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Editor's Note

Now that the frenzied activity of the centennial year is over, this issue will, I hope, play its part in initiating a new round of reading, teaching and writing about Chekhov. Some material is reprinted from other periodicals. Harvey Pitcher's translation of Leo Rabeneck's description of Chekhov's last days and death, a large portion of which is reprinted here, first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on July 2, 2004. It will be of special interest to those who cannot read the Russian original. Liisa Byckling's short article draws its materials from a longer study she published in Russia, and the review of Peta Tait's new book comes from *Modern Drama*. In addition to other reviews, notices about the appearance of two important new publications, a belated announcement of a significant monograph, and some professional news, including a draft proposal of a constitution for NACS, I trust you will be amused by the travesty by Ivan Shcheglov, which is introduced and translated by Laurence Senelick.

**Chekhov's Last Moments**

**Leo Rabeneck**

**Translated by Harvey Pitcher**

(Reprinted with the kind permission of the *Times Literary Supplement*)

Harvey Pitcher introduced his translation with the following comments:

When Anton Chekhov died of TB in Germany on July 15, 1904, at the age of forty-four, three people were present: his wife, Olga Leonardovna Knipper (a leading actress with the Moscow Art Theatre), a German doctor, and a twenty-one-year-old Russian student, Leo Rabeneck. The Rabenecks were German in origin but had been in Russia since the 1730s. Though fully assimilated into Russian life, they had remained faithful to Lutheranism and held Finnish nationality. By 1904 they were extremely prosperous, owning large cotton mills that still function today, and an estate outside Moscow that was to become a grand Soviet sanatorium. Leo studied chemistry in Moscow and Dresden, joined the family business in 1907 and became a full director in 1915. During the First World War he supervised the evacuation of important chemical works from areas near the front line. After the Revolution he settled permanently in London (where members of the family still live), becoming well known in the Russian émigré community. ... He never returned to Russia, and died in 1972 at the age of eighty-nine.

"Chekhov's Last Moments" was published in a Russian émigré journal in 1958.

Thinking back now to that distant past, I have a clear picture in my mind of friendly little Badenweiler, situated on the gentle hills of the Black Forest, and of the Hotel Sommer facing the beautiful

Badenweiler Park. The summer of 1904, I remember, was sunny and very warm, and there was a feeling of peace, joy and contentment about everything. Anton Pavlovich had arrived in Badenweiler only a short time before us [Rabeneck was traveling in Europe with his brother], but judging by his outward appearance, he seemed very much better, and Vishnevsky (an actor with the Moscow Art Theatre) told me later in Moscow that Chekhov had written to him in the Caucasus from Badenweiler, assuring him that his health was "returning by the hundredweight".

But this recovery was only apparent; in reality his health was following its prescribed course. When I visited Anton Pavlovich on the day after our arrival, I was struck by the difference between this apparent recovery and his generally wasted condition—though he had a good complexion and was very sunburnt. As I sat talking to him, I noticed that he had frequent bouts of severe coughing and spat into a small blue spittoon that could be sealed tight, and which he carried round in his jacket pocket. It was, incidentally, as a result of this sensible precaution, taken by Anton Pavlovich for the sake of other people, that the management of the first hotel where the Chekhovs stayed in Badenweiler found it necessary to withdraw their hospitality, since they reckoned that the presence in their hotel of such a very sick person might drive many of their other visitors away.

At the Hotel Sommer, to which they then moved, the Chekhovs took a rather noisy, unrelaxing room overlooking Badenweiler's main street. Anton Pavlovich felt on edge there and was very insistent that they should move to another room. But it was the height of the season and they had to wait for a quieter, more comfortable room to become free. At last the chance came: a wonderful large room with a balcony and a view over the shady Badenweiler Park fell vacant. I remember Anton Pavlovich's joy when I went to see him in this new room. He had at once become somehow calmer and more cheerful.

After Chekhov's death, when Olga Leonardovna and I were going over all the recent events, she said to me: "Remember how Anton kept pressing me to move him to another room and how on edge he was, as if in a hurry to find his last earthly refuge".

I used to visit Anton Pavlovich almost every day, taking him the Russian newspapers and often reading them aloud to him. He was terribly interested in all the events in the Far East. The war with Japan disturbed him: our failures at the front distressed him deeply and he grieved over them.

There seemed to be no hint then that his end was imminent. He was making plans for the future and had decided to return to his home at Yalta in the Crimea by steamer from Naples. He even asked Olga Leonardovna to go to the nearest town of Freiburg and order him two flannel suits, for the journey and for the Crimea: one white with a blue stripe, one blue with a white stripe. Olga Leonardovna invited me to accompany her. So one fine morning we set off, taking an old suit of Anton Pavlovich with us for the tailor to use as a pattern. After reaching Freiburg and ordering the suits, we decided to take advantage of the wonderful day to look round this old German town and its surroundings.

Returning home at about 6 pm, we found Anton Pavlovich strolling quietly round the hotel garden, accompanied by my brother. There was a large crowd of very noisy, sweaty Germans sitting in the garden, drinking endless quantities of beer. Seeing how cheerful and happy we looked on our return, Anton Pavlovich came up to us and glancing at me through his pince-nez said: "I bet you've been paying court to my wife all day" – which threw me into great confusion. Then, without waiting for my reply, he turned to Olga Leonardovna and said: "You know, darling, I kept feeling that sooner or later those Germans were going to beat me up".

None of us that evening could have imagined that within a few days Anton Pavlovich would be in his coffin and being taken on his last long journey back to Moscow. When I was talking to Dr Schwörer after Anton Pavlovich's death, he told me that Chekhov had been very seriously ill and he was amazed by the irresponsible attitude of the doctors who had advised him to leave Russia and undertake such a long and exhausting journey abroad when he was in such a condition.

A few words about this German doctor who was looking after Chekhov when he died. Dr Schwörer was a comparatively young man, good-looking and with a pleasant manner. The traces of duelling scars on his cheek showed that in his student days he had belonged to one of the German student corps. Since he was also treating my brother, I was able to study him closely, and I came to the conclusion that he was a knowledgeable and conscientious doctor. Remarkably, he had a Russian wife, a Muscovite like us, Yelizaveta Vasil'yevna Zhivago. Even more surprisingly, Dr Schwörer's great friend, Dr Determann, who had a practice in a spa not far from Badenweiler, was married to the same lady's sister. Thanks to their Russian wives, these two German doctors often visited Moscow and loved everything Russian.

On the night of July 14/15 my brother and I were fast asleep after returning late in the evening from a long excursion in the mountains. Through my sleep I suddenly heard a loud knocking at the door and the voice of Olga Leonardovna calling my name. Jumping out of bed I ran over to the door and saw the scared look on her face. She was in her dressing-gown.

“Leo dear, please get dressed straight away and fetch the doctor – Anton’s ill.”

I dressed at once and rushed off to the doctor’s house. About ten minutes’ walk from the hotel. It was a warm balmy night and at the doctor’s they were all sleeping with the windows open. Hearing the bell at the gate, the doctor called out from his bedroom: “Who is it?” I shouted back that I’d been sent by “Frau Chekhov”, as her husband was ill. The doctor immediately put a light on in his room, came over to the window, told me he’d be at the hotel in a few minutes, and asked me to pick up a cylinder of oxygen from the chemist’s on my way back. From the doctor’s I rushed off to the chemist’s, woke him up, too, and got the required oxygen. By the time I returned to the hotel, the doctor was already in Anton Pavlovich’s room. I went in and handed him the oxygen. Anton Pavlovich was sitting up in bed, propped up on pillows and supported by Olga Leonardovna. He was breathing heavily and with difficulty. The doctor began giving him the oxygen. After a few minutes he whispered to me to go downstairs to the hall porter and fetch a bottle of champagne and a glass. Once more I disappeared and returned some time later with the champagne. The doctor filled the glass almost to the brim and offered it to Anton Pavlovich. The latter accepted it with pleasure, smiled his attractive smile, and said, “It’s a long time since I last drank champagne”, and gallantly drained the glass in one go. The doctor took the empty glass from him and handed it to me. I put it on the table next to the bottle.

At the very moment when I put the glass on the table, with my back to Anton Pavlovich, there was a strange kind of gurgling noise from his throat, rather like the noise that a tap makes when the air has got into it. When I turned round, I saw that Anton Pavlovich, still supported by Olga Leonardovna, had turned on to his side and was resting quietly on his pillows. I thought he wanted to lie down for a bit after his spell of difficult breathing.

The room was quiet, no one said anything and the shaded light of the lamp made everything look gloomy. The doctor did not move away from Anton Pavlovich and held his hand in silence. It never entered my head that all this time he was feeling his pulse. Several

minutes passed in complete silence and (not having the faintest idea that Chekhov might be dying) I felt that now, thank God, everything had calmed down and our previous anxieties were already past history. The doctor then quietly released Anton Pavlovich's hand, moved over to the foot of the bed where I was standing, led me to the back of the room and said softly: "It's all over. Herr Chekhov is dead. Please be kind enough to tell Frau Chekhov".

I was stunned and all I could say was: "Are you quite sure, doctor?"

"Unfortunately, yes," he replied, visibly suppressing his emotion and deeply moved by what had happened.

The whole of our conversation had been conducted in a half-whisper. Olga Leonardovna paid us no attention and went on leaning across from her own bed supporting Anton Pavlovich, not guessing that it was all over. I went quietly up to her, touched her on the shoulder and signalled her to get up. She carefully removed her arms from behind Anton Pavlovich's back, got up and came over to me. With difficulty restraining my own emotions, I said to her in a half-whisper: "Olga Leonardovna, my dear, the doctor says that Anton Pavlovich is dead".

The blow was so terrible and unexpected that poor Olga Leonardovna seemed at first to be turned to stone, but then she threw herself on the doctor in a kind of frenzy, seized him by his jacket collar and began shaking him with all her strength, repeating in German through her tears: "It's not true, doctor, say it's not true, doctor".

With great difficulty the doctor and I gradually succeeded in calming her down and bringing her to her senses. The doctor stayed in the room for some time afterwards, and before he left, conscious of how badly Olga Leonardovna was taking her husband's death, he asked me to remove all the sharp objects, such as knives and so on, from the table, and not to leave her alone, but to stay with her until morning. He promised to return early in the morning with his wife to take Olga Leonardovna back to their house, while the dead man was washed and dressed.

I have to say that Anton Pavlovich's death affected me deeply. I was a very young man, and at that age such events impress themselves on one very strongly, for the whole of one's life – much more so than in later years. It was the first death I had witnessed and it upset me a great deal.

I ought to have turned Anton Pavlovich, who was lying on his side, on to his back. This I failed to do, and next morning the doctor

and I had to make a great effort to straighten out the body which had stiffened in the wrong position. We were not entirely successful, since the dead man's head remained tilted slightly to one side. My brother and I took photographs of the dead man lying on the bed in his room. These photographs were then published throughout the Russian press, and I remember how puzzled many people were by the tilt of the dead man's head.

After the doctor had left, I persuaded Olga Leonardovna to sit out on the balcony. I fetched two armchairs and we sat down. The night was pleasantly warm. Dawn had already broken and the birds were beginning to call to each other in the park. There was a wonderful sunrise, then early morning arrived. We sat there in silence, shaken by what had happened, only now and then exchanging recent memories of Anton Pavlovich. Olga Leonardovna suddenly remarked: "You know, Lyovushka, those weren't suits you and I ordered for Anton, they were funeral shrouds".

Early in the morning the doctor and his wife came to fetch Olga Leonardovna. It was difficult to persuade her to leave the dead man's room. I promised to keep an eye on everything and to call for her when it was all over.

At about 5 pm I arrived at the doctor's and walked back with Olga Leonardovna to the hotel.

We went into the dead man's room. The evening sunlight barely filtered through the Venetian blinds, which had been lowered over the window and the balcony door. The dead man was lying on the bed surrounded by flowers, his arms folded on his chest and an expression of complete calm on his face. I left Olga Leonardovna alone to say farewell to Anton Pavlovich. It was late evening when she reappeared, looking somehow calmer and more refreshed. I saw her back to the doctor's where she was to spend the night.

That night (July 15/16) Anton Pavlovich's body was to be transferred from the hotel to a small local chapel. Everything had to be done very late, when the hotel guests were all asleep. The night porter came in to inform my brother and me that the bearers had arrived. We went into Anton Pavlovich's room. In our presence these people brought in not the usual bier, but a large long linen-basket. I remember how deeply offended my brother and I were by this way of doing things. We had to look on in silence as the remains of our beloved Russian writer were carried off in a linen-basket. The bearers carefully lifted the body and began placing it in the basket, but the basket was not long enough to allow the body to lie completely flat and it had to be propped up in a half-reclining position. Watching the

bearers trying to fit the body into the basket, I felt for a moment that I could see a flicker of amusement on Anton Pavlovich's face.

We carried the basket with Anton Pavlovich's body out into the street. It was a dark night. The bearers began moving along the road to the chapel. Our way was lit by two torchbearers walking on either side. On reaching the chapel, my brother and I put the body of Anton Pavlovich down at the place prepared for the dead, surrounded it with flowers and after saying a farewell prayer went home.

On the morning of July 16, Yelyena Ivanovna Knipper [Olga Leonardovna's sister-in-law] arrived in Badenweiler from Dresden. It was another, hot airless day. Olga Leonardovna's first meeting with someone close to her was painful and moving.

That same evening we all made our way to the chapel to say prayers and pay our last respects to the dead man.

Several days later we accompanied Anton Pavlovich's coffin from Badenweiler to the railway station. The carriage with the coffin was coupled to a passenger train for Berlin. Olga Leonardovna and Yelyena Ivanovna left by this train on their way to Russia, taking Anton Pavlovich back to be buried in the soil of his native Moscow at the Novodevichii Monastery,

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## NEW BOOKS

*The Complete Plays of Anton Chekhov*, edited, translated and annotated by Laurence Senelick, is projected to be published by W. W. Norton & Co. in November 2005. It will contain virtually everything Chekhov ever wrote in dramatic form, including his early experiments, parodies and humorous pieces. Some items have never appeared in English before, including the first version of *Ivanov* and the collaborative farce (with Leont'ev-Shcheglov) *The Power of Hypnotism*. The major variants of different editions will also be provided, along with copious notes and an appendix listing lost plays and those plays planned by Chekhov but never written. This will constitute the first complete one-volume edition of Chekhov's dramatic works in any language.

*Seeing Chekhov: Life and Art* by Michael C. Finke has just been published by Cornell University Press. This study, according to the publisher's summary, "explodes a century of critical truisms concerning Chekhov's objective eye and what being a physician gave him as a writer in a book that foregrounds the deeply subjective and self-reflexive aspects of his fiction and drama. In exploring previously unrecognized seams between the author's life and his verbal art, Finke profoundly alters and deepens our

understanding of Chekhov's personality and behaviors, provides startling new interpretations of a broad array of Chekhov's texts, and fleshes out Chekhov's simultaneous pride in his identity as a physician and devastating critique of turn-of-the-century medical practices and ideologies."

*Mikhail Gromov, Chekhov Scholar and Critic: An Essay in Cultural Difference* by Patrick Miles was published by Astra Press in 2003. This monograph traces the evolution of an extraordinarily fine Russian critic of Chekhov, noted for the emphasis he placed on Chekhov's first play *Bezottsovshchina*, his deep appreciation of "Step'," and his illumination of the literary ties between Chekhov and Dostoevsky. Late in his career he came to a lyrical appreciation of *The Cherry Orchard*. Miles analyzes the weaknesses as well as the strengths of Gromov's approaches to Chekhov texts and compares and contrasts Russian and European conceptions of the work and function of a literary critic.

## **BLEEDING HEARTS AND MOCKING DARTS**

### **A SUPPOSITIOUS PARODY OF LIDIYA AVILOVA**

Laurence Senelick

Tufts University

Should we feel sorry for Lidiia Avilova? In certain circles, she seems to have turned into a character from Chekhov's preliminary notes on *The Cherry Orchard*, Varvara Nedotiopina (Barbara Left-in-the-Lurch). Her specious memoirs, in which she claims that she was Chekhov's only true love, have been thoroughly discredited. When they first appeared, in truncated and expurgated form in the first edition of *A. П. Чехов в воспоминаниях современников* (Moscow, 1947), the editor A. K. Kotov felt called upon to issue a disclaimer in his introduction. Ernest Simmons went farther, however, totally demolishing their pretensions for readers of English in his biography of Chekhov (Boston, 1962). In Russia they have been vilified by L. M. Sagydi. Even the tolerant V. S. Pritchett characterizes Avilova as "incurably sentimental and pursuing."

Don't waste your sympathy. Avilova's taradiddles are very durable. They seem to be as hard to kill as the villain in a splatter movie. After the death of Chekhov's widow, they appeared in amplified and elaborated form in later editions of Kotov's collection, and were endorsed by no less an authority than Ivan Bunin. They were translated into English by David Magarshack with the sensational title *Chekhov in My Life: A Love Story*. The British edition of

1950 was reprinted in America by Harcourt, Brace in 1968 and again by Greenwood Press without comment in 1971, nearly a decade after Simmons' biography had appeared. The book was then resuscitated by Methuen in 1989. French and German translations are readily available. Avilova's "thick-gathering fancies" continue to be taken as Gospel by second-hand biographers, short-story writers and playwrights who insist on promoting a portrait of Chekhov as a soft-hearted romantic. Typical is Inna Goff who has built several fictions on Avilova's already fictitious accounts. *Le Monde*, reviewing a new French translation of *The Island of Sakhalin* (12 mai 1995), explains that Chekhov fled to Siberia to escape his unhappy love affair with the married Avilova. Only last year (2004) a one-woman show in France by Mariecke de Bussac, entitled *Le secret de Lidia Alekseevna*, purported to reveal for the first time Chekhov's long-hidden liaison.

When, precisely, did Avilova begin to spin these yarns? Immediately after Chekhov's death, she wrote to his sister Mariia, "I am far from insinuating that I knew him well and that I was anything to him" (20 July 1904). Nothing even vaguely suggestive of romance appeared in her reminiscences as they were published in the Chekhov Jubilee Anthology of 1910. Simmons believed that Avilova had pieced together her chimeras in the early 1940s, nearly fifty years after the events she purports to recall, but in fact she spent years refining her fantasies. A notebook of her *Рассказы. Воспоминания* for 1917 reveals her earliest attempts to turn Chekhov from beloved object to loving subject. It is an early experiment in what the Chekhovian scholar Zinovii Papernyi in his latest and last book, *Тайна сия ...любовь у Чехова* (Moscow, 2002), calls Avilocentrism.

It may very well be that her mythopoeia, although not revealed in public, began soon after Chekhov's demise, and that her claims were known to members of his circle. In his memoirs of Chekhov, the lawyer A. F. Koni recalled that the author was interested in cases of "delusional lies," in which a person gradually comes to believe that what might have been actually had taken place. Koni thought it common to children; Chekhov remarked that it occurs "with certain very impressionable women." (А. П. Чехов . *Отрывочные воспоминания, Сборник А. П. Чехов*. Leningrad, 1925, p. 211.) If he had Avilova in mind, he may have shared his observations with other friends, or quoted from letters which have not survived.

In the process of editing and translating the complete plays of Chekhov for W. W. Norton and Co., I was intent on uncovering his "collaboration" with Ivan Shcheglov, the farce *The Power of Hypnotism*.

A description of this play is provided in the standard collection *Чехов в театре* and the notes to the Academy of Sciences edition of Chekhov's plays (Moscow, 1974-84), but the editors of the latter chose not to include it as a legitimate text. I eventually found the play in a posthumous collection of comic sketches and parodies by Shcheglov entitled *Жизнь вверх ногами (A Topsy-Turvy Life)*, St Petersburg, 1911, and it will duly appear in translation in my edition of *The Complete Plays*.

Shcheglov was the army captain Ivan Leont'evich Leont'ev (1856-1911), who in the early 1880s embarked on a promising career as a playwright and novelist under that pseudonym. His speciality was depictions of the rising middle-class, and his novel *Дачный муж (Suburban Husband)* added a phrase to the language. He and Chekhov kept up a close epistolary relationship, their letters packed with private jokes and teasing references. Although Shcheglov's own career petered out in the 1890s, he still considered himself an intimate of Chekhov's, alert to the gossip that swirled around him.

In *A Topsy-Turvy Life*, there appears a parody entitled "My Lover Anton Chekhov", allegedly by a certain Miss Murashkina (Pismire or Ant; Chekhov uses the joke name Murashkin in his one-act sketch *Трагик поневоле [A Tragedian In Spite of Himself]*). It is a lampoon of the over-imaginative female fan who seemed to be fatally attracted to Chekhov. Papernyi begins his book on Chekhov and love with a selection of quotations from such fan letters. However, there are a number of touches in the parody which point directly to Avilova. In a foreword to her memoirs which was first published in vol. 68 of *Литературное наследство* in 1960, she uses the term "our love affair," while the excesses of her prose are already evident in the 1947 version of her memoirs. On first meeting Chekhov, she reports, "Something exploded in my soul... I have not the slightest doubt that much the same thing happened to Chekhov. We stared at one another in surprise and joy. 'I'll come again,' said Chekhov. 'Shall I?'" The juxtaposition of rapture and bathos is typical of Avilova and particularly well caught in Shcheglov's parody.

What I am suggesting is that Avilova's myth-making had gained currency, perhaps in manuscript form, in Chekhov's circle not long after his death. Shcheglov had somehow come in contact with, and could not resist sending up, the excesses of his friend's most clinging female admirer. He may not have published the spoof in his own lifetime, but his publishers Vaisberg and Gershunin had no qualms about including it in this final garner of his humorous pieces.

In any case, here is the parody, and readers may judge for themselves.

**"My Lover Anton Chekhov"  
(from reminiscences of Chekhov by Miss Murashkina).**

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It was in Yalta.

A warm April evening...

Chekhov was sitting on a bench by the seashore, alone and downcast. My heart prompted me to what had to be done: I sat down beside him...

What did it matter that we had never met? His works had made me a kind of "spiritual mistress" of his... And of course, I had come to Yalta expressly to see *him* and sit beside *him*...

But he did not move a muscle.

I shifted closer to him. He did not even turn his head.

Then I shifted quite close to him, so that my knees touched his knee. Chekhov trembled the slightest bit and raised the stick he had in his hand.

I instinctively drew away... But he immediately lowered the stick and, pointing it at the roaring sea before him, faintly exclaimed:

"That's the sea."

Good heavens, I was finally hearing what I had so passionately longed for: I was hearing *his* voice! I almost lost consciousness with happiness... No more than a few words, but what divine harmony of Chekhovian simplicity!!..

Anyone else in his place would have uttered: "Farewell free verse!" or "O, how I adore this eternal realm of azure!", something of that sort, but he was classically terse:

"That's the sea."

Darling Chekhov! How I wanted to hug and kiss him!!..

But I remembered that a titan of Russian literature stood before me, and, falling to my knees, I worshipfully bussed only the tip of his shoes. I sensed I might inflame him with my ardent breath and shower him with sweat brought on by the unremitting Southern mugginess, but I did not have the strength to restrain my sacred impulse.

Chekhov gently drew back his foot, and squinting through his pince-nez, thoughtfully exclaimed:

"You there... how often do you take a bath?"

I blushed deeply. I immediately understood that he was referring to a "spiritual bath," i.e., did I often read his works. -- And because I held it as a

rule, punctually, every Saturday night, to re-read at least one of his divine stories, I boldly replied, staring affectionately into his face:

"Every Saturday, dear teacher!"

And squatting down like a Turk, I sat at his feet, on the sand, like the most devoted of his idolators.

Chekhov sighed deeply...

Oh, if only you could have heard that sigh! It was not a sigh, but a sort of suppressed, symbolic grief for his poor native land, devoid of "spiritual baths"... And he, -- he, whose days were ominously numbered, what could he give beyond what he had already given in Marx's collected edition?!

Such a sigh was capable of upsetting the whole soul of a human being, let alone a woman -- I could not hold back and burst into hysterical sobs.

Apparently, Chekhov's nerves could not endure women's tears, he turned aside and, ever so quietly, whispered as if to himself:

"What a pain in the neck that one..."

And did not complete his remark.

But with my intuitive woman's soul I surmised at once who "that one" was: "that one" was his own expiring life, which was starting to become burdensome to him.

Poor, vanquished titan! Hast thou not invigorated gloomy people with thy creations not wrought by human hands, whilst thou thyself now perish beneath the weight of inexorable fate!!

And cautiously, holding my breath, I drew from the pocket of his lightweight overcoat a fresh handkerchief... in memory of our meeting, momentary though it was but quite profound in its symbolism.

I do not know whether Chekhov noticed my action or not -- but he suddenly and decisively rose and, waving his hand despondently, headed for home...

Do you remember the end of that Chekhovian classic "The Swedish Match"?

"*I'm going to get blind-drunk!*" he decided on his way out the gate."

All of Chekhov is in that single phrase.

Yes, all -- with its worldly sorrow and creative dissatisfaction -- and that corrosively despondent wave of the hand wordlessly gave his game away.

I sat on the sand distraught and dispirited by the revelation of the "hidden secret," intimately confided to me by Anton Chekhov in two or three dropped phrases and chance gestures, and fixedly watched him go.

The motions of his arms and the turn of his head still preserved a semblance of life, but in his stooping spine, I could distinctly read "Swan Song" ...

But the sea roared enigmatically as before, there was an annoying smell of magnolias and from the distant boulevard was borne the Bacchanalian strains of the Strauss waltz "Wein, Weib und Gesang."

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The very next day, early in the morning, I hurried over to Chekhov's villa, but... they would not let me in: he had become worse... Apparently, our brief encounter on the seashore, a chance encounter, during which we seemed to have become spiritually involved with one another, had powerfully excited him... (I will not hide it: even though I may be fifty years old, I am remarkably well-preserved.)

Oh, who would have thought at the time that it was to be our first and last encounter!!..

In two month's time --

**HE WAS NO MORE.**

.....

.....

At the first news of his death, I rushed like a madwoman to the dear Chekhovian bench, *our* bench, and unburdened myself with loud, incessant sobbing... I sobbed long and loud, almost until the setting of the sun (the doctors had forbidden me to leave the house after sunset) and my sobs reverberated with a booming answering echo in the Crimean mountains.

And, when carefree tourists of either sex passed by and asked me, "What has happened?" -- I replied, choking on my tears:

"He is dead -- he, my matchless lover -- Anton Chekhov!"

Yes, he was my lover, because no one ever loved him as passionately as I did -- not his mother or his sister or his brother or his wife...

**NO ONE!!!**

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As before the Bacchanalian strains of the Strauss waltz reached me, as before it smelled annoyingly of magnolias; as before the sea roared enigmatically, as if whispering to poor impatient humanity the familiar Chekhovian words, -- "What is the point of so much acute suffering, and so much passionate languor, and all this uproar over women and constitutions, when it makes no difference -- in three thousand years or so, -- everyone will be identically joyous and happy?!"

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Copied from the original: **I. L. Shch.**

[translation by Laurence Senelick © 2005]

## **Kama Ginkas Directs Chekhov in Finland (1988-1996)**

### **Liisa Byckling, Helsinki, Finland.**

Finland had a strong tradition of productions of Chekhov based on the model provided by the Moscow Art Theatre.<sup>1</sup> After World War II Eino Kalima, artistic director of the Finnish National Theatre, was known as the best interpreter of Chekhov in Northern Europe, for he was able to convey with Finnish actors, whom he considered the ideal performers of Chekhov, the specifically Russian flavour of the plays, a blend of subtlety, lyricality and reflectiveness. The contemporary Finnish theatre's image of Chekhov, however, is the result of the efforts of three generations of directors: the first arrived on the scene in the 1960s, the second came twenty years later, and the third appeared at the end of the 1990s. And the young directors, in order to express themselves and their respective eras, had to overcome the Chekhovian canon established by Kalima.

Finland's connection with the Russian treatment of Chekhov was renewed when Kama Ginkas was invited to direct in Helsinki in the years from 1988 to 1996. For the Swedish-language Lilla (Small) Theatre Ginkas directed two productions, and he also directed *The Seagull* for the Theatre Academy. For these same theatres he mounted two of his Dostoevsky productions, *Crime and Punishment* at the Lilla Theatre and *The Idiot* at the Theatre Academy, together with a production of *Macbeth* for the Helsinki City Theatre in 1987.

In 1988, his production, *The Theatre of the Watchman Nikita* opened at the Lilla Theatre. He had made this dramatization of "Ward No. 6" sometime in 1969, but for a long time, for reasons having nothing to do with him, this show was not staged in Krasnoïarsk, Leningrad, and Moscow, the cities where he had worked and had acquired celebrity as one of the brilliant directors of

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<sup>1</sup> This short essay is based on my longer article, "Chekhov v Finliandii," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo. Chekhov i mirovaia literatura*, Vol. 100, Part. 2 (Moscow, 2005), 623-660.

the younger generation. "Naturally I could not stage *The Theatre of the Watchman Nikita* at that time because 'Ward No. 6' was too controversial for the Soviet authorities," Ginkas told me in an interview.<sup>2</sup> The dramatization was done in the style of "the cruel Chekhov" characteristic of Russian theatre of the 60s. And it was precisely this tendency in the interpretation of Chekhov that Ginkas affirmed, something he substantiated in a conversation with Slavists from the University of Helsinki shortly before the premiere of his production. Many years later, Ginkas spoke about his work with Finnish actors and noted the independence and professionalism of Western—in this case, Finnish—actors.<sup>3</sup>

Here is what the Russian theatre scholar Nadezhda Tarshis, my colleague and friend, and one of the authors of the collection *Russian-Finnish Theatrical Contacts*, wrote: "The epic might of hopeless stagnation and the opposition to it by the human soul are depicted with equal force. The space for the ward of the mentally ill, designed by David Borovskii, seems monumental and so spacious that the dark powers of the watchman Nikita have more than enough room to let fly. Nikita (played by Borgar Gardarsson) is terrifying and imperturbable, like an almighty god. His direction of the theatre of cruelty is very simple: each inmate receives his share of torment for the sake of order, which costs Nikita little or no apparent effort. It's clear that the watchman knows his business. He and the former colleagues of Doctor Andrei Efimovich Ragin constitute in this production a united whole, which is not enlightened by mental activity or even any intellectual effort or human contact. They form a united natural force, that of loutishness."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For my interview, see Liisa Byckling, "Tshehov ja tunne (Chekhov and Emotions)," *Teatteri*, 7 (1988), 24-6. See also .Kama Ginkas and John Freedman. *Provoking Theater, Kama Ginkas Directs* (Hanover, 2003), 148.

<sup>3</sup> Kama Ginkas and John Freedman.. 100-104. Ginkas called Asko Sarkola, "one of the top Scandinavian actors ... Asko is an excellent actor. he picks things up immediately and does them. When an actor picks things up immediately and does them right away, you naturally begin suggesting new ideas . Asko was able to incorporate them into his acting, too. That is the moment when you realize you can do much more than you originally had thought." (103-104).

<sup>4</sup> N. Pesochinskii and N. Tarshis, "Dva chekhovskikh spektaklia," *Russko-finskie teatral'nye sviazi* ed. A. Ia. Al'tshuller (Leningrad, 1989), 142. For a selection of reviews of the production in the Finnish and Swedish press see the journal, *Teatral'naia zhizn'*, 2 (1989).

Doctor Ragin (Asko Sarkola) becomes a prisoner of Ward No 6 through his contact with others: the progressively oppressive and devastating friendship forced on him by the garrulous Mikhail Aver'ianovich (Erkki Saarela) and the profoundly wounding argument with his patient Ivan Dmitrich Gromov (Marcus Groth), whose genuine mental torment deprives him of peace by wakening his moral consciousness. The impression of the Russian critic agrees with mine, and therefore I quote more of Tarshis's review:

“The lack of ordinary comforts [*bezbytnost'*] in the hospital, the monumentality of the scenic space, the laconic graphic quality of the set by David Borovskii concur with the severe architectonics of the show's rich motific content. The doleful singing of Ivan Dmitrich and the comic patter of the annoyingly persistent sociability of Mikhail Aver'ianovich are the two rhythmic extremes of the production. The artistry of Marcus Groth in the role of Gromov is magnificent—the psychological and intellectual sharpness of the bitter, scenic outline is perceived when coupled with the unreflective solidity of the watchman Nikita and with the softness of Andrei Efimovich, a man with a responsive soul and therefore doomed. In the same regulated system of images the shallow Mikhail Aver'ianovich takes his place, though the distinctly comic rendering of this role in the generally tragic tonality of the production is not therefore taken as an end in itself. The senseless playfulness of a friend, waving to the hero for whom a tragic understanding of the world has come to light, is a specially stinging motif of the production, one of its emotional leitmotifs.”<sup>5</sup>

Two versions of the production, Swedish and Finnish—the audience at the Swedish theatre knows both languages—were mounted. Tarshis thought that in Moscow Ginkas would have devised a completely different, third version of *The Theatre of the Watchman Nikita*, with a much more direct approach to the social and psychological ambience in the hall, which is historically tied to the issues of Chekhov's story. Tarshis refers to a Moscow production at the end of the 80s where, on the small stage of Theatre of the Soviet Army *Ward No 6*, directed by Iurii Eremin, offered the example of a

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<sup>5</sup> Pesochinskii and Tarshis, 142.

dramatic action effectively gripping the audience by the force of its conflict.

In Helsinki Ginkas presented a forceful, masterly directed show with a wonderful ensemble of actors and a clearly articulated conception, "a weighty production." The acting of Marcus Groth as Gromov and Asko Sarkola as Ragin was remarkable, as all the Finnish critics noted. And the music, religious canticles composed by Iakov Iakulov, ritualistically mourned the heroes and conveyed bitter thoughts about the torments of the modern soul.

Toward the end of the 1980s a new generation of directors announced itself in Finland, responding to Chekhov without false piety and with great interest in the "extremes" of his scenic world. Directing Chekhov was the equivalent of the staff of life for these directors, those in the provinces and theatrical schools as well as those in the larger theatres. And instead of social analysis they emphasized the theatricality of Chekhov's world and offered a more emotional treatment of his characters.

In 1995 at the Lilla Theatre Ginkas presented *Life is Wonderful*, a show based on the comic stories of Chekhov and on "The Lady with a Pet Dog." Here the tragedy of love was shown in a sharp tragicomic form. The scenic designer was Sergei Barkhin, a frequent collaborator of Ginkas. "Love as a punishment, love as an ordeal—this is a very Russian theme," Ginkas said to me in an interview.<sup>6</sup> "Why is life so strangely ordered, that what is given to a person only once passes without any profit?" These words do not come from "Lady with a Pet Dog" but from "Rothschild's Fiddle," which was planned as the continuation of a Chekhov work in two parts. The second part, however, was not realized until last year, 2004, at Yale University and at the New Generation Theatre, Moscow.

The Moscow critic Roman Dolzhanskii summarizes the production roughly as follows:

Ginkas begins the performance with two fragments from a humorous piece, 'A Guide for Those Wishing to Get Married.' These vaudeville openers give the show a frivolous tone,

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<sup>6</sup> For my interview see "Kama Ginkas Lillanissa," *Teatteri*, 2 (1995), 24-25.

reminiscent of a fling at the seaside. ... A pair of clownish partners are characters representing the world surrounding the heroes. They behave affectedly, make faces, laugh, respond with banality to frank and candid confessions, smoke silently, and indifferently put up insuperable impediments. ... In a tightly fitted black suit, in a black bowler and with an umbrella in his hand, Gurov, played by Asko Sarkola, resembles Belikov, the man in the shell. He does not look at all like a hero and lover, this tall, thin man with glasses, who in passing suddenly reminds us of Chekhov. Experienced and flabby, he does not seem capable of being aroused by a sudden passion. The Estonian actress Kert Toming plays Anna Sergeevna. Some of her lines she speaks in Finnish, some in Estonian, which emphasizes the provincial roots of her character. ... Ginkas does not make up dialogue for Chekhov. The whole text of the story has been broken down into lines, and so the actors play the characters as well as narrating them. Such a dual vision, a vacillating *ostranenie*, is needed by Ginkas, because he is presenting not a personal, lyrical story but, one could say, an existential drama. Gurov and Anna Sergeevna are not given a moment of serene happiness. From the very beginning, a mysterious anxiety hovers over their relationship. ... The necessity they feel to be always together is sent them as an ordeal. ... And at the end these two figures in black stiffen, as if in a stupor; he on a bentwood chair and she behind him on the lid of a newly knocked-together coffin.<sup>7</sup>

In the spring of 1996, at the same time that the Finnish director Jotarkka Pennanen presented his intimate, reflective version of *The Seagull*, Ginkas premiered his *Seagull* in Helsinki. For this production he used the students of the Theatre Academy (the Swedish-language division). In a conversation with me, Ginkas said that the comedy in Chekhov's play was generated by the special point of view of its author. "From the side the 'tragic' seems laughable and absurd. We

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<sup>7</sup> My summary comes from R. Dolzhanskii, "Dama s sobachkoi v Khel'sinki," *Moskovskii nabliudatel'* (May 1995), 77-81. Ginkas has since staged *Lady with the Lapdog* in Moscow at the New Generation Theatre (2001) and at the American Repertory Theatre (2003). The production of *Rothschild's Fiddle*, created jointly by the New Generation Theatre and the Yale Repertory Theatre, opened in January 2004.

act in all seriousness, but even the greatest sorrow is only 'a subject for a short story' in God's book. A unique life is nothing but a sketch." A character of Chekhov is "a man who wanted." Can he really be fulfilled? Ginkas considers Chekhov the cruelest writer in the world's literature; he is "an infinitely sober person for whom, to his regret, God does not exist."

The production was put on in the Virus Theatre, an old factory on the shore of the Gulf of Finland. Ginkas and his designer Barkhin created a beautiful interior, which at the same time was an exterior scene with earth and birches. This unit set was the place of the play's action and of the interaction of man with nature. For the first time in the history of the productions of this play in Finland, "the view of a lake" was revealed to the audience; from the big window the Gulf of Finland was visible, and behind this window arose the "World's soul" of Treplev's play. Later the window was smashed, and through it Nina, with difficulty, climbed in and out of the last act.

The light, the sounds, including the singing of some of the text, and the life and natural beauty of the trees that grew towards the ceiling set off the cruelty of what was happening. Treplev lit small lights on the earthen floor as symbols of his wonderful theatre, and then burned completely the curtain in front of the window of his theatre. " Thus even the people were utterly destroyed in this symbolist production," wrote the critic Jukka Kajava. In the last act the evening darkened, and night came on the scene as in a story told by Chekhov. The conclusion of the play was unusually cruel, as in the ancient theatre. At the beginning Kostia asked, "Who am I?" But he received no answer. "This production altered the orientation of the viewers, those well-versed in the dramas of Chekhov," concluded Kajava. "Ginkas followed his thought through to the end, putting on a show about fundamental questions. The director offered neither a prescription for survival nor relief; instead he proposed a question about life's meaning—Who am I? In this newest Finnish production Chekhov became the existentialist writer who proposes philosophical questions: 'Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?'"<sup>8</sup> Although the young actors, just beginning their careers,

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<sup>8</sup> Jukka Kajava. *Helsingin sanomat* (26 February 1996). The polyphony of the production was analyzed in detail in: V. Semenovskii, "Shvedskaia spichka (*Chaika v Khel'sinki*," *Moskovskii nabliudatel'* 1-2 (1997), 67-70.

coped worthily with their difficult assignments, the production is remembered, because of its scenic beauty and poetry, as the special collaboration of director and designer.

Ginkas brought to Finnish theatregoers a new understanding of the extreme poles of all of Chekhov's works, as well as his combination of intense drama and comedy. Ginkas revealed the sharpness of the writer's psychological analysis and his tragicomic contrasts, which had been unfamiliar to us in Finland. And without doubt, especially in Lilla Theatre, he found actors who thought the way he did, artists who were spiritually close to him, and the type of intimate surroundings, without an oppressive bureaucracy, in which he was comfortable working and thinking.

After the run of *Macbeth* A. Smelianskii noted that Ginkas achieved in Helsinki the total self-expression that he failed to attain or sustain in Moscow (the reference is to the period of time when he was busier in Finland than in Russia). "Perhaps," the critic added, "in Suomi (Finland) he finds the Baltic sky of his childhood in Lithuania."<sup>9</sup> Ginkas's theatrical work, the intensity of the actors, the force of his poetic images, and the rhythmic structure of his productions of Chekhov stunned the Finnish audiences. Ginkas created the realm of a "supertheatre", real and metaphorical at the same time. Our own Finnish shows and recent Moscow productions, which have come to us on tour, have broadened the horizons of the audiences and have influenced young Finnish directors. But it was the theatre of Ginkas in Helsinki that created a whole new era and revealed to us a new Chekhov.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Chekhov, Anton. *A Life in Letters*. Ed. Rosamund Bartlett. Trans. Rosamund Bartlett and Anthony Phillips. London: Penguin Books, 2004. lxvi, 552 pp., Index, 16.00 USD (paper).

Chekhov, Anton. *"About Love" and Other Stories*. Trans. Rosamund Bartlett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. xxxiv, 211 pp., 8.95 USD (paper).

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<sup>9</sup> Anatolii M. Smelianskii, "Semeinyi portret v inter'ere," *Predlagaemye obstoiatel'stva*. (Moscow, 1999), p. 249.

Chekhov, Anton. *The Complete Short Novels*. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Alfred A. Knopf (Everyman's Library), 2004. xli, 548pp., 23.00 USD (cloth).

Reviewed by  
Mark Conliffe (Willamette University)

These anthologies came out to mark the centenary of Chekhov's death and they will be lasting markers of that anniversary and valuable resources to students of Chekhov and general readers. Each of them translates closely Chekhov's style and tone while offering a contemporary English rendering that is accurate and accessible. Moreover, the anthologies bring together Chekhov's writings into well-crafted editions that neatly emphasize major aspects of the writer and his work.

Among the 370 complete letters that make up *A Life in Letters*, many have not been translated before and others have been translated only in censored versions. More broadly, the collection presents letters of different lengths and from different times in Chekhov's life, providing a sense of his moods and feelings, impressions and ideas, priorities and whims, and epistolary style and various relationships, as well as illustrating changes in these things over time. These features alone make this collection a welcome complement to the popular editions by McVay (1994), Karlinsky and Heim (1973), and Yarmolinsky (1973).

The famous letters are here, but it is the collective impression of complete letters that creates a fuller image of Chekhov. To take one example, the collection's nine letters that Chekhov wrote from Yalta in the fall of 1898 hint at the breadth of his correspondence and reveal various features of his character. Their content ranges from everyday concerns, telling of trees he ordered, things he needs (luggage strap, shirt studs, black tie, stamps, envelopes), and the direction of his finances, to the unexpected death of his father. We read what might be considered an ordinary letter to his father together with letters in which he responds to news of his father's death and condolences from friends. We gauge Chekhov's expression of loss when he writes about his father's death and when he writes about being away from, and homesick for, Moscow. In some letters we read of his practical and thoughtful concern for his mother's and sister's wellbeing, while in others he shows comparable concern for writer friends and their work. He appears as a family man, literary mentor, and friend who is generous and gracious, reflective and instructive, and sad and peeved. In these few pages we sense transition, too. Chekhov suggests the sale of Melikhovo, the purchase of land in Yalta, and his eventual settlement there. We also receive our first, albeit quiet, mention of Olga Knipper. This sampling may seem a particularly fruitful one, but throughout the collection one welcomes Rosamund Bartlett's efforts to ensure that readers receive more than passing mention of a person, event, or aspect of Chekhov's character, and that we receive this information from Chekhov himself.

When we occasionally receive only passing mention of a person or event, the notes usually clarify their significance. A few times, though, readers might wish

for a note that would indicate to which of his works Chekhov is referring. Near the mid-way point in the 17 October 1889 letter to Suvorin, for example, Chekhov writes, "If someone offers you coffee, don't go looking for beer in it. If I present you with the ideas of the Professor, trust me and don't look for Chekhov's ideas in them, thank you kindly. There is only one notion in the entire story to which I subscribe, ..." (94-5). Many will know that Chekhov is referring to "Skuchnaia istoriia," but a note (like the helpful one offered in Karlinsky and Heim) would assist those who don't recognize the reference. The lack of a couple more notes like this one and the presence of a few typos (103, 399, 417, 428) are tiny blemishes in what remains a handsome and valuable edition.

On first reading *"About Love" and Other Stories*, one might be inclined to apply as an epigraph to it Mar'ia Vasil'evna's thought from "Na podvode" (1897) that, "Life was generally arranged in such an incomprehensible way and relationships with people were so complicated that you ended up feeling terrified, with your heart sinking, however you looked at it" (128). The quote points accurately to Chekhov's (and editor/translator Bartlett's) efforts with these stories to present "complications" that individuals see in life and ways in which they try to make order of what seems to them to be the "incomprehensible" fabric of life. More precisely, a chief goal of the collection is to present stories "from across the range of Chekhov's literary career which have a particular focus on the themes of love and loss" (xxvii). Sure enough, love is central to many of these seventeen stories (all but "Na puti" [1886], "Schast'e" [1887], and "Ryb'ia liubov'" [1892] have been anthologized quite regularly), and, because love rarely shores up Chekhov's struggling characters, it is not surprising that these stories also touch on loss and the ways that loss directs characters' actions or manifests itself in their feelings. Love and loss can spur Chekhov's characters to reassess or make sense of a situation or relationship, and in choosing stories to reveal how characters ignore or act on this prod, Bartlett provides an anthology that hangs together nicely.

Bartlett translates Chekhov's language closely, taking care, for instance, with Chekhov's word repetitions in the opening characterizations of "Na puti." We read "long" three times and "pointed" four times in the early description of Ilovaiskaia when those words correspond with *dlinnyi* and *ostryi* in the original. What should a translator do, though, in that same description when we learn that Ilovaiskaia is a young woman *s prodolgovatym belym litsom*? Bartlett renders this as "with a long white face" (11), rather than, say, with the less common "oblong" white face, and such a choice might make more significant for the English reader the narrator's early comparison of Ilovaiskaia to a "serpent" [*zmeika*] or at least the early comment on her thinness. Similarly, at the beginning of the story, we read that Likharëv has a "thick, broad nose" and "thick black brows" (8), and in the Russian he has a *tolstyĭ širokii nos* and *gustye chërnye brovi*. The choice to use "thick" in both early references to Likharëv – instead of "thick" and then "bushy" – offers not only a comment on his physiognomy but perhaps a suggestion about his character. Bartlett also renders Chekhov's sentence lengths and punctuation carefully, and this care appears clearly at the end of "Student" (1894) when in a 130-word sentence she translates the student's thoughts from Chekhov's own 94-word sentence, thus relating comparably the succession of sensory and ideational stimuli that strike the student, as well as the vastness and

eternal nature of the questions he is considering. Finally, a couple of typos caught my eye in the anthology (67, 71), but they don't detract in any way from the meaning of their passages.

In their translation of a selection of Chekhov's stories in 2000, Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky seemed to promise a translated collection of Chekhov's longer works of fiction, and in *The Complete Short Novels* they have delivered on that promise, giving us new translations of Chekhov's *povesti* "Step'" (1888), "Duèl'" (1891), "Rasskaz neizvestnogo cheloveka" (1893), "Tri goda" (1895), and "Moia zhizn'" (1896). (For a new rendering of *Drama na okhote*, see Ronald Wilks's translation, *The Shooting Party*, Penguin 2004.) The collection conveniently reveals how Chekhov's comfort level, experiments, and successes in longer prose forms developed and differed.

In their commendable and usual careful attention to word order and sentence length, Pevear and Volokhonsky have given readers a somewhat new English Chekhov that will, I think, send a few readers with Russian back to Chekhov's original to confirm features of his style. Often Pevear and Volokhonsky's careful attention provides fine results, but in some sentences it creates a bit of work (at least for this reader). Recall the following early description of Samoilenko in "Duèl'": «Когда он, грузный, величественный, со строгим выражением на лице, в своем белоснежном кителе и превосходно вычищенных сапогах, выпятив вперед грудь, на которой красовался Владимир с бантом, шел по бульвару, то в это время он очень нравился себе самому, и ему казалось, что весь мир смотрит на него с удовольствием» (*PSSP*, 7: 361). Compare the P/V version: "When, corpulent, majestic, a stern expression on his face, in his snow-white tunic and perfectly polished boots, his chest thrust out, adorned by a Vladimir with a bow, he went down the boulevard, for that time he liked himself very much, and it seemed to him that the whole world looked at him with pleasure" (125). Ironically, perhaps, at a moment when they let up on such careful translation, the meaning of a phrase can become a bit ambiguous. For instance, early in "Tri goda," as part of the description of Nina Fëdorovna's childhood, we learn that she and her brothers lived *v rodnoi kupechskoi sem'e*. Pevear and Volokhonsky tell us that the children spent their childhood and youth "in a family of merchants" (336). Hugh Aplin's version (*Anton Chekhov, Three Years*, Hesperus 2004) is clearer on this point, telling us that the children spent that time "in the merchant family into which they were born" (7). Let me add that this is an attractively produced and relatively inexpensive hardcover edition, and in it I noticed only one typo (441).

In addition to new renderings of Chekhov's writings, each anthology offers a rich collection of detailed supplementary material: an introductory essay; a chronology of Chekhov's life, which includes broader literary and historical events; a list of further reading; and explanatory notes. *A Life in Letters* includes also a list of the main sources for the collection's letters; a roster of Chekhov's seventy correspondents in the collection (full names, dates, a very brief biographical note, and in some cases a tally of letters that make up that particular correspondence); four maps that highlight where Chekhov lived and traveled in Russia and the Far East; and a comprehensive index.

Gennadii A. Shaliugin. *Chekhov: "Zhizn', kotoroi my ne znaem"...* Simferopol': Tavriia, 2004. 468 pp. ISBN 966-572-507-6. No price indicated.

Reviewed by

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Gennadii Shaliugin, director of the Chekhov home-museum in Yalta, has published a thick volume of Chekhoviana in commemoration of the centenary of Chekhov's death. *Chekhov: "Zhizn', kotoroi my ne znaem"...* begins with an article on Chekhov's first publication, and ends with a vivid discussion of his death; in between it ranges far and wide, from before the beginning to after the ending.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, "Stat'i," offers eleven pieces of Shaliugin's scholarship; most have been previously published (not always in venues easily accessible in North America), but those appear here in revised versions that take more recent scholarship into account. The second, "Publikatsii," makes available archival memoiristic material pertaining to Chekhov, his family and inheritance, and the White Dacha (introduced and annotated by Shaliugin). The third, "Dokumental'nye ocherki," offers a variety of pieces that fill in blank spaces regarding certain of Chekhov's acquaintances, tell stories pertaining to Chekhov's afterlife (e.g., fascinating material on Mikhail Bulgakov at the White Dacha), and at times overtly cross generic boundaries, casting Chekhov's biography in fictional forms. Last, it should be noted that the volume offers a fine, well reproduced collection of photographs—not the usual selection, but one that includes a number previously unpublished, from the Yalta collection, pertaining to Chekhov and his circle of family and acquaintances.

The volume's introductory article, "Dolgoe ékho talanta. Vmesto predisloviia," offers a number of sharp and useful generalizations about Chekhov's poetics, world view and character, including his "trust toward the reader" and absence of dogmatism (9), and "respect toward life in all of its manifestations" (10) and particular aesthetic and personal way of dealing with death. But Shaliugin's is not an idealized Chekhov: the volume is packed with colorful details, including material that was previously considered too sensitive for publication (some for personal, some for political considerations). And Shaliugin is not hemmed in by a scholarly style. His writing is often lyrical and elegiac, and you never quite know where a new biographical detail is going to take you—as in his speculative remarks about the design of the White Dacha in connection with Chekhov's tendency toward agoraphobia (366).

There is a lot of material here that might save the western Chekhov scholar from repeating ancient truisms about Chekhov that are belied by biographical fact. I certainly wish I had been able to avail myself of this book last year before proceeding to press on Chekhov. A piece on Chekhov's relationship with Suvorin ("Chekhov skhodit s uma': grani polemiki A. Chekhova i A. Suvorina") innovatively shifts the discussion of Chekhov's distancing from Suvorin away from the conventional political ground and onto aesthetic bases. An article whose title suggests it will be just an excavation of Pushkin subtexts in "Black Monk" becomes a wide-ranging piece on Chekhov's autobiographism, with what struck me as deeply insightful remarks on Chekhov's anticipation of

death (“Menia vlechët nevedomaia sila’. Pushkinskie motivy v ‘Chërnom monakhe’ Chekhova”). In “Son’ Konstantina Trepleva. Neizvestnye istochniki p’esy ‘Chaiki’” we find, among other convincing interpretive assertions, that Konstantin Treplev’s play in *Seagull* has roots in the “astronomical fantasies” of Camille Flammarion. There is a helpful discussion of Chekhov’s practice and continuing identity as a physician, which includes characterization of marginalia on Chekhov medical books and the fellow doctors and sufferers of TB with whom he socialized in Yalta. This piece, “Meditinskii molotochek na stole,” veers into a discussion of some of the physicians who made pilgrimages to the White Dacha after Chekhov was long dead, including Bulgakov; it ends with a eulogy for a certain Ukrainian physician of Shaliugin’s acquaintance, Iu. Enenko, whose writings on Chekhov are cited at length in the original Ukrainian. This is but one instance of a kind of freedom of movement at play in this volume which I found quite refreshing. Another piece, “Mnogouvazhaemyi kollega...’ (lechashchii vrach Chekhova—doktor I. N. Al’tshuller,” tells the story of what became of Chekhov’s last Yalta doctor after Chekhov departed the scene.

In “Mnogoe ia videl i mnogoe perezhil...’ (Chekhov puteshestvennik)” Shaliugin credits his colleagues at the Yalta museum with discovering the source of Solënyi in *Three Sisters* in the boorish Lt. Shmidt, in whose company Chekhov traveled for a month-and-a-half en route to Sakhalin; he fills in the facts, in part through a fictional sketch portraying the moment Chekhov “discovered” his character via a recollection of Shmidt (295-96).

Utterly riveting are the recollections of Chekhov’s sister Mariia Pavlovna, told by his nephew Sergei Mikhailovich, on the bases of conversations they had in the late 1940s, when Mariia Pavlovna was working on her will. There’s much family history in “Mariia Pavlovna vspominaet”; and there’s also the story of the White Dacha under siege by bandits in the Civil War period and the Bolshevik seizure of the possessions Maria Pavlovna was keeping in a safety deposit box in Moscow (see also “Seif No. 315. Iz istorii chekhovskogo nasledia”)—some of those items were lost forever, some later were falsely characterized as having been donated to the state. There are also facts here that don’t quite correspond to the saintly Chekhov image. I was struck by the anecdote that has Chekhov humiliating his sister before her female friends—who would ostensibly frequent the Chekhov apartment to visit her, when their real interest was the Chekhov brothers—by imperiously commanding her to “put on the samovar,” in a manner reminiscent of the ending of the story “Aniuta” (223). And then there is the episode in which Pavel Egorovich informs the Chekhovs’ landlord that his wife is having an affair with his son Aleksandr, after which Aleksandr compels his father to apologize to the deceived husband (215). And did you know that Chekhov never brushed his teeth until Ol’ga Knipper taught him to? (235); or that Chekhov’s mother apparently suffered from some sort of obsessive-compulsive disorder, which would render her unable to continue eating if somebody’s hand passed over her dishes? (213).

This last material comes from Chekhov’s nephew, but throughout the volume Shaliugin too shows quite an eye for the colorful anecdote, the striking detail. Perhaps this is because Shaliugin is a writer as well as a scholar; perhaps inhabiting Chekhov’s personal space, as Shaliugin does in his daily work, and dealing with the manifold lovers of Chekhov who come to Yalta in pilgrimage,

helps keep Chekhov particularly alive for him. So it seems when reading the pieces in this volume.

Peta Tait, *Performing Emotions: Gender, Bodies, Spaces in Chekhov's Drama and Stanislavski's Theatre*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002. 207pp.

Reviewed by  
Rose Whyman (University of Birmingham)

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Peta Tait's *Performing Emotions: Gender, Bodies, Spaces in Chekhov's Drama and Stanislavski's Theatre* is a feminist analysis of the plays written by Anton Chekhov and directed by Konstantin Stanislavski, with particular reference to the acting of Olga Knipper, a member of the Moscow Art Theatre and Chekhov's wife. The central thesis of the book is that the emotions of the characters in Chekhov's main plays and the performances by Stanislavski's actors of these emotions were socially defined, in accordance with cultural and gender structures of the epoch in which the plays were produced. Tait asserts that both the notion of Chekhovian universality (i.e., that Chekhov's work encapsulates truths of human behaviour, to which many commentators on Chekhov subscribe) and Stanislavski's emphasis on the authenticity of emotional expression in acting obscure the extent to which the characters in the productions express emotions which are socially constructed and, in particular, gendered.

In this respect, the book makes a new and very valuable contribution to work on Chekhov and Stanislavski, and its examination of the work of Knipper, a Russian actress at the turn of the twentieth century, adds to a field of inquiry largely neglected until the recent work of Catherine Schuler and others on Russian actresses, in both Russia and the West. In addition, the book treats the problem of emotion and acting in a way that extends its scope far beyond that of theatre of the period under discussion. As Tait points out, studies on emotion in theatre rarely draw from disciplines such as psychology, and, conversely, other disciplines that deal with emotion make scant reference to theatre. The book contains an impressive bibliography of works on Chekhov, Stanislavski, Russian theatre, and postmodernism and theatre. More generally, Tait also draws from critical theory, philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences. Though her reading is all in translation, Tait generally avoids pitfalls that can result from reliance on the early translations and interpretations of Stanislavski's work in particular, the problems which have been pointed out by writers such as Sharon Carnicke.

A definition of emotion is outside the scope of the book. Rather, Tait explores the way the characters in the plays define themselves in terms of their emotions and the emotional truth (as he saw it) that Stanislavski required from his actors. As emotions are embodied and therefore inseparable from issues of self and identity, her discussion engages a wide range of writers on science and the arts. In this way, the book progresses from a discussion of representations of

emotions in the texts (with particular attention to femininity) to an interrogation of the precepts of a system of theatre production and an acting theory where ideas of nature, logic, and truth were linked with emotion and issues of social construction were neglected. Tait exposes the circularity of Stanislavski's psychologism, where assumed inner emotions of outer bodies were staged in a way that suggested interiority, reiterated dominant ideas about femininity, and presented a socially logical appearance (that is, where true emotions were socially appropriate ones). Tait uses the work of Merleau-Ponty to challenge Stanislavski's assumptions in an interesting way.

This new approach affords many valuable insights into Chekhov's main plays. For example, Tait's examination of intertextuality and self-dramatization in *The Seagull*, where the characters, in their searches for love and fulfilment, frequently relate their own emotional experiences to literature, is particularly enlightening. Her examination of *Three Sisters* contrasts the emotional self-expression of the women, their aspirations about love and work, and their rejection of conformity to domestic roles with male emotional certainties and assertions of control. Themes of spaces and their emotional connotations recur: for example, the Prozorovs' house and its usurpation by Natasha in *Three Sisters*, and, in *The Cherry Orchard*, the relationship of Ranevskaiia and other characters to the estate.

Occasionally, Tait's references to other works are so brief as to be obscure. For example, the reference to David Jones's statement the Stanislavski's truth was derived from nineteenth-century thought about verisimilitude necessitates referring to the source for clarity. And, of course, she enters into areas that are open to debate. In the section on Stanislavski's actor training, Tait makes use of Joseph Roach's important work *The Player's Passion*, including its claim that Stanislavski's system cannot be comprehended without Pavlov's science. Many writers have questioned the extent to which Soviet materialism dictated a line between Pavlov and Stanislavskii's theories, and Tait's argument here cannot be upheld on close examination. Overall, however, this re-examination of Stanislavski and Chekhov explores the important area of the cultural representation of emotion within a particular theatre context and should be instrumental in the development of a "politics of emotions in theatre practice" (165).

Emma A. Polotskaia, "*Vishnëvyi sad*": *Zhizn' vo vremeni*. Moscow,: Nauka, 2003.  
381 pp. ISBN 5-02-022752-8. No price indicated.

Reviewed by Ralph Lindheim (University of Toronto)

*The Cherry Orchard: A Life in Time* is a sweeping book by the scholar and critic, Emma A. Polotskaia who condenses in it the knowledge and experience of a lifetime. She begins by examining the major changes Chekhov made in his play in the short time between the submission of the script to the Moscow Art Theatre and the publication date, only months before his death. Then she considers the various critical responses to the play as well as many of the major productions of it in the rest of the twentieth century. Much of this information is known, at least

to English readers familiar with the writings of Harvey Pitcher, Laurence Senelick, Donald Rayfield, and others, but Polotskaia offers additional insights into the evolution of the play as well as its relationship with other plays and stories by Chekhov. She outdoes her predecessors in two major sections devoted to the explorations of the situation, themes, and motifs in *The Cherry Orchard* by other Russian writers—Blok, Bunin, Bulgakov, and Petrushevskiaia—and by major European and American playwrights of the twentieth century—George Bernard Shaw, Tennessee Williams, and Samuel Beckett. In the section on the impact of Chekhov on modern drama—Williams is noted to have said, when asked to list three writers who influenced him, "Chekhov, Chekhov, Chekhov!"—Polotskaia is careful not just to distinguish the ways in which Chekhov's play is reflected in the later plays, but also to emphasize significant differences in the treatment of similar materials. She does not indiscriminately speak of Chekhov as our contemporary for she knows that Chekhov's dramaturgy [lacks] does not share the loquacious paradoxicality of Shaw, the melodramatic intensity of Williams, and the devastating absurdist vision of Beckett.

In reviewing the reception of the play, Polotskaia chronicles the changes in attitude toward a play that she feels summed up Chekhov's past as well as looked forward to innovations in the future, had the writer lived. One of the major problems that so early blinkered—and continued to obstruct—the vision of actors, director, critics, and audiences alike was the perception that the play ran, to quote Dorothy Parker about a particularly mediocre performer, "the gamut of A to B." For too long a time, only the social content of *Cherry Orchard* was highlighted, and swords were crossed over the proper response, positive or negative, elegaic or sarcastic, to the gentry characters who are experiencing the decline and passing of their significance and to those forces that were about to replace them. Unfortunately the play was seen simplistically as a contest or struggle between social groups or generations, whose failure or success were lauded or dismissed in the light of preconceived attitudes and ideologies. Yet slowly, as the twentieth century reached its midpoint, the critical understanding of Chekhov widened, and new productions both abroad and in Russia successfully challenged the Moscow Art Theatre's interpretation of Chekhov. Polotskaia insists, and rightly so, on the seminal insights of critics such as Skaftymov, who deserves to be much better known—and not just for his Chekhov criticism—and on the masterful theatrical embodiments of Chekhov's vision by both foreign directors, such as Jean-Louis Barrault, Giorgio Strehler and Peter Brooks, and by Russian directors, such as Anatolii Efros and L. Kheifets, who directed the play for television. All the best interpreters of Chekhov in the second half of the twentieth century were attuned to the singular structure of the play, including the mixture of genres it embodied, its scenic beauty and lyricity, the humanity of its characters, and the ruminations—some dark and foreboding, others bright and welcoming—about the process of time, in which all the characters are imprisoned, and about the changes that are inexorably and inevitably suffered.

The last part of the book, in addition to a short section on the recent Cacoyannis film of *The Cherry Orchard* and other films on similar themes and a section on the French traits of Ranevskiaia—a section that swerves dangerously close to racial stereotyping—is devoted to a handful of roles from the play, both major and secondary, and to the actors associated with these parts. Polotskaia

notes how they performed their roles, mining their potential as vibrant stage figures, and how they sharpened the awareness of audiences to the complexity of the characters and to the depth and breadth of the play's vision. Despite Chekhov's intention to build up Lopakhin as the most important character in the play, the role of Ranevskaiia, from the play's premiere to current productions, became the focal point of any production, the character audiences come to see, and the part that most female actors want. Olga Knipper's playing of Ranevskaiia is reviewed at length, and the description of what she did with the role, including the movement of her hands, illuminated the character's attractive features together with her less flattering traits, the character's strengths as well as weaknesses. But above all, it was Knipper's grace and charismatic charm that made her interpretation of the role canonic, a high achievement that many fine, later interpreters of the role—Madeleine Renaud, Valentina Cortese, Natacha Parry, Alla Demidova—strived to equal. Lopakhin, too, has had great interpreters, and the play as a whole gains when, as in the Efros version, the actor playing him, Vladimir Vysotskii, is as strong and arresting a figure as Ranevskaiia. Gaev and Trofimov are not, oddly enough, studied at length, though Polotskaia had expressed her admiration for Innokentii Smoktunovskii's profound interpretation of Gaev in the Kheifets television production and seemed to suggest that only a more gentle but satirical approach to the "eternal student" is acceptable for current productions. Finally, some of the smaller roles, Firs, Epikhodov and Sharlotta, are reviewed. Some attempts to make more of these men than Chekhov perhaps intended or, at least, finally decided reveal the danger of disturbing the rather delicate balance and carefully designed interrelationship between major and minor roles. But Sharlotta is an oddly impressive figure, who only gains from a strong, well conceived and realized reading that emphasizes what other characters in the play do not exhibit, an enigmatic strangeness and otherness.

One could wish that other productions of *The Cherry Orchard* were celebrated in the book, namely, the famous Tyrone Guthrie Old Vic production with Charles Laughton as Lopakhin, and the 1964 John Hirsch production at the Stratford Festival, with the luminous Kate Reid as Ranevskaiia. But more significant than descriptions of individual productions is Polotskaia's awareness of how important and essential this particular play is to all who act in it, direct it, or intently watch and respond to it. Not only is the play revived at critical times of transition in the development of a society, but it also is performed to showcase the emergence of new talent, to display a company at the height of its creative power, and to mark the conclusion of a career in the theatre. And the future will see many more milestones, personal, social, cultural, marked by performances of this marvelous play.

## News

### Conference in Russia

Professor Anatolii S. Sobennikov of the Faculty of Philology and Journalism of Irkutsk State University announces an international conference on the philosophy of A. P. Chekhov to be held at the Chaika tourist centre on Lake Baikal. from 28 June 2005 to 2 July 2005. Papers on the following topics will be offered:

- The philosophical context
- The ontology of space and time
- Axiological questions relating to art
- Gnoseological issues
- The religious context
- Anthropological issues relating to art

Those interested in attending and participating should contact Prof. Sobennikov as soon as possible at [soben@slovo.isu.ru](mailto:soben@slovo.isu.ru) or at the following address:

Иркутский государственный университет  
Факультет филологии и журналистики  
664003 г. Иркутск ул. Карла Маркса 1

### **Panels at AATSEEL .**

There will be two Chekhov panels at this year's conference in Washington, D.C. The first sponsored by the NACS will be chaired by Robert Louis Jackson (Yale University), and the speakers are: Radislav Lapushin (University of Chicago), "The Poetry of Prose: The Motif of Clouds in Chekhov's "Krasavitsy"; Yanina Arnold (University of South Carolina), "Space and Self in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*"; and Carol Flath (Duke University), "How Is More Better?: Chekhov's Letters in English Translations." The panel discussant is Michael Finke (Washington University in St. Louis).

The second panel, under the general heading, Chekhov's Art in Prose and Drama, will feature four speakers: Nikita Nankov (Indiana University), "From Husband to Lover to Husband to Lover to Husband: Chekhov's Story 'Volodia bol'shoi I Volodia malen'kii' and Unlimited Semiosis"; Marjorie Berger (Independent Scholar), "'The Student' and the Reader"; Vera Zubarev (University of Pennsylvania), "*Three Sisters*: Comedy or Drama? The Mystery of the Subtitle"; and Tatiana Alenkina (Columbia University), "Translating the Subtext: Paul Schmidt's 1997 Version of Chekhov's *The Seagull*."

### **Proposed Constitution for the North American Chekhov Society**

#### **I. Legal Status & Headquarters**

1. The name of the organization shall be: The North American Chekhov Society, aka NACS.
2. The Secretariat of NACS, including an information and documentation center, shall be located at the home/office of the Executive Secretary.

#### **II. The purpose of NACS is:**

1. To promote appreciation for the works of Anton Chekhov
2. To provide a forum for North American Chekhov scholars.

3. To promote the exchange of information, knowledge and research among Chekhov scholars worldwide, and to foster cooperation and good relations among all interested parties.
4. To organize panels and conferences to discuss research on the life and works of A.P. Chekhov, including an annual panel at the December conference of AATSEEL.
5. To provide visiting scholars the opportunity to meet with colleagues.

### III. Membership

1. All academics, graduate students, independent and affiliated scholars, theater professionals and amateurs, writers, and others engaged in research and/or educational/cultural activities involving the life and works of A.P. Chekhov may join NACS
2. NACS shall require annual membership fees. The amount shall be determined by the Executive Secretary in consultation with the Executive Committee, and shall be due by Chekhov's birthday --old or new style, January 16 or January 28--every calendar year. . The membership fee shall include subscription to the Bulletin of NACS. Membership fees are used to make available information about A.P. Chekhov and NACS and to promote conferences and symposia on the works of Chekhov.

### IV. Official Bodies of the North American Chekhov Society

1. The official bodies of the North American Chekhov Society are the General Assembly and Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee shall consist of five (5) members, including an Executive Secretary, who will serve three-year terms. Members shall be chosen at the annual meeting by a call for nominations, followed by a majority vote of members present.
3. The General Assembly and Executive Committee shall meet annually at the December meeting of AATSEEL.
4. All offices of NACS are unpaid.

### V. Finances

The budget shall consist of membership fees, conference dues, subsidies received from any source and from income, if any, from the sale of NACS publications.

### VI. Amendments to the Constitution

Amendments to the constitution must be approved by 2/3rds of the membership, who will be informed of proposed changes and asked to vote on them either by regular mail or by e-mail.

**The NACS Executive Committee (Inna Caron, Julie de Sherbinin, Carol Flath, Jerry Katsell, Ralph Lindheim, and Cathy Popkin) has drafted the above constitution and welcomes comments from the membership. Please send your comments, objections and suggestions to me: [ralph.lindheim@utoronto.ca](mailto:ralph.lindheim@utoronto.ca) or Ralph Lindheim / Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures / University of Toronto / 121 St. Joseph St. / Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J4. The additions or revisions accepted by**

**the Executive Committee will be appended to the document, on which the membership will then vote at the December AATSEEL meeting.**