who she is, has no place to go. "You must please find me a situation. I can't go on like this." "We'll find you one, Charlotta Ivanovna," Lopahin says. "Don't you worry yourself" (IV, 71).

We meet here no lovers but the incomplete, no fairies but the ineffective. What remains is a cast of all clowns, each a "good-for-nothing," in Firs's refrain (and he doesn't except himself). Nice people all of them, but they don't see and they can't do. All blind and deaf, and there is no countercharm that can get through, open the eyes, no language they can hear. Gaev, talking inappropriately as usual, this time about his sister (who is good and kind and nice, he says, and he loves her, but there is no denying she is an immoral woman), doesn't see Anya until Varya whispers to him. "What do you say? (*a pause*). It's queer, there seems to be something wrong with my right eye. I don't see as well as I did. And on Thursday when I was in the district Court . . ." (I, 24). And of course as Lyubov says to Trofimov, "I seem to have lost my sight, I see nothing," and she knows that Trofimov the bold seer doesn't have better eyes but only more ignorance: ". . . you don't see and don't expect anything dreadful because life is still hidden from your young eyes." Firs has lost his hearing to old age, but she stops her own and when Trofimov tells her truths about herself, it is "No! No! No! You mustn't speak like that (*covers her ears*)" (III, 52, 54).

Without eyes or ears that can open, without anyone who has the power to do something for them, with no medicine for the incurable, in a dream, in a sleep from

which they cannot wake, there is no way to change. They are continually telling one another that they haven't changed. "Varya's just the same as ever, like a nun," Madame Ranevsky says on her return. "You're just the same as ever, Varya." To Gaev, "You are just the same as ever, Leonid"; and the grinning Yasha agrees, "just the same as ever" (I, 7, 13, 17, 23). Varya says the same of Lyubov: "Mamma's just the same as ever, she hasn't changed a bit" (23). Lyubov finds comfort in that as she looks out of the window into the garden and sees her childhood, her innocence; in this nursery where she used to sleep, from here looked out into the orchard, happiness waking with her every morning, "and in those days the orchard was just the same, nothing has changed (*laughs with delight*)." (20). A great deal has changed, even if the cherry orchard looks the same and she still throws away her money and Varya still has the habit of a nun. Time doesn't move for them, except as they are its victims, as the world around them changes, as they grow older without much other change. The one character Lyubov doesn't recognize when she returns is Trofimov, because he was young enough when she left to have become old in his twenties. "Can I have changed so much? . . ." Why does he look so old, that mangy-looking gentleman, likely to be a perpetual student?—and in essentials the same as ever and will be the same forever (21-22).

Time is presented dramatically in this play as though we were engaged in a critical action with a limited period in which a decision must be made, a deed done. There are four days, Theseus declares, between now and his wedding, when Hermia must move to find her fate, and indeed it is accomplished magically faster than that. Elizabeth Bennet, Dorimant, the Duke Vincentio, must use their time, in an hour, a day, or perhaps some months by a series of stages, but always by the clock or calendar, to gain their desire or lose it for all time. And so it seems here, because if nothing is done to save the cherry orchard it will be sold on August 22, as Lopahin announces in Act I, and repeats in Act II, and then August 22 is the day of Act III. But in the rhythms and its pauses of this play time slips by in a leisurely way: from Act I in May, with the cherry trees in flower; to Act II, about three weeks later, a summery scene, everyone out of doors in glorious weather; to Act III, the aforesaid August 22, when they dance; to the concluding Act IV, October but still good weather for his building business, Lopahin says happily. The pressure of time as a continuum in which critical decisions and actions must be taken is there to be felt only as an absence. There is no movement to that pressing end. Trofimov concludes Act I with a tender word to the half asleep Anya, "My sunshine! My spring," but we go in a dying fall, not to a new spring but from spring to fall. The sun rises in Act I, goes down in Act II and it is the night of August 22 in Act III. Act II—following the first act when the problem is presented and the action would seem to begin, and preceding the third act when the cherry orchard is to be sold and the action would seem to end—would seem to be the moment when the turning move, the right word, ought to come.

In Act II all the characters have gone out to what would seem to be the right sort of place to seek a solution not to be found at home, to the open country, and quite beautiful, perhaps with hope from another realm. But it is at "*An old shrine, long abandoned and fallen out of the perpendicular.*" Sweeter than Volpone's shrine certainly, but if his was a false god they have long abandoned theirs (though they still do appeal occasionally, with little faith, for magic or divine help to come from wherever that may be). Near the shrine is a well, a source, perhaps, except that in this setting it doesn't seem

to be used; among large stones “*that have apparently once been tombstones*” (now that is gone); and an old garden seat (of course). They even have what seems to be a suggestive (and, as always, indecisive) map for the journey. The road to the house is seen, and on one side the beginning of the cherry orchard, and far, far away on the horizon, faintly outlined, a great town, visible only in fine weather. But it is near sunset. No one moves. “*All sit plunged in thought.*” (II, 28). Thinking about what? Lots of things. Lopahin enters with Lyubov and Gaev and he tries to concentrate their minds.

You must make up your mind once for all—there’s no time to lose. It’s quite a simple question, you know. Will you consent to letting the land for building or not? One word in answer: Yes or No? Only one word!

Lyubov wonders who has been smoking such horrible cigars here; it’s been Yasha, her useless valet, but she never knows. Gaev says that now the railway line has been brought near it has made things very convenient. They’ve been over and lunched in town. (Lopahin’s point about the railway, but not quite what he intended.) Gaev would like to go home now and have a game of billiards.

LYUBOV: You have plenty of time.

LOPAHIN: Only one word! (*Beseechingly*) Give me an answer!

GAEV: (*yawning*). What do you say? (31-32)

Lyubov drops her purse, scattering gold pieces. Lopahin finally gets back their attention for a moment. Maybe the aunt in Yaroslavl will send help, Gaev volunteers, but when and how much we don’t know. How much? a hundred thousand, two hundred? Oh well, ten or fifteen, and we must be thankful to get that.

LOPAHIN; Forgive me, but such reckless people as you—such queer, unbusiness-like people—I never met in my life. One tells you in plain Russian your estate is going to be sold, and you seem not to understand it.

He’s right about that. “What are we to do?” Lyubov asks: “Tell us what to do.”

I do tell you every day. Every day I say the same thing. You absolutely must let the cherry orchard and the land on building leases; and do it at once, as quick as may be—the auction’s close upon us! Do understand! Once make up your mind to build villas, and you can raise as much money as you like, and then you are saved.

These absolutes, only one word, and do it at once, and quick as may be, make up your mind, be saved, are simply incomprehensible, not their language. It’s so vulgar, she says, and Gaev perfectly agrees. “I shall sob,” Lopahin sobs, “or scream, or fall into a fit. I can’t stand it! You drive me mad!” He calls Gaev an old woman, which is sort of precise, and sort of heard (“What do you say?”), and gets up to go. Lyubov is in dismay. “No, don’t go! Do stay, my dear friend! Perhaps we shall think of something.” What is there to think of? Well, with him there “it’s more cheerful, anyway (*a pause*)” (33-34).

Lopahin, the one businessman in the place, is subject to time, very busy with time, and not only of the calendar but of the clock. In Act I he is “(*glancing at his watch*),” saying “there’s no time to say much . . . well, I can say it in a couple of words,” and he tells them of the coming date of the sale; “(*glancing at his watch*)” once again, decide, he

says, to take some steps, August 22 is coming; and “(*looking at his watch*)” once again, “Well, it’s time I was off” (I, 14, 16, 17). In the last act he is looking at his watch again, now warning everyone that the train goes in forty-seven minutes, so they ought to start for the station in twenty minutes, “You must hurry up!” (IV, 65). The play began with him asking what time it is and complaining that the train is late, but then, yawning and stretching, he missed the train. “. . . what a fool I’ve been. Came here on purpose to meet them at the station and dropped asleep . . .” (I, 3). He missed his train again in the third act, after buying the cherry orchard. With himself, and with other people, his clock doesn’t work too well. He won’t be well in time for his wedding day. If there’s still time at the end he’s ready to propose, “now at once,” “(*looking at his watch*). Yes” (IV, 73-74). He has interesting things to say about time. “Yes, time flies,” he says. “What do you say?” Gaev asks. “Time, I say, flies.” “What a smell of patchouli” (I, 12).

The scent of this self-made rich man offends Gaev, who has his own sense of time, of time past and time to come and of their relations. That old bookcase, for example. Last week he pulled out the bottom drawer and found the date branded on it, made “just a hundred years ago. What do you say to that? We might have celebrated its jubilee. Though it’s an inanimate object, still it is a *book case*.” Pishtchik is amazed. “A hundred years! Fancy that now.”

GAEV: Yes . . . It is a thing . . . (*feeling the bookcase*). Dear, honoured bookcase! Hail to thee who for more than a hundred years hast served the pure ideals of good and justice; thy silent call to fruitful labour has never flagged in those hundred years, maintaining (*in tears*) in the generations of man, courage and faith in a brighter future and fostering in us ideals of good and social consciousness (*a pause*). (I, 17)

If he has not much of that silent call and fruitful labor and if a brighter future will not be his, still it is a thing, and it brings tears. He, like the others, is a man of a period, in his case of an outdated liberalism (a Russian Roebuck Ramsden). “I’m a man of the eighties. They run down that period, but still I can say I have had to suffer not a little for my convictions in my life. It’s not for nothing that the peasant loves me. One must know the peasant! One must know how . . .” “At it again, uncle!” (25-26). Firs’s life came to an end in the sixties, in the “catastrophe.” Epiphodov is a man of the future; he may make his entrance in new boots that creak so that there is no tolerating them, and he may be a man who is the brave present sport of less than heroic misfortunes, but after all he is a reader of the much translated Englishman’s rational, progressive history of civilization: when he takes up a jug of kvass, “to quench my thirst,” in it “there is something in the highest degree unseemly of the nature of a cockroach (*a pause*). Have you read Buckle? (*a pause*)” (II, 30). But past, present or future nothing in these people changes. It was three degrees of frost in the first act and it is three degrees of frost in the last act. If how to marry Varya and Lopahin and how to provide for Firs were problems in the first act they are still there in the last and they will never be solved. We begin in the comforting nursery and we end in the empty nursery.

There is no turning back, Lopahin says to Lyubov, with tears, and “oh, if our miserable disjointed life could somehow be changed!” He has just bought the estate, the end of Act III (62). In a disjointed life the time is out of joint. Act III began with a dance and a dance is what one may well expect in a comedy. But not now, at the wrong time, but later, later, when all has been worked out harmoniously and everyone celebrates a

new order. While this dance is in progress the cherry orchard is being sold offstage. “It’s the wrong time to have the orchestra,” Lyubov says, “and the wrong time to give a dance. Well, never mind (*sits down and hums softly*)” (48).

When Chekhov calls this a comedy he knows very well what he is doing, and that should hardly surprise us. He is writing a play for an audience which knows what is expected in comedies—lovers and marriages, and incompetent clowns, and effective fairies with power to create and to resolve problems, a dream, a journey, a sickness to be lived through to a new life in good time, a dance to conclude, and the language of nonsense and the higher language of wit and poetry: and Chekhov holds out all these expectations and then deliberately leaves them incomplete, rearranged, without their expected effects. And he does it so beautifully. The characters themselves really wish they were in another kind of comedy, and, here as one might expect from them, it would be a sentimental comedy. All their difficulties would end without the need to do anything. If only somebody would leave us a legacy. Maybe Anya could marry a rich man. Maybe our aunt, that good fairy in Yaroslavl, will give us the money. Maybe a lottery ticket will win. If God would help us. Gaev has his own happy place, that game he plays in his mind, in which he is almost always a successful shot-maker. And caramels are always sweet in the mouth. Pishchik, in fact the most bumbling character, gentle sponger, but always wondering, never losing faith that something will happen, does get the money he needs by a stroke of fortune, “. . . a most extraordinary occurrence.” Some Englishmen came along and found in his land some sort of white clay, “. . . most lovely . . . wonderful (*gives money*)” (IV, 72). That sort of thing had happened to him once before; he thought everything was over, he was a ruined man, “and lo and behold—the railway passed through my land and . . . they paid me for it”; and as he said then, “something else will turn up again, if not to-day, then to-morrow . . .” (I, 19). So evidently such things do happen to some people and there is this happy stroke at the end: but he’s the wrong man, not that we have anything against him, good old horse (and a horse is a fine beast, it can always be sold), but his fortunes are not what had held our attention. Besides, he has solved his problems by selling off, first, part of his land, and now his rights (and this time for twenty-four years, ominous figure!). Then he discovers that everyone else is leaving and it agitates him, but

No matter . . . (*through his tears*) . . . no matter . . . men of enormous intellect . . . these Englishmen . . . Never mind . . . be happy. God will succour you . . . no matter . . . everything in this world must have an end. (IV, 73)

“Heyday!” says Congreve’s Witwoud at the end of the last act, “what, are you all got together, like players at the end of the last act?” (*The Way of the World*, V, iii). A good question for anyone, wit or fool, who knows what happens at the end of comedies. But here all disperse: Varya to Yashnovo, seventy miles away, and as Lopahin notes, “(*a pause*). So this is the end of life in this house!” (74); Lopahin to Harkov for now; Trofimov back to Moscow to his university; Gaev to a job at the bank, where he won’t last; Anya to school; Lyubov back to Paris.

LYUBOV: Now we can start on our travels.
 ANYA: (*joyfully*). On our travels!

Anya and Trofimov are excited: “Good-bye, home! Good-bye to the old life!” and Trofimov, in his old refrain, cheers her on with “Welcome to the new life!” (75, 77); but this is not a journey to a new life but a round-trip on the railway. Lyubov is completing her circle, back to what she had just left last May, that faithless lover, that place on the fifth floor, smelling of tobacco and so comfortless (I, 9), just the same as ever. We have followed the telegrams from that begging lover, the only messages she responds to, as they called her back, from Act I (17), when she tore them without reading, to Act II (35), when she carried them in her pocket and read them before tearing, to Act III (53), when they fell from her pocket, as she was getting one every day, and she knew she really ought to go. The modern telegraph is the one form of communication that seems to work effectively, as the railroad is the one form of movement, and both take her around to where she was. She can live there on the money their Yaroslavl auntie sent the family to buy the estate with, “—hurrah for auntie!—but that money won’t last long” (IV, 71). One last moment for “Oh, my orchard!—my sweet, beautiful orchard!” and it *was* that, “My life, my youth, my happiness, good-bye! good-bye!” (77), and it *is* that.

The stage is empty, silent, and in the stillness the dull stroke of an axe in a tree. The footsteps of an old man, locked in. “They have forgotten me . . . Never mind,” and “There’s no strength in you, nothing left you—all gone! Ech! I’m good for nothing (*lies motionless*).” And now the concluding music. We’ve had a succession of increasing discords from act to act: the shepherd’s pipe far away beyond the orchard, beautiful in itself, melancholy in implication, to end the first act; Epikhodov’s mournful guitar to begin and then, following the mournful breaking harp-string, end the second act; the Jewish orchestra, hired by the family with nothing to pay them, playing its wrong-time dance music to begin the third act, and then again, but this time at the ironic order of the new master, to end it; in finale, to punctuate the strokes of the axe far away in the orchard, again the sound from the sky like a breaking harp-string dying away mournfully (IV, 78), the concluding refrain. Never mind, as motionless Firs says, and, as Pishtchik said, no matter.

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The Seagull on 42nd Street, Vania in the Village

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If solitude in creative work makes the work more difficult, as Chekhov insisted in a letter to a brother in 1886, then the work of staging one of Chekhov's major plays should have been much easier this season in New York City, where all four of the major plays were produced by established theatres. Ian Rickinson's *The Seagull* made the move from London's Royal Court Theatre to Broadway (at the Walter Kerr Theatre, which is of course on 48th Street – and not 42nd, as the review title implies). Classic Stage Company, a venerable Off-Broadway company just south of Union Square, offered up *Uncle Vania*. *Three Sisters* was presented by Classical Theatre of Harlem. And Sam Mendes returned to the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) with his production of *The Cherry Orchard*, a "Bridge Project" production shared between BAM and The Old Vic in London.

This reviewer caught the first two of these productions, both of which were essentially traditional stagings with period costumes and sets. Both productions also included the film actor Peter Sarsgaard in a leading role (Trigorin in *The Seagull*, Astrov in *Uncle Vania*). In fact, both productions included a number of recognizable film and television actors, which means the trend of Hollywood actors coming to New York to establish serious acting credentials continues, for better or worse (in Sarsgaard's case, for better AND for worse, but more on that later). This reversal of the 20th-century trend of actors moving from New York to Hollywood to legitimize their talent and success should be a welcome one, since it reestablishes New York as the (or at least a) real testing ground for great acting. Unfortunately, what it means for the theatre-goer here is that you might end up paying top dollar for a ticket to a show with a well-established film actor who turns out to be a mediocre (and largely untested) stage actor. Although both productions came with instances of acting that felt wrong for Chekhov, neither, thankfully, had amateurish stage acting – even with a slew of screen stars.

To be fair, besides Mr. Sarsgaard, Kristin Scott Thomas, in the role of Arkadina, was the only other Hollywood actor on display in *The Seagull*, and she has had a serious stage career. She also has a strong stage presence. But many of the other actors in this

season's Broadway production of *The Seagull* were British film and television stars, so they might count as "Hollywood" in spirit if not in actual origin. Most notable among them was Mackenzie Crook (as Konstantin, or Kostia), who is best known for the original British television series "The Office."

In any case, the provenance of these actors' renown was not a problem for this production of *The Seagull*. Indeed, what was most remarkable about this production was the ensemble acting, where every person on stage seemed to belong to and be intimately familiar with the world that was collectively created. This is no doubt in part because the cast has been at this for some time now, since the production was a transfer from London. But two of the actors, Mr. Sarsgaard and the astoundingly talented Zoe Kazan, as Masha, were American replacements, and even they found their places and rhythms (and British accents) in this world. Ensemble acting was of course one of the premier goals of the Moscow Art Theatre, whose own success with *The Seagull* has forever linked that theatre to this play. If ensemble acting is to be a measure of success for any production of *The Seagull*, then this production was a success.

There were nonetheless a few missteps with Mr. Rickinson's *Seagull*, and they served as a reminder that a production's translation from page to stage comes with inherent tensions, tensions which are magnified when the page text is itself a translation (in this case from Chekhov's Russian to the English of Christopher Hampton, a translator with an ear for what sounds good to an English-speaking audience). Whatever faults this reviewer found (both with this production and with *Uncle Vania*, to follow), then, might generously be seen as a necessary part of the process of theatre. Indeed, sometimes what is wrong with a performance is as instructive about the play as what is right.

One small misstep was the way Polina was played by Ann Dowd. Polina is a character who may live in the country and be past the age of fertility, but she is not an old peasant, devoid of sexuality. If the unhappy and unrequited love that she professes for Dorn, who did love her in the past, is to resonate and serve as a warning of things to come for her daughter, Masha, who similarly loves Kostia (or even for Kostia, who similarly loves Nina), then the viability of her longing must feel true. But this Polina was played as a peasant babushka, and it was difficult to believe that Dorn, played in a brooding, vibrantly intense way by Art Malik, could ever have loved her, or that she could still feel the longing that she professes. Ms. Dowd is a good actor, but the angle on this role was wrong.

Children sometimes must atone for the sins of their parents: this small misstep in the characterization of Polina was more than made up for by the power and urgency of Zoe Kazan's portrayal of Polina's daughter, Masha. Kazan, the granddaughter of Elia Kazan, seems to have inherited her grandfather's devotion to Stanislavsky and his notion that great acting by the person in the part is the birth of a new being. New York critics lavished attention on Kristin Scott Thomas's performance as Arkadina, which was indeed impressive. But for this reviewer it was Kazan's Masha who was the most impressive and illuminating of the production. Her initially awkward misery, which turns into cruelty towards Medvedenko once she marries him, was palpable and affecting, and her rejection of her mother's model and her insistence that she and her husband transfer to another town where she won't see Kostia was a steely and determined reminder that unrequited love may be fine for novels, as she herself says, but it is unsustainable in life. Kazan seemed to make this sentiment the key to her performance, and by doing so she

created a new parallelism in the play: Masha becomes a secondary reinforcement of the willingness to persevere despite unhappiness and crushed dreams, a willingness that so many critics find heroic in Nina at the end of the play.

The character of Nina, played by Carey Mulligan, was an ideal portrayal of optimistic naiveté turned wizened weariness, and her performance alongside that of Ms. Kazan and Kristin Scott Thomas (as Arkadina) revealed an imbalance between genders in this play. Nina, Masha, and Arkadina are variations on the theme of determined perseverance. The question of why Chekhov called the play a comedy is a recurring one, and while there were certainly funny moments in the play (Ms. Thomas had exquisite comic timing, and Peter Wight earned quite a few laughs as the bumbling Sorin), the real answer to that question this production seemed to offer was the will on the part of its women to survive. If comedy is simply tragedy plus time, then *The Seagull* may be a particularly female comedy, since here it is the women who persevere despite setbacks.

Arkadina is of course the great, ageless survivor of this story, and Ms. Thomas's Arkadina was a tour de force of narcissistic performing and manipulative mothering – of her own son, Kostia, but also, ironically, of the younger Trigorin, played ably by Mr. Sarsgaard. One of the most memorable scenes from the play came in Act III, when Arkadina convinces Trigorin to stay with her and makes him believe that it is his choice for them to leave together. Arkadina briefly begs on her knees, but it is Trigorin who is infantilized, ending up sitting on the floor with his head hung and his legs spread (britches nearly bursting – Mr. Sarsgaard has gained weight, and in this scene it could be viewed more as baby fat than manly girth). The pose was that of a toddler in trouble, and whatever unhappiness Trigorin later inflicts on Nina, this scene of an emasculated child beaten into submission was definitive. Chekhov insisted that the fishing rods that Trigorin carries are the key to Trigorin, an observation David Magarshack took to mean that it was the absence of vanity that made him a successful writer and lover. But in this production it was not so much an absence of vanity in Trigorin, but rather the simultaneous stroking and annihilation of it by Arkadina, the consummate actress who controls her audience (and her men) by controlling her display of emotions – and not letting her emotions control her. The principle of perseverance displayed by the play's – and especially this production's – women (taken to frightening extremes by Arkadina) is one place a comedic value might be found in a play that doesn't seem much like a comedy (despite Chekhov's assertions that it is).

If this perseverance by women is a comic value that stands in contrast to male ineptitude and acquiescence, it is Kostia most of all who cannot be comedic, since there is no time after tragedy in the case of his suicide that ends the play. But the characterization of Kostia was probably the greatest misstep in this production, and the one that most undermined the comedic values it so freshly found in its three principal women. There is nothing funny about a suicide, and yet most critics do not read Kostia's death as tragic in the dramatic sense, since tragedy is inevitable and even necessary. As Richard Gilman has pointed out, Kostia's fate is not the result of a fatal flaw, nor is it the necessary result of his attempt to pass beyond limits imposed upon him; his story is not even a paltry tragedy of a writer of genius who, but for an unhappy love affair, would have lived to be acknowledged as such. The “comedy” around and in spite of this suicide can be found by viewing Kostia's story as the cautionary tale of a ridiculous young man who takes himself and his meager attempts at art far too seriously.

But Mr. Rickinson's production of *The Seagull* rejected an approach to Kostia that simply made him look ridiculous in contrast to the women around him. Interestingly, this production also rejected the mode of simple psychological drama, which has been a common (if misguided) approach for staging Chekhov's plays since Stanislavsky. Instead, this *Seagull* offered what can only be called "psychotic drama," at least in its portrayal of Kostia. Mackenzie Crook is a skinny man with a hard face, and his Kostia was a portrait of madness from beginning to end. He fidgeted, beat his head, swayed, and seemed on the verge of eruption throughout most of the play, and while it was an impressive performance, it nonetheless undermined so many other elements of the play. In particular, Kostia's relationships with Nina, Masha, and Arkadina were called into question, and their developments as characters had to be reinterpreted. Nina's departure for Moscow (and Trigorin) looked more like a safe bet if Kostia were her only other option. Masha's marriage to Medvedenko seemed inevitable. And Arkadina looked more like a mother unable to cope with a mentally ill son than merely a self-promoting performer who was probably never meant to be a mother. Such stark reinterpretations are possible (Chekhov can be many things, and Kostia does kill himself, after all), but only if there is an all-encompassing reevaluation of the wisdom and value of perseverance on the part of everyone else. Against a backdrop of sustained madness that culminates in a suicide, the act of accepting life and moving on looks less like comedic tenacity and more like gross negligence.

This tantalizing reinterpretation of *The Seagull* was not carried through, however. There is probably too much in the text of the play to counterbalance a reading of the play as extreme as Mr. Crook's performance implied, and too much that is admirable in the performances of the three women. Indeed, if anyone in this production could be read as the dead seagull that sits like a stuffed symbol in the final act, it is either Trigorin, who ordered the bird to be stuffed, or Kostia, who killed it in the first place. The women fly throughout. Even the set of Sorin's estate house seemed to illustrate this tension in directorial thought with its elegant, red-velvet furniture set against dingy, whitewashed walls that looked more appropriate to an insane asylum. The ultimate effect, then, was one of contradictions, questions, and superb acting, which, like the whitewashed walls, attempted to pull richly disparate, sometimes unmatched elements together in a sparse yet powerful way. There are worse ways to spend an evening!

While Mr. Rickinson's *The Seagull* was a richly ambitious production (if a very qualified success), Classic Stage Company's *Uncle Vania* was a much more modest production, both in terms of scale (overdone, but underwhelming) and in terms of its ability to offer up new revelations about Chekhov's play. The theatre of Classic Stage Company is a small space, with a thrust stage and riser seating that can accommodate just over 150 people. Yet the profile of the company in no way matches the size of its space. Classic Stage Company has secured a reputation for restaging and reinterpreting classic pieces of drama in bold and provocative ways, and with outstanding theatrical talent. Their *Uncle Vania*, however, felt small in its importance, in part because some elements were simply too large.

Part of the problem was the set itself. On such a small stage, a pared down version of the estate house would probably work best. But every space mentioned in the text of the play was crammed in here, with rooms delineated by their furniture. Couches stood next to tables, which stood next to sideboards, which stood next to bookcases, all of

which were barely missed by anyone who took a turn on Elena's swing (in what was apparently supposed to be the garden space). Strewn amidst all this furniture were period props that were intended to give it all a rustic, Russian feel. A large staircase took up the center of the stage, leading up to a second-story loft that must have been Vania's room (although, curiously, next to no action took place there, even in the fourth act, which is set in his room). Under Austin Pendleton's direction, every nook and cranny was used, which meant that actors often circled the staircase in awkward ways, attempting to converse around and behind this central structure. There is generally not a bad seat in this tiny theater, but because of the obstructive staircase, there was not a good seat to be had for this production.

The acting, too, was often larger than necessary. Chekhov's plays certainly feature characters who overact (*The Seagull's* Arkadina is a prime example), and surely *Uncle Vania's* eponymous character should be played this way in places, since his dramatic moments are so ridiculous. When he insists, for instance, that he could have lived a normal life, like that of Dostoevsky or Schopenhauer, this is a good indication of his skewed sense of normalcy. His shooting at (and missing) Serebriakov while theatrically yelling out the word "bang" is another indication of his tendency to overact (and overreact). The role of Vania was played by Denis O'Hare, who is contemporary New York stage royalty (and now has a career as a character actor in films), and his take on the role played up Vania's penchant for dramatic behavior. But there can be too much of a good thing: Mr. O'Hare spent most of the play yelling, spitting, and waving his arms. His delivery of lines was highly idiosyncratic, more in keeping with the clipped and elliptic translation of *Vania* by David Mamet than with the fluid and faithful translation by Carol Rocamora that was actually used for this production. This Vania was so aggressively overplayed that he seemed to be from a different world (or at least a different version of the play) altogether.

The sense that actors were playing different versions of the same play extended to other characters as well. Vania's mother, Mariia, and his archnemesis, Serebriakov, were played by long-time New York actors Delphi Harrington and George Morfogen, respectively, both in a way that suggested the mores of Edwardian England. Louis Zorich made a warm and convincing Telegin that seemed at home in a Russian period piece, but the part of Marina, played by Cyrilla Baer, was pure confusion. Ms. Baer played the part with a mid-Atlantic accent and very good diction, which was an odd choice for a country nanny. She was also a good twenty years too young for the role, and the stuffing she wore under her dress to make her appear fatter was distracting.

Cast alongside these actors in search of unifying direction were two individuals who share an off-stage life (and might, therefore, have acted as a unifying force to this production): real-life love interests (and well-known screen actors) Mr. Sarsgaard as Astrov and Maggie Gyllenhaal as Elena. After cutting his Chekhovian teeth in *The Seagull* on Broadway, Mr. Sarsgaard should have had an easier time transitioning to the part of Astrov. But there were some strikes against him from the outset, not the last of which was his physical presence, which was simply too young-seeming and too healthily round for the part of Astrov. Mr. Sarsgaard also has a tendency to speak in a droning, sardonic whine that was difficult to square with the part of the workaholic country doctor oblivious to Sof'ia's love (the whining quality, by the way, was kept in check in *The Seagull*, perhaps out of fear of the imperious Arkadina of Kristin Scott Thomas!). Ms.

Gyllenhaal, on the other hand, was an outstanding Elena. Ms. Gyllenhaal's own tendency to put an ironic distance in her voice was a good match for the part of a woman given to contemplating her loveless marriage to a much older man and her potential seduction of Astrov. It is common to cast actresses a good deal older than the given age of Elena (27) in this part, and Ms. Gyllenhaal, who is in her young thirties but looks younger, offered up a picture of youth that drove home the difference between herself and her retired husband, Serebriakov (played by the septuagenarian Mr. Morfogen). Alternating between listlessness and theatricality, this Elena was young enough to yearn for something else yet old enough to know that something else is now impossible for her.

As with Broadway's *The Seagull*, this Off-Broadway *Uncle Vania* found most of its strength in its women. Besides Ms. Gyllenhaal, the other outstanding performance on this stage was Mamie Gummer in the role of Sonia (Sof'ia, the more formal variant, is the name given in the playbill). Of all the characters in *Vania*, Sonia is arguably the most important. She is, after all, the one alluded to in the title, since only she can call Vania her uncle. Gummer, the daughter of Meryl Streep, has a plain but affecting mien, and her constant bustling in the background was the picture of prosaic heroism (to use Gary Saul Morson's term). Indeed, Ms. Gummer acted with a quiet intensity that captured Sonia's internal longings for her own romantic happiness and her external habit of attending to others' needs. The best moment in the play was between her and Ms. Gyllenhaal's Elena at the end of Act II, when they discuss Elena's unhappy marriage and Sonia's secret love for Astrov. As they opened up to each other, they seemed to find a common idiom as sisters (rather than awkward step-mother and step-daughter), a commonality in voice so lacking elsewhere in this production, where characters spoke as if they came from different worlds rather than the same family. In the scene, Elena moves from confiding her unhappiness to Sonia in a spirit of genuine vulnerability to theatrical pronouncements about her wishes for Sonia and her own hopeless situation, calling herself a "minor character." But Sonia, normally so attentive, interjects with, "I'm so happy," a line that reveals that she has for once not been an attentive audience to Elena's performance. David Magarshack called moments like this an example of Chekhov's "strophe/anti-strophe" technique, something Magarshack saw as one of the principal structuring elements of Chekhov's plays of indirect action. When Elena takes herself and her situation too seriously, Sonia's remark deflates her performance, revealing that Sonia has her own concerns and cannot be a constant audience to Elena. Whether this is one of the key structures on which Chekhov's play rests is debatable, but Ms. Gyllenhaal and Ms. Gummer played the scene superbly.

Small but truthful scenes such as this one can count for a lot in a production of this play, and to call a production of *Uncle Vania* small is not necessarily a bad thing, since Chekhov's plays are so often about the small realities that prevail over the more dramatic moments by which characters mistakenly orient their lives. Sonia is a compelling character because she does not let Astrov's rejection of her wreck her basic decency and kindness. The final scene of the play is a moment when small is the only appropriate choice, and here, unfortunately, this *Vania* went for a larger and more dramatic ending than the play calls for. Chekhov ends this play not with a suicide, or even with a departure (Elena and Serebriakov leave, to be sure, but the others remain behind), but rather with a tableau of work. Sonia and Vania, so long distracted from their toils on and for the estate, return to their accounts and inventories as the curtain falls. In

this production they initially did this on that largely unused second floor, which might suggest the elevated importance the director found in the role of work in these characters' lives (and in Chekhov's thinking). But rather than ending there, both Sonia and Vania returned to the main floor, where Sonia gave her final monologue. She then comforted a crying and erratic Vania, and then they danced as the lights went out. Sometimes smaller is better.

**John Neumeier's *The Seagull*
performed by
The National Ballet of Canada**

**Ralph Lindheim
University of Toronto**

John Neumeier's ballet, *The Seagull*, opened to good reviews in Toronto and enjoyed a fairly successful run of ten performances in November of last year. Though the choreographer claimed that his audience need not know Chekhov's play or indeed other works of the writer that inspired the making of this ballet, it became clear that such knowledge would enrich one's pleasure and understanding. There was, to select one slight example, the moment when Medvedenko handed out booklets to those on stage—one was unfortunately dropped and had to be swiftly retrieved before the characters could dance on that part of the floor—that surely stemmed from Kuligin's gift of his brochure in *Three Sisters*, first to Irina and then to Vershinin.

On the other hand, it is true that many of the characters and their interactions and conflicts, together with the presence for most of the ballet of the seagull and Konstantin's stage with the motifs and themes associated with them, including the creation and destruction of beauty, were immediately comprehensible to the audience even if they had never seen or read Chekhov. An omnipresent theme is love and its misfortunes, though the warm reciprocated relationship between Konstantin and his uncle Sorin is beautifully realized. All too clear, however, is the characters' debilitating dependence on the people who can not or do not love them: Polina's dependence on Dorn; Masha's dependence on Konstantin; Nina's dependence on Trigorin, which was blatantly demonstrated towards the end of the ballet by having her lie down in front of a disdainful Trigorin—this surely is one of Neumeier's revisions of the Chekhovian text, in which Nina, in the last act, confesses that she still loves Trigorin but leaves without throwing herself at his feet—and Konstantin's dependence on his mother Arkadina as well as Nina. Other themes that are superbly embodied in the language of dance are the conflict between younger and older generations as well as the significant issues emerging from the lives of the artists on stage and off, and the dreams of those who want to become artists and stars in the future and supplant their predecessors, who are not and will not be willing to cede their place in the limelight.

Art—in Chekhov's play the art of performing and writing words and in Neumeier's brilliant transposition the art of creating or performing dance—is the other major concern of the ballet. But here Neumeier alters the emphases of Chekhov. Arkadina's role in the ballet is reduced; she is given only one serious, very effective solo

when she reminisces about her past lovers. Trigorin, however, becomes the more melodramatically villainous of the major figures, with his casting aside of Nina highlighted twice. Also there is a direct attack on Trigorin's art, which is revealed as banal and kitschy when he and Arkadina perform his ballet *Death of a Seagull*, a travesty of the dancing styles as well as costumes of the Russian Imperial Ballet of a hundred years ago. We have no clear sense that Trigorin is a creative artist, whereas Chekhov's Trigorin has a talent for describing nature and for mood-painting, but compromises his creative gifts by grafting onto what he does well civic, publicistic material, since this type of content has come to be expected of a Russian writer after Turgenev and Tolstoy. Though Trigorin's artistic integrity may be called into question by Chekhov's play, his discomfort with acceding to such conventionally demanded content, which he himself, as an honestly concerned citizen, feels a compulsion to write, does him credit.

On the positive side, reviewers who admired Neumeier for creating a story ballet with complex characters and a moving, emotional and psychological subtext, rather than a Balanchine, terpsichorean tour de force, rightly praised the richness of the choreography. All of Chekhov's characters appeared on the ballet stage—indeed, there were a couple of extra characters brought in—but more importantly all, while onstage, were given significant and detailed and individualized gestures, including some impressive arm movements, and dancing to do. The duet for Medvedenko and Masha in the last act was especially expressive, with Masha breaking off the patterns mirroring those of her husband to plead for Konstantin's attention and love. This, too, was yet another instance of Neumeier's choreography that suggests the emotions below the surface by having the dancers dance or stand not according to but against what was expressed or suggested by the music. Also noteworthy was how Chekhov's ensemble acting was reflected in the ensemble dancing: Neumeier's stage was often packed, with its many areas full of dancers all in movement. And no one viewing, therefore, can grasp the full richness of the choreographer's conception and vision and of the interpretive skills brought to their roles by the dancers.

Yet the evening's emphasis is given to Treplev, the young choreographer and dancer. Konstantin's total absorption in the art of the dance is suggested by his Pirandellian appearance on stage twenty minutes before the beginning of the performance. As the audience slowly files in, he is already on stage in full view, contemplating a seagull and dreaming and making notes about his art and the performance of his dance piece, *Soul of the Seagull*, that is soon to receive its first performance. Nina arrives after the houselights dim and the music begins, and her meeting with Konstantin is a breath of fresh air, their youthful, idealistic exuberance and ardor expressed not just in the lifts but in the ecstatic intertwinings of their bodies when seated or lying on the floor. Konstantin's dance, which like Treplev's play is perhaps lengthened to try the patience of the audiences, both onstage and in the hall, breaks the mold of traditional ballet by evoking tribal dances. The music set to the percussion music of Evelyn Glennie contributes to the neo-primitivism Konstantin seems to champion. Moreover, it is to his art and stage that Konstantin always returns when frustrated in love and in winning respect for his art. At climactic moments of pained failure at the end of each of the two acts, Konstantin immerses himself in his art. At the end of the ballet he withdraws completely from the world, in which he had been hoping to succeed, retreating

into the safe womb of his art by pulling himself under his stage away from the eyes of all who would hurt or deny his claims for attention.

Nina, in the ballet as well as in the play, displays her ability to move beyond her first phase as an enthusiastic but novice dancer. Later, at the beginning of the second act, when employed as a chorus girl in a city cabaret, it all too soon becomes clear that Trigorin, though he has seduced her with dreams of a career as a classical ballerina, has done and will do nothing to aid her career. Yet, at the end, even after she has again offered herself to Trigorin and been rejected, she seems strong enough not to be devastated by the trauma she has undergone, flexible enough to recall and reprise some of the choreography of Konstantin's ballet, and determined enough to leave the scene of her early dreams and triumph and perhaps—though too much may be read into her rather simple walking away from the stage—trust in the hope that the future will bring artistic development and progress, if not success.

A word about the music of the ballet. It was selected by the choreographer from works by Tchaikovsky, Scriabin, Shostakovich, and, as previously mentioned, Glennie. Most of the reviewers had nothing but praise for these selections, noting how appropriate they were for the scenes they accompanied and also how seamlessly they fit together. I can second their expert opinions, though it should have been made clear in notes to the ballet in the program that Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony for Strings arranged by Rudolf Barshai, which dominates a significant number of the ballet's closing scenes, was an arrangement of the famous and moving String Quartet No. 8, written in 1960 but expressing the composer's horror at the devastation wreaked by the firebombing of Dresden towards the end of World War II.

Neumeier's *Seagull*, for which he also designed the set and costumes and devised the lighting design, is clearly the fruit of his full engagement with the Russian writer who inspired him. Chekhov proved himself a true dramatist who composed his plays with more than just the words of his characters in mind. He, too, suggested to directors and actors—in hints they did not always take and do not always grasp or follow today—how the sets were to look, how the stage was to be lit, how characters were to be dressed and how they were to move, how the moods of individual acts were to be created, and how they were to comment through contrast on those that preceded or followed. Both Chekhov and Neumeier in their commitment to total theatre devised works that are more than the sum of all their intricate parts and thus created a poetic realm both in the theatre and of the theatre.

Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin, eds. *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2007. 352 pp. Illustrations. DVD. \$29.95, paper.

Reviewed by

**Mark Conliffe
Willamette University**

This volume brings together many of the rich presentations of the October 2004 NEH-sponsored symposium at Colby College that marked the hundredth anniversary of

Chekhov's death. The symposium gathered literary scholars, historians, translators, theatre critics and artists, health-care professionals, and writers of fiction and popular criticism, and the volume materials range from articles based on papers delivered by participants to transcripts of discussion forums and a digital video of Michael Finke's interview of Dr. Robert Coles. The materials are presented in seven sections, which are prefaced by the editors' introduction and an article by Robert Louis Jackson on Chekhov's art. The seven sections provide a variety of views on the ways in which the participants have understood and embraced Chekhov, interacting with his work and life – that is, *translating* his work and life – and conceiving a Chekhov of their own. Central to the presentations, as Michael Finke and Julie de Sherbinin observe in their introduction, are reflections on what Chekhov and his writings have meant in the American cultural context and how and why this meaning might vary from discipline to discipline.

In his thoughtful consideration of Chekhov's art Robert Louis Jackson draws our attention to how point of view comes together with depiction and narration in Chekhov's writing to create his particular perspective. In his artistic approach Chekhov sees *truthfully, justly*, Jackson underscores, bringing readers to heightened moral, social, and philosophical awareness without heavy-handed judgment or solutions. And yet, this achievement, ironically, might not appear at once through Chekhov's seemingly simple texts, texts that delicately relate the connectedness of life's everyday banalities and the drama of life beneath them. It is this unity, which Chekhov intuits in the happenings of life, that reveal his particular way of considering, knowing, and representing Russian life.

The opening section, "Translating Chekhov's Prose," is the transcript of the "Forum on Translation," which Carol Apollonio Flath and Julie de Sherbinin moderate and in which Peter Constantine, Richard Pevear, and Larissa Volokhonsky participate. Carol Apollonio Flath provides context for the forum by placing English translation of Chekhov's texts into historical perspective, and then prompts the participants to weigh in on D.S. Mirsky's claim that Chekhov's Russian lacks individuality and color, and therefore is "so easy to translate." What results immediately is some bafflement and unanimous disagreement with Mirsky, and then for the remaining forum the moderators and participants, perhaps unexpectedly, account for this bafflement and disagreement by reflecting on the individuality, color, and challenges of Chekhov's prose – its rhythm, its tone, and its characters' particular voices, for example. Readers also receive a glimpse into the creative methods of the translators, who, in response to the moderators and later to the audience, discuss their usual process in translating (their goals and consideration, or lack of it, of other translations), explain some of the decision-making that leads them to choose to translate certain texts, and provide some examples of translating potentially slippery excerpts.

The articles of Laurence Senelick, Michael Henry Heim, and Sharon Marie Carnicke, which make up the section "Translating Chekhov's Drama," touch on many topics that the forum raises, and their sustained discussions of translation and adaptation also raise serious questions about the goals of translators and adaptors in rendering Chekhov's plays for English-language readers and theatre-goers. In a compelling and forceful article Senelick argues that appreciating how Chekhov uses language throughout his writing – "seeing Chekhov whole" – can only help a translator in making choices, because this appreciation reveals the importance of Chekhov's word order, word choices, sentence structure, Russian idioms, repetition, and rhythm. To support his case, Senelick

takes us through some of his translation decision-making, revealing his approach to devices and verbal motifs, examining the role of these devices and motifs in the works, and displaying clearly how language in Chekhov's plays often functions to hold together seemingly unconnected elements. Senelick concludes with seven instructive maxims for translating Chekhov's plays, and, though I won't list them here, prospective translators might do well to tack them above their desks. Heim, as had Senelick, draws on his experience in recently translating Chekhov's plays, and in his short article he submits three insights that have become essential in his approach to translating: look to the source text for hints about how literal or free the translation should be, identify clearly the function that the translation will serve (will it be a classroom text or a stage-worthy text?), and collaborate with directors and actors in preparing stage-worthy texts. Unlike Senelick and Heim, who discuss approaches of translators who know Russian well, Carnicke focuses on the practice of encouraging well-known English-language playwrights with little or no Russian to translate and adapt Chekhov's plays. The directors and producers who encourage these playwrights are responding to "the ambivalent context of praise and aversion that greets Chekhov in English-language theaters today" (91), Carnicke explains, and thus are seeking to avoid low attendance at the box office – Chekhov on his own could spell boredom to many! – by linking Chekhov to popular playwrights. These playwrights, the reasoning follows, might make Chekhov's plays appeal to those who struggle with him, and Carnicke sensitively surveys famous efforts of playwrights who have accepted this challenge. But by the end of these plays, she asks, might the Chekhov in them be lost? By that point might the layers of interpretation (playwright's adaptation – director's preferences – actors' interpretations) conceal Chekhov? Carnicke thinks so.

The public reviewers' and illustrators' constructions of Chekhov in American periodicals and newspapers is the subject of Julie de Sherbinin's "American Iconography of Chekhov," the first article in the volume's third section, "Chekhov and Anglo-American Letters." She eloquently scrutinizes reviews both of works on Chekhov and of new translations of his work, as well as illustrations that often accompany these reviews, to chart popular understandings of Chekhov in American culture. In so doing de Sherbinin identifies tendencies, slants, and clichés that distinguish an American iconography of Chekhov that develops with time. Thus, in the early twentieth century Chekhov was a pessimist, by mid-century he was a realist, and in the last decades of the century, with increased attention to his work and him, he became fuller – here humane, self-sacrificing, and virile, and there complex, self-concerned, and frail. Her careful analyses tell us much, of course, about how she sees these reviews and illustrations, but de Sherbinin also forces us to think about the interaction in the review-illustration pairing and thus to see the individual Chekhovs that reviewers and illustrators might claim. In "Writing in English with a Chekhov Muse" Katherine Tiernan O'Connor discusses texts, which clearly are indebted to Chekhov's writing, and their authors, who observe an affinity between themselves and their Chekhovs and who, if pushed, might say that Chekhov has communicated with them. She considers Katherine Mansfield's "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" and "The Garden-Party," Joyce Carol Oates's "The Lady with the Pet Dog," Raymond Carver's "Errand," and John Ford Noonan's play *Talking Things Over With Chekhov*, revealing a variety of connections between the texts and of sympathies between the authors. Mansfield and Carver express their indebtedness to

Chekhov's art and persona, finding in his art and life attitudes that comforted them in their own art and life. Oates, on the other hand, is concerned with Chekhov's text, and she refashions Chekhov's story of the same name, openly revealing her perceptive awareness of the story's workings and her remarkable capacity to distinguish her story clearly as her own. And, Noonan parodies the familiarization of Chekhov, respecting and understanding the admiration that one can have for Chekhov but poking fun at those who assume a close relationship with him. In "Hunters off the Beaten Track: The Dismantling of Pastoral Myth in Chekhov and Crane" Andrew Durkin explores how Chekhov and Crane rejected the pastoral tradition, which was so influential in nineteenth-century Russian and American literature, and stepped away from a central aspect of their established cultural system. Durkin considers Chekhov's "St. Peter's Day," "June 29th," "At the Wolf-Baiting," and "In Moscow on Trubnaia Square" and Crane's Sullivan County sketches to look especially at narratives of the hunt and of nature generally. In thoughtful readings he traces how Chekhov's characters, either because of their triviality or their contemporary conditioning, are unable to respond meaningfully to elements of a pastoral existence, and how Crane's characters display the myths of the past to be embellishments at best and flights of fancy at worst. In her article, "The Sound of Distant Thunder," Anna Muza examines the place of Chekhov and subtexts from his major plays in Tom Stoppard's *The Coast of Utopia*. She discusses in detail, detail that reveals much about the achievement of Chekhov's drama, how Stoppard employs Chekhov and certain aspects of his plays in order to convert history into a performance of history. Yet, this employment is as concerned with Chekhov's art and language, as it is with Chekhov's representation of the human condition.

The section "Chekhov and American Writing" opens with James McConkey's warm reflection on *his* Chekhov. Sometimes taking Eudora Welty's comments as his prompt, he admires the integrity of Chekhov and his work, an integrity that appears in Chekhov's clear appreciation for the "elusive, shifting nature of reality" and his compassionate moral awareness of the ways – sometimes unjust and hurtful – in which we treat others and ourselves. The only blurb for this volume is taken from Claire Messud's "Chekhov and Aspiring Writers": "To trace the influence of Chekhov on contemporary fiction is like searching for the original cutting from which a vast plant has grown." Yet, it's clear from her ranging article that she has done some searching and can offer at least a general tracing of that influence over the past twenty-five years. She points to quiet restraint in the short prose of the 1980s and 90s, quietude and restraint that recall Chekhov and that has been overwhelmed recently by an exuberance that is in line with "the frenetic, unreflective spirit of our digital age" (171). This change, Messud explains, is marked by a turning away from the importance of character, a supreme importance that, for her, along with his use of detail, trademarked Chekhov's prose and generated her enjoyment in it. Francine Prose's "Learning from Chekhov," a reprint of her 1987 article, recounts her simultaneous interactions with a creative writing class and the volumes of Chekhov's stories that Constance Garnett translated. From these relationships Chekhov proves not only to help Prose with her teaching but also to offer her options in her assumptions about life. He seems to know so much, she applauds, to create such distinct characters, and to appreciate the value of unbiased observation, and thus he reveals the fullness, unpredictability, and possibility in life. In the final article of this section James Wood considers how Chekhov crafts storytelling and in this way how

his writing seems to merge with his characters. Chekhov achieves simplicity, Wood argues, “by using complex literary techniques to break through literary complexity; by using literature against itself” (197). He focuses his analysis on Chekhov’s use of free indirect speech in “Rothschild’s Fiddle” and “Gusev” to explore delicately and insightfully how Chekhov’s style blends with characterization and setting.

Two articles in the section “Innovations in Chekhov Scholarship” examine Chekhov’s prose, and the other two examine his plays. Robert Louis Jackson reads “Rothschild’s Fiddle” against the Old Testament Psalm 137 (“By the Rivers of Babylon”) and Luke 15: 11-32 (the “Parable of the Prodigal Son”), detailing the Eastern Orthodox liturgical metaphorical perception of these texts and considering this perception in Chekhov’s depiction of Iakov Ivanov’s crisis in the story. Chekhov reveals, Jackson uncovers impressively, the force and meaningfulness of religious imagery in everyday occurrences and, though Chekhov does not credit Christian faith for the story’s affirmation of man’s humanity, the psalm can be seen to provide the story’s ethical idea. In her bold article Svetlana Evdokimova explores Chekhov’s fight against the malaise of contemporary theatre, a malaise developing from theater-goers’ weakness for melodrama, and a malaise that Chekhov took on headfirst in his own plays. In creating a new theater and new type of play he sought, Evdokimova makes clear, to overcome melodramatic conventions. In doing so he hoped to make audiences unsusceptible to the “virus” of melodrama. He challenged the aesthetics of excess and “astonishment” (Peter Brooks’s term) by choosing as the setting of his plays the middle ground of everyday life, rather than paths of extreme behavior, radical change, or tragic vision. Cathy Popkin proposes that at times Chekhov advocates an alternative to particularity, individuality, or identity, where value and insight are located in continuity, in being part of “one gigantic life form” or formless field, and where individuals accept transience and embrace the freedom of life as it is, and thus don’t worry about what might be missing in it. She sees such advocacy in “The Bishop” and supports her thoughtful reading of this story with considerations of Chekhov’s “Champagne: Thoughts from a New Year’s Hangover,” “Champagne: The story of a Rogue,” and “Without a Title,” as well as some Zen teachings. Spencer Golub provocatively explores Epikhodov’s role in *The Cherry Orchard*, clarifying the character’s anxiety, imagination, wanting, occasional obsessing, and wandering mind. Golub usually works from the play, but at times he builds on it, contributing to and complementing Chekhov’s writing, one might argue, as Epikhodov’s “anxiety of wanting” contributes to and complements the wanting, rather than the doing, of others in *The Cherry Orchard*.

The two articles in the “Performance Practice” section take us through goals, choices, and efforts that Ellen Beckerman and Carol Rocamora made in their productions of Chekhov’s plays. Beckerman, Artistic Director of LightBox, places great importance in creating a physical atmosphere on stage with its own integrity and vigor. She aims to create a physically heightened production that will effect an electrifying charge in the theatre and provide a vibrant platform for the play. This goal is a challenging one to reach, and to express how she arrives at it she recounts her work on LightBox’s production of *Gull*. Rocamora’s productions were conditioned by a trip to Moscow, and in her article she recalls how her brief visit with the director of the Army Theatre, a veteran director of Chekhov’s plays, inspired her staging of them. In that brief visit the director drew her attention to the Chekhovian nature of Serov’s “Girl with a Peach” and

offered some of his secrets about Chekhov's plays, sending Rocamora home with four principles that have helped her understand Chekhov: Chekhov sensed the fullness, clarity, and complexity of the moment; Chekhov intensely felt the natural world and human nature; every act in a Chekhov play has a kernel, an essence (*zerno*); and, Chekhov saw Russia through the eyes of a dying man. And, she recounts the importance these principles had for her, the actors, and the set designers in her 1995 production of *The Cherry Orchard*.

The volume's final and largest section, "Seminar in the Medical Humanities," offers a vibrant mix of perspectives on Chekhov's life and work. In Michael Finke's interview with Dr. Robert Coles, which also makes up the DVD that accompanies this volume,* Chekhov's messages emerge as correctives in many situations to the people we think we are, the actions we think of making, and the reasons we have for those actions. It seems to Coles that Chekhov constantly sought to comprehend and learn from others, and these efforts most likely led him to travel to Sakhalin and at times to the suffering and the poor. To be sure, he wanted to pass on this comprehension in his writing, but in addition he hoped, Coles believes, to embrace it himself so that he might be as broadly present and aware in the world of others as he could, and thus avoid "the danger of a kind of smug insularity" (279). Chekhov wished to liberate himself from himself. Coles acknowledges his introduction to and subsequent affection and respect for Chekhov to the literary and medical tutelage that William Carlos Williams gave him. Indeed, the notion of doctor as learner, teacher, one being healed, and healer runs crisply through Coles's reflections on Williams, Chekhov, and himself. In "Heal Thyself, Hide Thyself: Why Did Chekhov Ignore His TB?" Michael Finke proposes that Chekhov's way of seeing derives from his professional training and identity. His medical knowledge informed his literary work, but, more importantly for Finke, created awkwardness and struggles for Chekhov in his living with tuberculosis. If most likely perceived as degenerate and dangerous, might his tubercular body have been something that Chekhov preferred to keep to himself? Was he worried about how he was seen, how he saw himself, and therefore did he seek to render his body unreadable? These questions motivate Finke's analysis of Chekhov's life and inform his reading of stories with physician characters, medical themes, and ailments. Conevery Bolton Valenčius offers a new reading of *Sakhalin Island*, identifying the work as an example of medical geography and accounting for aspects of it, which previously challenged easy readings and generic designations, as central in the genre's goals to provide medical and scientific knowledge about the interaction between individuals and a particular place. Chekhov's collection of data and arguments, Bolton Valenčius clarifies, accord with the medical science of his time, and thus also the framework for his critique of the Sakhalin administration is a familiar one for medical geography. For at the heart of his critique, she contends, is his realization of the "specific ways in which known laws of the human sciences, and especially those that relate environment to human well-being, are being transgressed, to the great suffering of those living on Sakhalin" (313). The "Seminar on Anton Chekhov and the Medical Humanities" brought together members of the Symposium with health-

* The DVD and transcript versions of the interview of Dr. Robert Coles are slightly different. The volume's text is tidied in spots, but it also has sections that were removed from the DVD. So, on the one hand, it's fuller. On the other hand, the DVD gathers energy, respect, and emotion for Chekhov in Dr. Coles that can't be sensed fully in the text. They complement each other, and the DVD deserves to be watched on its own.

care professionals, who had been asked to read Chekhov's "Aniuta," "Ward 6," and "A Medical Case" in preparation for the seminar, and the transcript printed in this volume displays the abundant variety of understandings and meanings that the stories have for the participants' attitudes to Chekhov's stories, their own lives, and the ways in which Chekhov's depictions of health-care interaction might be meaningful for us now. Indeed, the richness and energy of the seminar's discussion is a testament to the fruitful examples of Chekhov's life and writing for the individuals in attendance and their many vocations and disciplines. In a brief commentary Richard Kahn, M.D., who moderates the seminar above with Michael Finke, touches on how this manifest richness and energy mark the entire Symposium, applauding its conception generally and its multidisciplinary interaction specifically. The volume closes with an excerpt from "About Chekhov," which was written by Chekhov's Yalta physician and acquaintance, I.N. Al'tshuller (1870-1943), in 1929 and published in 1930. It is translated here for the first time by Eugene Alper. In the first paragraphs Al'tshuller recounts his early acquaintanceship with Chekhov, and in the remaining bulk of the excerpt we read of his interaction with Chekhov and treatment of his tuberculosis. He provides a history of Chekhov's condition, details his apparent denial of it, and takes us through the deterioration of Chekhov's health in his last years, and we gain a fuller sense of the likely causes of this deterioration and appreciate why Al'tshuller understands it to have been inevitable.

This is a valuable and stimulating volume that speaks to the fullness with which Chekhov and his work continue to resonate. There is something here for everyone interested in Chekhov, and the volume certainly will provide material for classroom discussion, further research, and dialogue among *chekhovedy*. Professors Finke and de Sherbinin are to be commended for their important work in organizing the Symposium and editing this volume.

LETTERS

To the editor:

I read with great interest Carol Apollonio's insightful article on the story "Grasshopper" in the last issue. I would like, however, to raise a few issues about translation and critical analysis.

Prof. Apollonio notes that the title has been translated into English as "The Grasshopper," "The Butterfly" and "The Fidget." However, the very first English translation of "Poprygun'ia", by R. Long, published in 1908, called the story "La Cigale." The reference was, of course, to La Fontaine's fable "La Cigale et le fourmi," which would be more familiar to most educated Europeans than Krylov's reworking. Long thus managed to retain the literary allusion, and his version was widely disseminated in collections of Chekhov's stories published in 1912, 1917, 1929 and as a Modern Library volume in 1932.

(Incidentally, Krylov was content to translate La Fontaine almost verbatim, with none of his usual adaptations. Sir Bernard Pares, whose translation of Krylov's fables (1926) remains the best, chose to entitle his rendering "The Gadfly and the Ant." This is entymologically incorrect, but he may have chosen it because it suggests "gadding about.")

Prof. Apollonio's translations of passages from the story are careful and accurate, but occasionally fall into over-coloring Chekhov's vocabulary. Very often, Chekhov's prose gives an illusion of flatness, which tempts the translator to heighten its effects. (I've been guilty of this myself.) So, on p. 8, "ustroila krasivuiu tesnotu", "arranged a nook of beauty," becomes "cluttered," which suggests the tightness of the space but omits the ironic reference to artificial beauty spots. Similarly, on p. 10, the "baba" lights the stove "lackadaisically" whereas Chekhov says merely "ne spesha," "unhurriedly." On the following page, "wolfing down" also seems an overtranslation of "zhadno est'," "ate greedily."

I would also question as misleading the rendering of "lubochnye kartinki" as "peasant prints", since *lubki* were commercially printed and sold, primarily to the merchant class. They were "popular" but not folk art. And "statuette" for "figura" implies smallness, whereas this may well have been a life-size effigy of a kind often seen in the vestibules of 19th-century homes. A similar misreading of period interior decor comes on p. 9 when Prof. Apollonio has the walls of the dacha papered with "pischeiu bumagoi," whereas it is the ceilings, in a cheap substitute for distemper.

To move from lexical to critical matters, I take issue with one of Prof. Apollonio's statements on p. 15. After quoting Aristotle to define the moment of recognition for characters, she states "It is a moment of wisdom that only narrative can provide." Since Aristotle cited *anagnorisis* as an organic component of tragedy, he must have believed that drama was the appropriate medium for such a device. I would argue that the epiphanies of Oedipus and King Lear are far more powerful than anything conveyed by a narrator in prose.

Yours truly,

Laurence Senelick
Tufts University

Carol Apollonio, Duke University, replies:

Thanks are due to Laurence Senelick for his insightful comments. The story's title indeed presents challenges to the translator, who must decide whether to respect denotation (*scamperer*); psychological nuance (*fidget/flibbertigibbet*); entymological and figurative meaning (*gadfly*, *butterfly*); Russian literary allusion (*dragonfly*); English literary allusion (*grasshopper*); or yet more deeply layered literary precedent ("La Cigale"). None of these options reflects Chekhov's title exactly, and each one comes at a cost. "Gadfly," for example, might cause the reader to picture not someone who "gads about" à la Olga Dymova but a person who is irritating in social settings and needs to be swatted, or even, dangerously in the Russian context, a political activist. A twenty-first-century reader of an English translation entitled "La Cigale" would miss a rich chain of nuances. But R. Long should of course be credited at the head of the long line of translators who have tackled Chekhov's beautiful story.

As for the many points concerning word choice, they too are welcome, especially the comments about late-nineteenth-century home décor (popular prints; the papered ceiling). Translation is the beginning, not the end of a dialogue. Chekhov's style may seem "flat" to some, but it is dense in poetic nuance, sound play, and rhythm; hence the torment it causes translators. My sense is that richness of vocabulary in English—which is in fact the strength of our language—may compensate for some of the damage we inflict on other levels. Rendering Russian adjective-verb combinations (*zhadno est'*) with an idiomatic expression in English (*wolf down*) can be a very effective translation strategy. That said, I agree that a cold, literal approach can be appropriate in many *critical* readings.

Professor Senelick's final point is well taken. The word "narrative" somehow slipped into the sentence instead of "plot"—because Chekhov's story is, after all, a narrative. It is of course the wrong word, for Aristotle was writing about the tragic art of his time (in other words, the drama). To be safe, and at the cost of putting off a discussion of the Greek terms until another time, the phrase should read: "a moment of wisdom that only plot can provide." Still, the vexed question as to whether drama or narrative is more effective in bringing about catharsis is not as easily solved as we critics might imply.