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Editor's Note

This issue opens with three tributes to Aleksandr Pavlovich Chudakov, the great Chekhov scholar and critic who died last October. The first is by Professor Robert Louis Jackson, the second by a young poet and critic, Radislav Lapushin, and the last by Emma Polotskaia, one of the most eminent and respected of Russian Chekhov specialists. Their commemorations are followed by two essays, one short and pointed and the other longer and more reflective, by retired professors, one of Russian and the other of English. Nathan Rosen speaks for the defenders of the hero of Chekhov's "Darling" by focusing our attention tellingly on the ending of the story, and James McConkey, in an essay that first appeared last August in *The American Scholar*, meditates on the unquenchable desire for a "happiness and freedom obviously beyond attainment" on the part of so many of Chekhov's characters—and of their author and readers as well—that contributes to moral balance and sanity, even in bleak, demoralizing times. Two reviews of important new books are also included in this number, as well as a brief Chekhov bibliography of some interesting books and articles that have appeared in the last little while, a few of which I failed to note in earlier listings. The issue concludes with the minutes of last December's meeting of the NACS, and with a word about NASC dues, which are now due and should be sent to me, Ralph Lindheim / Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures / University of Toronto / 121 St. Joseph St. / Toronto, Ontario M5S 1J4.

Remembering Alexander Chudakov

Robert Louis Jackson

I did not know Alexander Chudakov intimately, though I talked with him from time to time over the years; what I knew well was largely what I felt about him: his always bear-like hug and affectionate wag of head and his smile in greeting; his lumbering bigness and strength, and the presence at the same time of a gentle spirit; his non-present presence at the first meeting of the International Chekhov Society (later NACS) at Yale twenty-five years ago (I earned the fury of the Moscow establishment for insisting, vainly, on Chudakov's inclusion in the Soviet delegation that wouldn't come without his staying home—so it didn't come); his love of plunging in the cold waters off Sakhalin, or anywhere in the fiercest winter; his direct, earnest, unaffected relation to his work; his passion for Chekhov; his child-like rush with Sergei Bocharov to drink a drop of water of the Mediterranean nearly a year or so ago when we met at a Chekhov conference in Genoa and visited coastal Liguria, the Cinque Terre; his markedly mixed feelings about contemporary Russia; his look and words of wonderment, wagging his head, after hearing my talk on *The Cherry Orchard* at the Moscow Art Theater school in Moscow last April: "Do you really lecture so closely to the text? "; his general reflections on death and the death of his grandfather in the last chapter ("*I vse oni umerli*") of his nostalgic, semi-fictional autobiography *Lozhitsia mgla na starye stupeni* (the "untimely deaths" of

Mozart and Pushkin will always stand in the way of Anton's complete "reconciliation" with God); and the inscription to Leslie and me when he gave us *Lozhitsia mgla* . . . "s vsegdashnei liubov'iu." And the slightly Chekhovian note of his grandfather: "Dusha moia budet smotret' na vas ottuda, a vy, kogo ia liubil, budete pit' chai na nashei verande . . . U vas budet drugaia zhizn', zhizn' bez menia; ia budu gliadet' i dumat': pomnite li vy menia, samye dorogie moi? . . ."

And then—the last shall be first and the first shall be last—Chudakov's great work on Chekhov, from which I never came away without learning something important: work that was born into a congealed environment, work that forced a new independent way of looking at Chekhov on an elite establishment that—when it was in a good mood—obstructed and sought to nullify anything that was creative or different, anybody that had the audacity to place literature above ideology, to speak without cliché, to be direct and honest, that is, deviant. Chekhov scholarship, Russian culture, all of us owe a great debt to Alexander Chudakov: not only for a man who wrote splendid writings, but also for a person who had the courage of his convictions.

On the back cover of *Lozhitsia mgla na starye stupeni* there is a photograph of Alexander Chudakov: his back is to a window, his body framed by the window's black and white geometry; he holds in his hands a sizable book, and is looking down at it. The expression on his face is austere, with a blend of impatience and patience, as of one who is engaged, but also skeptical; the look of a man, finally, who has made his way across a lonely stretch of Russian history, and understood it . . . and withstood it.

Alexander Chudakov gave much, loved, and was loved. *Requiescat in pace.*

In Memory of Aleksandr Chudakov

Radislav Lapushin

"There is only one dogmatic element in Chekhov—his censure of anything dogmatic. No static idea, an idea that does not allow for revision, can be true. Even the most luminous and beautiful idea, in its origin, is transformed, upon being developed to its ultimate conclusion and being perceived as an absolute, into its opposite." I remember when I read the preceding lines from the last chapter of *Chekhov's Poetics* at the start of the 1980s in the narrow corridors of the Faculty of Journalism at the Belorussian State University, where I was a student in an atmosphere that neither contemplated nor forgave any kind of "revision." How I loved this last and most disheveled chapter of his book with its inner freedom and daring transitions, so indifferent to conventional academic discourse, from literature to "the fate of living nature."

Later, when I was writing a dissertation on Chekhov and began to go to Chekhov conferences, to my delight was added fear. A phrase from his second book, "an in-depth survey of Chekhov criticism from 1883 to 1904 launched by the author . . .," aroused trembling. It seemed to me that upon meeting this critic he would, without fail, pin me down as Shebaldin nails the hero of "The Teacher of Literature": "What, you haven't read the criticism of Chekhov in his lifetime!" But there was nothing overwhelming about him. There was no pedantry in one who had filled up thousands of library card files . . .

Yalta with its flowers on bare branches, with the sudden arrival of spring, with the oppressive heaviness of fur coats left behind in the hotel room, with trips into the mountains, evening gatherings on the balcony open to the starry sky, when one doesn't seem to notice how the new day dawns, and the conversations have already flowed into everyone singing, and Chudakov, one of the leading soloists in this choir, is sure at a one moment to strike up the song "Po dikim stepiam Zabaikal'ia." Then Melikhovo, Taganrog, Baikal, and, for a number of times, Yalta—this is the route of the conferences devoted to Chekhov, which are unforgettable to all those who participated in them.

We shared a hotel room several times. In the mornings, when I had difficulty tearing my head from the pillow, he was already washing himself with cold water in the sink. One had to hurry so as to bathe in the sea before the beginning of the conference. He explained why it is so important to take a cold shower in the morning, and stand for a long time under the cold water. He was convinced that in general there is no such thing as water that is too cold, water that is unsuitable for bathing (bathing in any weather was, as it were, his visiting card). One felt the same when at his dacha he adroitly dealt with firewood, while you stood aside, not knowing what to do with your useless hands. No, you felt you would never be able to manage in his way, with his kind of rhythm, efficiency, and ardor.

And then with simple-hearted bewilderment he told of two young people who, leaving a train, carried one suitcase together. Laughing, I admitted that I do that often. He was amazed. For him, it seemed, there was no difficulty that he could not shoulder on his own. Did he know, generally speaking, laziness, apathy, depression? You couldn't tell him that you were tired; he wouldn't understand.

But at the same time . . . He could somehow lose his way easily and unexpectedly, wander off in the wrong direction. He seemed at times too large for this world, which was unsuitable for a man of his height and would threaten him everywhere with its sharp corners and blunt objects. From this, perhaps, stemmed his heightened interest in the material world and his desire for man and the world surrounding him to be in harmony with each other. Several times he repeated that I had "pleased" him (this was his word for it) with a simple, uncomplicated present for his birthday: a travel set with a variety of diverse, small things, each of which—and this was probably the charm of the gift—was provided with its small case, cover, tiny bottle, or separate compartment.

An intense examination of small details was accompanied by the breadth of his vision. At a conference of younger scholars working on Chekhov, I gave a paper on one of the stories. He told me that he liked it and added immediately, as if apologizing, "But Chekhov has still many other stories." It was important for him to account for each of the individual stories so as to frame a general perspective on the whole of this writer, to see the writer in relation to the general flow of a vibrant literary current including both major and minor titles.

In no one else have I met such an obstinate refusal to accept death, such a sharp and categorical discord with it. He spoke of how hard it was to read memoirs: the thought that the people, about whom he was writing, were no longer alive was unbearable. Just as tormenting, according to him, was the last chapter of a novel about the death of a grandfather. And in his motivation behind the vast project to cover the bibliography of the criticism of Chekhov in the author's lifetime, one senses a very personal intention: to wrest from oblivion tens, hundreds of names buried in newspaper files, to win them back from death.

I first heard about his novel at the Baikal conference, so inimitably organized by Tol'ia Sobennikov in 1997, I believe. Tents on the steep banks, papers given around a campfire, on which food was prepared . . . "And always the feeling that one should sit down and write a ballad" ("*I vseгда tut bylo nastroyenie, chto xot' sadis' i balladu pishi*")—I remember how Chudakov, looking at the water, quoted these words from "The Black Monk" (he knew by heart not only a huge number of verses but also long, detailed prose passages). I also remember the bathhouse from which we jumped into the icy (by my standards) water of Lake Baikal. For some reason I was in the water in Chudakov's slippers, one of which slipped off my foot (the slippers were different in size). I kept diving in unsuccessful attempts to retrieve it, feeling that I could no longer bear the cold, and suddenly there it was, the slipper was floating alongside me. And in the evening another bonfire, and when one threw back one's head, one saw the stars and the shadows of the pines covering the earth with their heavy wings. And there were conversations about literature, legendary scholars, the structure of the universe, enigmas, and the inexhaustible possibilities of the human brain.

And here, while floating on a boat, he took me aside and read several chapters from his novel. The boundlessness of the space around us seemed a projection of his memory, bringing to the surface from the depths of so many years, in such unbelievable detail, a whole unexplored continent of Russian life. The novel continued to grow; new chapters were read at later meetings in Moscow or were sent from Korea, where he taught, to America, where I moved. But the book brings back in my mind impressions of Baikal and the feeling of early morning there . . .

In later years we saw each other less often, for geographical reasons. Whenever I managed to reach him, he had just returned from somewhere or was about to embark on a journey again. And it was clear that it would continue like this for a very long time...

For me he was my senior, a revered man to be addressed by first name and patronymic and always with the formal "you." But at one and the same time he was unattainably young, audacious, and fearless. His goals—an exhaustive study of the criticism of Chekhov in the writer's lifetime, an in-depth commentary to *Evgenii Onegin*—were like the thoughts of a swimmer who swam away from the bank of a river early in the morning. How far it was to the opposite shore, almost indistinguishable in the morning mist, was of no consequence to him. He joyfully realized his strength and his destiny not just to dive, plunge in, and drift but, having pushed off from one shore, to reach the other . . . "Satisfied and content," "at rest," "in repose"—Chudakov never was like this.

And never will be.

**In Memory of Aleksandr Pavlovich Chudakov
(February 2, 1938 - October 3, 2005)**

Emma Polotskaia

Work on the *Complete Collection of Chekhov's Works and Letters* brought me together with Aleksandr Pavlovich Chudakov, for both of us joined the Chekhov group in the Institute of World Literature in the summer of 1964.

But, even earlier, I had received from him his first printed gift, an account of the Taganrog conference of 1962. In his article he mentioned his own paper on "The Grasshopper," which examined the story on two levels: on the lower level of narrative and the higher level of structure and thematics. He concluded that such a multi-leveled approach "opens the possibility for an

objective and complete description." Though a Chekhov scholar just at the beginning of his career, he defined in this way his unique approach to the writings of this author. And thus began his participation in the collective labor devoted to the publication of the Chekhov project, a project which lasted until 1983, when the last volume of the *Complete Works and Letters* appeared. In those years Chekhov was for us what he would become, much later, for the whole world.

From the very first meeting of our group, the manner of Aleksandr Pavlovich was fixed in my memory: the calm expression of his thoughts, with the gentle smile that was his for the rest of his life, but also his self-confidence and the frank statement of his critical response to the views of his interlocutor, if there were grounds for opposition. And then his true cultural intelligence and sensitivity. A student of the academician, V. V. Vinogradov, he impressed us with the breadth of his reading and knowledge from the day he appeared at the Institute.

In the first year of our group's working sessions we agreed to meet once a year in each member's home, and we called this gathering "Anton's Day." The first was held in the Chudakovs' apartment. Aleksandr Pavlovich and his wife, Marietta Omarovna, were very hospitable. And he, with special pride, showed us his large card file, in which he had made room for every work of Chekhov, beginning with "Agaf'ia." This card file moved together with them to all their other apartments.

The rest of our "Anton Days" do not stick in my memory, except for one in the Slavianskii Bazar Hotel on Nikolskaia Street, where Nemirovich-Danchenko decided with Stanislavsky to form the Moscow Art Theatre.

At our working sessions we often argued, particularly about the "indecent words" in Chekhov's letters, which the Academy's authorities demanded be replaced with ellipses in brackets. The position of N. I. Gitovich, the author of the well-known book *A Chronicle of Chekhov's Life and Art*, who recommended the restoration of all the cuts made in previous editions of the letters, was supported only by Aleksandr Pavlovich, N. A. Roskina and L. M. Dolotova—the last two, unfortunately, died too soon. In truth, there was no detailed and serious discussion of the restorations proposed by Gitovich, and I, for example, did not even know of the cuts, which Aleksandr Pavlovich published much later in an article entitled "'Indecent Words' and the Image of a Classic Writer. Concerning Cuts in the Editions of Chekhov's Letters." This article appeared in *Literary Review* (11:1991, 54-56), in an issue devoted to "the erotic tradition in Russian literature." As was apparent from the article, the censored remarks were not only witty but also very substantial, in some cases reflecting the writer's views, including his thoughts on aesthetics. I'll give one example. A fragment from a letter to I. L. Leont'ev-Shcheglov from Dec. 20, 1888, which did not appear in earlier collections but did, after much discussion, appear in our edition: "Why do you avoid talking about Sobolev lane [Chudakov points out that Chekhov refers here to a brothel district in Moscow—E.P.] I am fond of those who are there often, though I am there just as rarely as you are. One shouldn't be squeamish about life, no matter what it's like." And Aleksandr Pavlovich remarks sarcastically about those who censored these words from the *Complete Works*, "It is, of course, no concern that in the last example the writer is expressing also his artistic credo."

The examples that Aleksandr Pavlovich provided make us aware that any cuts in a text by Chekhov damages the understanding of this writer not just by specialists but also by ordinary readers who attempt to appreciate Chekhov's humor. The authorities nonetheless insisted on many cuts. When we had already put out two volumes of letters, we received the manuscript of Ronald Hingley's article "Chekhov Censored" from his *A New Life of Anton Chekhov*, which was to appear in the spring of 1976. He proposed publishing "material so long hushed up, which, it is difficult for us to say, may be trivial or significant biographically but about which it should be up to the many readers of Chekhov to come to their own opinions." [The preceding quotation comes from a translation of the Hingley article in manuscript form by an unknown translator. - E.P.] I don't

remember if this manuscript reached the authorities or not, but it would have had no effect whatsoever on the publication of the letters.

Aleksandr Pavlovich's own work on the publication of the *Complete Works* began with the preparation of the stories written in 1883 for the set's second volume, but for a while he worked jointly with the director of the group, L. D. Opul'skaia. She, in collaboration with him, concluded her participation in the project by preparing for publication the story "The Fiancée." It was, perhaps, the most definitive textological work in the *Complete Works* because Chekhov did not manage to destroy, as he so often did, the manuscripts of this his last story. As for the second volume, everything was clearly arranged: Aleksandr Pavlovich prepared the detailed commentaries to these early stories, and L. D. Opul'skaia prepared their texts. She valued him as a researcher and shared her experience with him.

Detailed research always preceded his commentaries. So that long before the preparation of "The Grasshopper" for the eighth volume he, in addition to a paper in Taganrog, had written a magnificent article about this story under the title "Poetics and Prototypes" for the first (1974) of a series of collected essays, all titled *In Chekhov's Creative Laboratory*. One of the most thorough commentaries on Chekhov's prose was prepared by him for the story "Ward No. 6" for the same eighth volume of the *Complete Works*. On Chekhov's drama he touched only in volume 13, where he contributed substantially to the commentary on *The Sea Gull*. But one cannot say that he was not much interested in the plays. Beginning with his book *Chekhov's Poetics*, he included the plays in his reflections on the writer's prose and in 1999 published the article "Chekhov's Dramaturgy in Parody's Crooked Mirror." And his last article on Chekhov, "The Second Cue," is also about drama. It was read as a paper at the Third International Chekhov Symposium in Badenweiler in October, 2004, which was devoted to Chekhov the dramatist, but it has not yet appeared in print.

As a commentator, Aleksandr Pavlovich brilliantly displayed his talents in his work on the last, the eighteenth, volume of the *Complete Works*. In the thorough introductory article to the volume's notes the entire creative evolution of Chekhov was captured, beginning with the writer's gymnasium writings and ending with the editorial work of his last years.

Preparing the humorous tale "Half-Baked Nonsense" was the only time I collaborated with him. And as I now recall, I was obliged to establish the text of the story, and Aleksandr Pavlovich compiled the detailed commentary, correcting the traditional mistake in dating the letter of Chekhov to M. V. Kisel'eva, which accompanied the text of the story dedicated to her children. The brilliance of Chekhov the humorist and the precise commentary mark this part as one of the highlights of the volume.

Aleksandr Pavlovich was also actively involved in the preparation of the sections marked "Dubia" and "Editorial Work" in this final volume of the set. Among texts written by others and corrected by Chekhov, "The Quarrel" by A. K. Gol'debaev (A. Semënov) was published for the first time. Noting the general feature of Chekhov's markings in manuscripts written by others—that is, that he "did not subordinate the style of the other writer to his own manner of writing"—Aleksandr Pavlovich concluded this section with the thought that, thanks to Chekhov's editorial assistance, "The Quarrel" turned out to be Gol'debaev's best work.

In the critical literature about Chekhov Aleksandr Pavlovich's books occupy one of the top shelves in significance and in reputation. In *Chekhov's Poetics*, written even before the publication of any of the volumes in the *Complete Works*, he was the first in our time to note that Chekhov never brought forward any single event in his stories or, at any rate, did not elevate one event over the others. This feature of Chekhov's writing was noted by the criticism during his lifetime—for example, the criticism of N. Mikhailovskii—though the trait was assessed negatively. He also focused attention on the preponderance in the world created by Chekhov of the fortuitous or, in his terminology, "the incidental." He considered that this was a phenomenon "characteristic of the preceding literary tradition" but was valued literally "as something incidental, as having

independent value." And he went on to emphasize that in Chekhov what may be incidental and fortuitous has "a right to the writer's attention *equal* to everything else. [The emphasis is Chudakov's – E.P.]" He insisted on the "free, unpredictable and unregulated combination of the substantial and the incidental, the essential and the fortuitous" (p. 282). And the book presented in a new way the sphere of ideas, not by means of quotations from the author's letters or from the utterances of his characters, a practice characteristic of many studies on Chekhov, but with an analysis of the artistic structure of his works.

The poetics of Chekhov appeared, thus, in a new light, which provoked an irate review in the press by G. Berdnikov, an advisor of the Central Committee of the Communist Party who was shortly after to become the director of our Institute. In the eyes of the ignorant and of those who worshipped the authorities Aleksandr Pavlovich's serious work lost all value.

Life, however, arranged everything with more justice. Aleksandr Pavlovich was not permitted to travel to the first Badenweiler symposium in 1985 but he turned out to be the one most widely mentioned in the volume of the conference's papers, which is easy to verify by looking at the index of names. And a short time later he was the personal guest of the mayor of Badenweiler. A year later, his second book on Chekhov, *The World of Chekhov. Origin and Formation*, appeared. In the inscription of the copy given me are some remarkable lines attesting to the author's firm convictions:

<p>Kak tol'ko vyshla v svet PCh, Sochli: ne v tom ona kliuche. Xot' ia ne stal molozhe, S kliuchom, boius', vsë to zhe. Zdes' net pro mrachnye goda, (Kotorykh ne bylo togda), I tozhe net pro realizm, Futliarnost' melochei, Konflikty, raznyi romantizm . . . Primate vsë zh trud sei.</p>	<p>As soon as <i>Chekhov's Poetics</i> appeared, They judged it to be in the wrong key. Although I have not gotten younger, And as for the key I fear nothing has changed. Here there is nothing about gloomy years (Which were not experienced then), And there is nothing about realism, The shell-like quality of trivia, Conflicts, all that romantic business . . . But nevertheless do accept this work.</p>
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The background of Russian literature, with which Aleksandr Pavlovich compared and contrasted Chekhov's depiction of the world, is very broad, ranging from Sentimentalism through the worlds of Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky up to Chekhov's contemporaries. The individual, in his view, is always depicted in Chekhov in a world of objects. In this second book he returns to the concept of the incidental and fortuitous in Chekhov but broadens its meaning. He writes that this is the central question for Chekhov as an artist: "under its imprint passed the criticism of Chekhov in the writer's lifetime, and arguments about it arose at the start of the 1970s when it was formulated as the main question by the writer of this book" (p. 364). And he went on to say that Chekhov, in connection with this very problem, was disturbed not simply by the "poshlost' of everyday life," but also by "the problems of the planet's future, of the spiritual and physical health of man, of freedom and of necessity." In Chudakov's view, this was "a new type of artistic and philosophical comprehension of the world, not fleeing from *byt* and physical things but including them in a meditating consciousness constructed over them. The fullness of truth cannot be revealed only in the sphere of the ideal but on an individual level and on a communal level, on the scale of the entire planet..." (p. 365). This means that the relationship of the writer to the external physical world must become part of the ethical ideal of the whole of humanity. A thought, in my opinion, of philosophical amplitude.

Aleksandr Pavlovich's third book related to Chekhov, was *Word, Object, World. From Pushkin to Tolstoy. Studies in the Poetics of the Classic Russian Writers* (1992). "Many years have already passed. / Since I was just a *Chekhoved* . . ." was the way the verses of the dedicatory inscription of the copy

presented to me began. He had in mind the broad literary sweep of the materials in this book. (By the way, he was not just a *Chekhoved* even earlier. To be more precise, in 1977 he together with Marietta Chudakova and E. Toddes published a book about Iu. Tynianov, which, if I can put it this way, attacked the official literary criticism. But to return to his third book, here was reflected his interest of long standing in 19th century Russian literature in general (which was also evident, as stated above, in *The World of Chekhov*). The book consists of two parts. The first is devoted to Pushkin, Gogol, Nekrasov, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Tolstoy. In the article on Chekhov he speaks of the writer's "unity of outlook," that is, "that all the works of the writer are written by one hand" (p. 106). He means the unity informing his fiction and his letters, and also his notebook entries. This essay on Chekhov was first published in the book *Dynamic Poetics* (1990) together with my work on the connection of Chekhov's letters to his dramas. From that date a more intensive study of the poetics of Chekhov's letters was undertaken.

Aleksandr Pavlovic was invited to the second Badenweiler symposium in 1994, which was dedicated to issues of philosophy and religion in the life and works of Chekhov. I remember how enthusiastically he was greeted by Chekhov specialists from different countries. In his paper, "The Man of the Field," he built on one of the main ideas of his 1971 book: "There is only one dogmatic element in Chekhov—his censure of anything dogmatic. No static idea, an idea that does not allow for revision, can be true." He illustrated his talk with a depiction of an egg in two positions: "God exists" and "There is no God." The author's conclusion corresponded with Chekhov's manner of establishing truths: "In Chekhov's consciousness Christian conceptions about the teleological structure of the world coexist antinomically with science's, that is, Darwin's, view of an antiteleological structure." The paper was discussed in a lively fashion, and "Chudakov's egg," as all jokingly referred to it, was a weighty argument in favor of Chekhov's complex conception of the world. He reworked this paper for the magazine *Novyi mir*, significantly enlarging the literary background and refining his argument about this difficult issue for the proper understanding of Chekhov's position. "Chekhov in various periods of his life," he wrote "was now closer to one position and then, later, closer to the opposite end of the field. But never—so as to be identified with one extreme or simply to linger on an extreme position—did he stop being a man of the field." And more appropriate to the enlargement of his theme was the new title of the article in the magazine, "Between "God Exists" and "There is no God" Lies a Whole, Vast Field' (Chekhov and Faith)."

At conferences I recall him in lively discussions with important scholars from all over the world but also with young people; even before Badenweiler he was in New Haven, and in a number of cities associated with Chekhov, from Sumy in Ukraine to Irkutsk, and, of course, quite often in Yalta and Taganrog. He became a famous Chekhov scholar after his first book, and his participation at various conferences increased respect for him and won him warm personal regard. Unforgettable was his presence at the Melikhovo International Chekhov Conference in 2000, where his paper, "An Exhaustive Study of the Criticism in Chekhov's Lifetime as the Foundation for a Critical Study of the Writer," was the first in the January 29th plenary session. He devoted many years to this subject, collecting a bibliography of this criticism, which to this day, unfortunately, remains unpublished, but I hope that A.P.'s friends and family will make every effort to publish his colossal labor.

In the evenings in Melikhovo, as in other locations, we got together in part to exchange our impressions of the papers (the conferences were composed of many sessions, and we regretted our inability to listen to all the papers) but also to enjoy ourselves. There were jokes, reminiscences, singing, into which were drawn shy people who usually did not open their mouths. Here yet another facet of the personality of this world-class scholar stood revealed, the ability to direct such an assemblage and to mingle the serious with the humorous. In a recent letter from Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk the director of the Chekhov Museum I. A. Tsupenkova recalled her meeting with Aleksandr Pavlovich in Japan in 2004, noting specifically that "he told different kinds of literary

anecdotes charmingly, read verses" and generally conducted himself "with a certain hussar-like swagger that in no way made him less attractive. "

Yes, like no one else in the different cities where he participated in conferences, Aleksandr Pavlovich was able to make people happy, and he himself found great joy in nature, especially in the sea. He loved water and often canoed. He was an excellent swimmer, fearing neither cold water nor water that seemed dirty to others. And when the last day of a conference came, he summed up the conference in a humorous fashion with verses he had prepared that neatly conveyed the essence of the papers given. It would be good if someone would collect these verses and publish them....

Aleksandr Pavlovich was able to appreciate the work of others. I well remember how, without fail, he responded to the new work of a colleague. When my first book on Chekhov came out in 1979, he expressed a rather high opinion of it, seeing that the content of the book was devoted to a subject close to his interest, the creative process of Chekhov. Though he treated this subject in his own way, he was able to respect another's perspective. And I cannot forget that he phoned me after he received my book on *The Cherry Orchard*. Considering it his duty to say what he found close to his own interests and fascinating—the first part of the book, especially the sections on Russian literature—he admitted that the last chapters about foreign writers and about the theatre interested him little. This surprised me a bit but did not wound me. That's a fact. Not without reason do the French say that "the tone makes the music." His words gave notice of his honesty, straightforwardness, and benevolence. And if he did not accept the basic idea of someone's work, when, for example, reviewing for *Chekhovskii vestnik* an article by B. Paramonov from the book *The End of Style* (M. 1997), he countered its pessimistic idea with his own notion. Citing in this instance "the normal mechanism of the deep conservatism of culture," he advocated for the need to oppose the neologisms of mass culture, like "inzhenerá" instead of "inzhenéry," etc. But he also pointed out in this review a series of accurate observations by the author of the article (for example, how the provinces served as a "reservoir" for Chekhov's art). By the way, Aleksandr Pavlovich was a member of the editorial board of *Chekhovskii vestnik* and on the staff of the Chekhov Commission of the Council on the History of World Culture, where he was the editor-in-chief of two books in the *Chekhoviana* series (*Chekhov and the Silver Age*, [1996] and *The Three Sisters - 100 Years* [2002]). In the first of the publications just mentioned he published an article, "A. P. Chekhov and Merezhkovskii: Two Types of Artistic and Philosophical Consciousness," where he presented his main figures in the following way: one as the bearer of a consciousness that is romantic, elevated, rhetorical, conspicuous, and the other as the carrier of a scientific type of consciousness, more narrowly focused, restrained, and private. The second of the two volumes he closed with his own substantial article on a review of the famous 1940 Nemirovich-Danchenko production of *Three Sisters* by A. Roskin, a remarkable critic who died in 1941.

Finally, a word about Aleksandr Pavlovich's amazing vocabulary, unique for our literary criticism. He did not abuse foreign words and terms, as is usual for many modern writers. But, daringly and appropriately, he used words which can be found neither in Dal' nor in other dictionaries. In his texts both "the world being constructed [*postroiaemyi*] by Chekhov" and that the name of Vinogradov is "unavoidable [*neoboidimo*]" in the history of poetics seem appropriate. And in another sentence he writes that our "native drama can rival imported [*sopernichat' s zavoznoi*]" (the last word is close only to a variant of a word appearing in Dal', "zavóznyi"). Violating, one might say, the laws of grammar (the verbs "postroit" and "oboiti" have no imperfective passive participles), Aleksandr Pavlovich added a touch of novelty to his style. For the first time in his 1971 book the words "sluchainost'" and "sluchainyi" assumed the unusual forms "sluchainost'nost'" and "sluchainostnyi," which in our day gradually worked their way into critical usage.

If we were to collect in Aleksandr Pavlovich's writings all similar deviations from our common dictionary, then we would link him to a number of writers who coined new words, words that have a greater claim for entrance into the colloquial language than the words listed by him at

the end of his review of Paramonov's work. And while thinking of this, I recall our plans to compile a Chekhov dictionary during our years working on the *Complete Works*. Unfortunately, this plan was not realized.

There is a pile of Aleksandr Pavlovich's books on my bookshelf as well as on the shelves of many of our colleagues, and it is crowned by his biographical novel with its title taken from the poetry of Blok, *Lozhitsia mgla na starye stupeni*, which takes the reader back to the time of the youth of the hero's grandfather. This remarkable book, which deserves special consideration, begins and ends with a mention of him. And appropriately for Aleksandr Pavlovich's character, his last appearance in print, published on the fortieth day after his death, was titled "The Size of the Honorarium Does not Affect Creativity..."

In conclusion, some words about his work as a teacher, for he was a talented instructor, although the time devoted to his books and articles and his many trips to different countries did not allow him to concentrate on his teaching. He lectured at a rather large number of educational institutions. While still a student at MGU he gave a lot of lectures and taught the Russian language at the Friendship among Peoples University in Moscow. In 1988, as "a worker paid by the hour," he worked at the Faculty of Philology at MGU where, according to the recollections of some of his former students, he lectured on the language of literature. Later he taught at the Lenin Pedagogical Institute in Moscow, where for three years he taught a course on the poetics of Chekhov. In 1992 he was promoted to professor. It was then that he offered a series of other lectures on the Russian language and literature and on historical poetics in three American cities, Los Angeles, Ann Arbor, and Boston.

In the mid-1990s he taught a seminar on Chekhov in the Literary Institute of the Union of Writers in Moscow but was forced to leave because the pay was too low. In the last years of his life he conducted special courses in the poetics of Russian literature and also on *Eugene Onegin*. Then for two and a half years, up to 2000, he taught Russian literature in Korea, where, by the way, he wrote his novel. Returning to Moscow, he continued to teach *Eugene Onegin* at the university. For a short time he also taught in the school of the Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, where his students were the actors. First, he finished a course on the poetics of Russian literature of the twentieth century and in the fall of 2005, his second year, he began a course "A Slow Reading of *Eugene Onegin*," a long dreamed of project, which came to an abrupt end with his death. This course brought to mind a similar course featuring the same slow reading of Pushkin's novel by the remarkable Pushkin scholar, S. Bondi, who could not finish his course, so carried away was he by his extreme enthusiasm for each line of Pushkin's novel in verse.

Aleksandr Pavlovich, unfortunately, left no students to continue his scholarly and critical work, though one of the students he advised, O. Shalygina, has begun work on a doctoral dissertation, "The Problem of the Compositional Organization of 'Poetic Prose' of the Silver Age (Chekhov, Belyi, Mandel'shtam, Pasternak)." But his influence on his contemporaries is without question, as can be seen in the articles on him in the periodical *New Literary Review* (No. 75, 2005). His colleagues in the Department of Russian Literature of the Silver Age at the Institute of World Literature, where he also worked in his last years and published an article, "On the Secondary Writers of the 'Silver Age'," are continuing his work. Developing his general idea for the project, the Department, under the directorship of Vs. A. Keldysh, is engaged in producing a series of studies on the literary criticism of the Silver Age.

The Ambiguous Ending of Chekhov's "Darling"

Nathan Rosen

This celebrated and semi-farcical story has an ending that seems pathetic and inevitable. Olenka, the chief character, "was always in love with someone and could not live otherwise."¹ In earlier days she had loved her father, her aunt, and a French teacher. As an adult, she needed not only to love someone but to have opinions, and her opinions were always those of whoever she was in love with at the time.

But husbands and lovers died or went away, and in the end she was left bitterly alone: "Worst of all, she no longer had opinions.... In her thoughts and in her heart there was the same emptiness as in her courtyard."

But after many years she fell more deeply in love than she had ever been—but this time it was a deep maternal love for a ten-year old boy named Sasha, the son of a veterinarian who lodged at her house and whose wife had left him. When the veterinarian went on extended trips to inspect cattle, Olenka felt the boy was being abandoned and she took him under her wing. It did not matter that Sasha was an ungrateful brat and her love was not returned. "For this boy who was not her own, for the dimples on his cheeks, for his visored cap, she would give her whole life, give it joyfully with tears of tenderness."

And with this rush of maternal passion came opinions. Sasha read aloud from his geography book that "an island is a piece of dry land surrounded on all sides by water."

'An island is a piece of dry land...' she repeated, and this was the first opinion which she had expressed with confidence after so many years of silence and emptiness in her thoughts.

It is surprising that a factual definition of an island in a geography book could become an "opinion" for Olenka. If she had first come across it in a geography book, it would not have been an opinion for her. *But expressed through the words of Sasha and her love for him, it gains the status and assurance of an "opinion."*

It is ironic, of course, that Olenka's first opinion in so many years should be the definition of an *island*. Sasha will inevitably leave her, or his mother may come from Kharkov to fetch him. Olenka will be isolated (having no object for love in her old age) and may truly become an "island" herself.

Yet it could be argued that another reading is possible. Let us examine the ending and its context more carefully, in English and Russian.

At the end Olenka's dream of Sasha's future is interrupted by a loud knocking at the gate. Olenka wakes up in fear; it may be a telegram from Sasha's mother to bring the child to Kharkov. It turns out that the voice she hears is of the veterinarian coming home from the club.

'Well, thank God,' she thinks.

The weight gradually lifts from her heart, she feels light again; she lies down and thinks about Sasha, who is fast asleep in the next room and occasionally murmurs deliriously:

'I'll hit you one! Scram! No fighting!'

This last line of a nightmare dream obviously applies to a fight that Sasha had with a schoolmate. Commentators find that it also applies to Sasha's resistance to Olenka's "smothering mothering" (Heldt 55).

They point out that Sasha had previously rebuffed Olenka for following him to school: "Go home, auntie, I can get there myself now." If Sasha's resistance to Olenka is *not* implied in the last line of his dream, then (as Karl Kramer says) "the ending appears considerably less relevant to the story than Chekhov's endings normally are" (161-62). In other words, these last words would have a narrow application only to Sasha's fight with a schoolmate and would have nothing to do with Olenka, the central character in "The Darling." This would seriously impoverish the story.

Hence critics agree unanimously that the ending has to do with Sasha's rebellion against Olenka. Examples of this interpretation:

"[He] resists Olenka in his dream at the end. . . . Olenka has affected the boy's psyche to the point where his sleep becomes a repeated scream . . ." (Heldt 53, 55).

"From the last line of the story it is evident that the boy himself has dreams of rebellion" (Kirk 114).

"In view of Sasha's open resistance to her attentions, the final line may apply to Olenka as well" (Kramer 161).

"Little Sasha's nightmare is a protest against the adoptive mother" (Peterson 209).

"In the end she is happily suffocating Sasha. His threats, in the last paragraph, end the story on a strange discordant note which is apparently a comment on her mindless bliss" (Proffer 40).

Let us look at the ending in Russian:

"Ja ttebe! Poshël von! Ne deris'!"
(*"I'll hit you one! Scram! No fighting!"*)

A grammatical analysis would show that the nightmare is not directed against Olenka. First, Sasha would never think of addressing his "Auntie" (as he calls her) in the second person singular (*tebe, deris'*). Second, he would not refer to her in a verb with a masculine singular past tense ending (*poshël*). It is puzzling that Slavic commentators have ignored these simple grammatical facts in interpreting the ending.²

Our conclusion is that the ending refers to Sasha's nightmare memory of a fight with a schoolmate; it has nothing to do with an unconscious rebellion against the "smothering mothering" of Olenka; nevertheless it may have an indirect and surprising relation to Olenka's dream in the same scene.

First, Olenka and Sasha sleep in adjoining rooms. They are both dreaming. Olenka's dream has nothing to do with Sasha's nightmare. She cannot hear him and even if she could hear him, there is nothing she could do to help him.

Second, she cannot hear him because she is deep in her own dream, which begins—and this is significant—while she is still awake, getting ready to go to sleep. It is a continuation of her daydream:

Then, lying down in bed, she dreams of the far-off, misty future when Sasha has finished his studies, has become a doctor or an engineer, has his own big house, horses, a carriage, gets married, has children She falls asleep and keeps on thinking about one and the same thing, and tears flow down her cheeks from her closed eyes.

What is startling is that she dreams “of one and the same thing”: Sasha’s distant, misty future, which has no relation to her own. She rejoices in his wealth and marriage and children—the last item is the crown of it all. And in this dream she does not think of playing a part in Sasha’s destiny or of wondering anxiously who will provide her with opinions in that future. By choosing to identify herself with Sasha’s future, by directing all of her passionate maternal love into that future, she acquires a measure of independence in the present. And this perspective makes the present more bearable.

A shift from the past tense to the present tense occurs in connection with Sasha.³ Chekhov does the same thing in “The Teacher of Literature” and “The Lady with a Dog.” This shift of tense makes it possible to move easily from the present to the future, or, more precisely, to incorporate the future into the present, making the future a part of the present. There was no future in Olenka’s previous attachments; she lived and loved and quaked in the immediate present. With the boy Sasha such a future becomes available. And I would emphasize that Olenka creates it for herself.

Of course this dream of merging with Sasha’s future is complicated by immediate danger in the present: there is a loud knocking at the gate, which luckily has to do only with the arrival of the veterinarian from his club; but at any time it can mean that Sasha’s mother wants her child back with her in Kharkov. The tension remains.

Thus the last scene with Sasha has two functions. Sasha has to overcome his own nightmare of a fight with a schoolmate, and Olenka cannot help him—a portent of the future. (The grammatical analysis shows that his nightmare is not a rebellion against Olenka.) Second, Olenka draws strength by living in a dream of Sasha’s future which has no further need for her love nor is she concerned with a need for opinions.

Is this not a movement toward freedom?

And as I have suggested, it makes the present more bearable.

Of course, at any time there may be a loud knocking at the gate . . .

NOTES

I wish to thank Savely Senderovich for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

- 1 For the text, I have used the translation of Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky.
- 2 Barbara Heldt is the only Chekhov scholar to notice the problem created by the masculine past tense verb ending. However, her explanation of it is not especially convincing: “The boy fights Olenka’s smothering mothering in a dream in the last words of the story. The dreaming cry to ‘Get away’ is in the masculine singular past tense, but Sasha has just previously begged Olenka to ‘Leave me alone,’ so the connection, too obvious in English, is made in Russian in dream-language” (55).

If I understand this correctly, the dream-language means that Sasha has substituted the schoolmate for Olenka. In Freudian terms, the masculine past tense ending served as a mask, designed by Sasha’s subconscious, to slip his rebellion past the eye of the vigilant censor (the superego).

To this it may be objected that neither Chekhov nor his readers knew about Freud or how the dream mechanism worked. Furthermore, as Ms. Heldt admits, the connection between “Leave me alone” and “Get away” is not as obvious in Russian as it is in English.

- 3 This shift from past to present tense is not reflected in the translations of “The Darling” by Garnett, Matlaw, and Magarshack. The past tense is used throughout.

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Conservatives, Liberals, and Chekhov

James McConkey

At various moments in my life, both difficult and happy ones, I have thought of Anton Chekhov, finding in his stories, plays, and letters the kind of mirror that enables me to see my inner rather than outer image.

In a much-quoted 1888 letter he wrote to an acquaintance—a letter written with obvious emotion, the expression of a credo from one normally silent on matters of personal belief—Chekhov says of himself:

I am neither liberal, nor conservative, nor gradualist, nor monk, nor indifferentist. . . . Pharisaism, dull wittedness and tyranny reign not only in merchants' homes and police stations. I see them in science, in literature, among the younger generation. . . . I look upon tags and labels as prejudices. My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom imaginable, freedom from violence and lies, no matter what form the latter two take.

Despite his protestations, most of Chekhov's biographers have tagged him as a liberal, basing their judgment on such grounds as his active concern for the health and education of the poor; his opposition to brutal governmental repression, including the treatment of convicts; the protests he makes (if indirectly, through his characters) against the ruthless leveling of forests as well as other environmental degradations; and his admiration of the French writer Emile Zola for that writer's vigorous championing of Alfred Dreyfus, the French officer whose secret court-martial and imprisonment, defended by conservatives in Russia as well as France, was an anti-Semitic frame-up.

Anybody like me (that is, anybody who so admires Chekhov's stories and plays that he or she has gone on to read everything else by him or about him available in English—his longest work, the non-fictional *Sakhalin Island*; the various collections of his letters; and nearly all the biographies devoted to him) is aware, though, that his nature contains conservative as well as liberal elements. For that matter, one could write a persuasive essay demonstrating how certain shadings of such labels as "gradualist," "monk," and "indifferentist" can also be applied to him: he believed in the eventual progress of humanity, he evaded marriage until his last years, and even his closest friends complained of an elusive detachment or remove in him.

He was the grandson of a serf, the son of a pious and authoritarian small-town merchant ever in search of social status; Chekhov's own university education and professional achievements—as a doctor as well as a writer—would never have been made possible, as he realized, without those reforms, instituted at roughly the time of his birth by Czar Alexander II, that liberated serfs and permitted worthy applicants other than aristocrats to enter institutions of higher learning. His own conservative tendencies prevented him, as a student, from joining in the liberal protests against the authoritarianism of the regime. Though differing attitudes toward the Dreyfus Affair brought distance to the relationship, Chekhov was first a protégé and then such a friend of the influential conservative publisher Alexis Suvorin that Chekhov's liberal detractors—and there were many—attacked him as Suvorin's “kept woman.”

In a letter to Suvorin written some years after he had left university in Moscow, Chekhov reveals his distaste for the continuing student disorders—even though those protests were made in the name of the very freedom that Chekhov valued for himself. (In the letter, he lists the student demands, which include academic freedom, free admission to the university “without regard to religion, nationality, sex, or social status,” and so on.) But unruly mass movements implied, if not outright violence, at least its possibility. Chekhov's lifelong abhorrence of violence was a consequence, one of his brothers said, of the gentleness of their mother, “who instilled into her children a hatred of brutality” as well as “a feeling of regard for all who were in inferior position and for birds and animals.”

Quite late in life, he dismayed a young admirer of his work by a blatant and utterly conservative remark. According to that admirer, an engineering student who later became a writer himself, Chekhov said, “The reason students are rebelling is to make themselves look like heroes and have an easier time with the young ladies.” Such a sardonic comment becomes only slightly less offensive to liberal ears when made part of the context in which it was given: his irritability throughout an ill-advised stay—for he was not well—with a wealthy philanthropist who was a major backer of the Moscow Art Theater, a landowner and industrialist whom Chekhov referred to as “a Russian Rockefeller.” As Chekhov observed to the student out of hearing of their host, the espousal of liberal causes by the genial “Russian Rockefeller” permitted him to indulge in “the revolutionary game” while remaining blind to the unwholesome environment and long hours to which he subjected his workers.

But generosity and liberalism coexist with a conservative self-interest in nearly all of us. As a retired Cornell professor, I am hardly to be compared with patricians, financiers, and industrialists with their parklands and mansions and philanthropies, but I reflect a mixture of attitudes, too. For example, my liberal leanings were certainly brought up short when the woods and farmland adjoining my family's extensive Finger Lakes acreage were divided into lots and put up for auction. To exclude from my view the mobile homes rapidly spreading in our scenic but unzoned township, I outbid all of the poorer folk—whether middle-aged laborers or couples too young to possess much of a nest egg—who yearned for life in the country.

Whatever his own mixtures, Chekhov has remained of inestimable service to me over the decades because of his unobtrusive insistence upon a freedom beyond our political and religious institutions. Freedom, I judge from reading him, is a basic human need, underlying our selfish as well as altruistic desires, and sometimes entangling both desires at once. That need seems innate for Chekhov. Among other matters, it accounts for the appeal that vast natural vistas—whether of mountains or steppes—have for him. (In “Daydreams,” a story he wrote in 1886, a narrator indistinguishable from the author muses upon the yearning of his characters—two rural constables and a convict recaptured after his escape—for an unobtainable freedom. He finds such longings to be either inexplicable or an expression of our genetic memories, of the life within an unbounded nature known to our distant ancestors.) Whether expressed or simply implied in his work and letters, his view that all of us want a happiness and freedom obviously beyond attainment is crucial

both to his seeming objectivity (the detachment that led critics on both the right and left to denounce him) and to the compassion (a quality that his biographers attribute to his liberalism) that lies within his depiction of even some characters who strike the reader as largely responsible for their own sufferings. In Chekhov's play *Three Sisters*, the reiterated cry for "Moscow!" is a manifestation of what all of us want but cannot possess.

As I have aged, I have increasingly come to realize that my own nature is best understood as a tension between body and soul, the old antithesis that today seems to be accepted without embarrassment only by those who are particularly devout. I have also come to believe that the separation that Christianity and other religions make between body and soul probably predates any specific religion, constituting an ancient awareness of the antithesis contained within each of us—the necessary concern for self-interest and the equally necessary concern for all that lies outside the self that possibly can justify our individual existence and provide us an encompassing meaning. For me (as well as for many others today) the first of these venerable terms has everything to do with being, the second with becoming, a reversal of Plato's position in the *Republic* that equates *being* with absolute (and hence timeless) forms, and *becoming* with our actual, time-bound human existence.

Chekhov himself was anything but a believer in absolute forms, whether provided by philosophy or religion. In reading Chekhov, I am aware of the applicability of the antithesis between physical and spiritual needs and desires to the comic as well as tragic confusions, contradictions, and aspirations of his characters. His personal desire "for the most absolute freedom imaginable" is, of course, spiritual in nature, the desire allied with becoming; but we most assuredly exist as bodies—as a practicing physician, Chekhov would be especially aware of that simple fact—and so possess physical as well as spiritual yearnings. The former, unlike the latter, are capable of fulfillment: Chekhov's "holy of holies," after all, includes the healthy human body. Nevertheless, his awareness of a freedom beyond attainment gives to his writings the sense we have of a moral basis in this rigorously nonjudgmental writer. That is to say, our self-deceptions, our petty resentments and other entrapments of the ego, our expedient hypocritical performances, the brutalities and social injustices of any given society, the hurt and violence we inflict on others—all these can be perceived as obstacles preventing the limited (but no less precious) freedom that is available to any one of us.

In only one story I know, "Gusev," does Chekhov offer us a glimpse into an apparently immutable truth, the truth that for him must lie within or beyond our longings. "Gusev" was written while Chekhov was aboard the ship returning him to Russia following his quite extraordinary overland trip across Siberia to investigate the prison colony on Sakhalin Island. It was a therapeutic experience for a writer who for a number of reasons had been depressed, suffering from an alienation so severe that (according to his biographers) he was in danger of a breakdown. The story depends on his observation at sea of two of his fellow passengers, both so ill that they died during the voyage, who are transferred by Chekhov's imagination into antithetical characters who bear some analogy to the oppositions of his own nature. (It is not his only story to do so: "Gooseberries" is an equally marvelous example. But more than with "Gooseberries" or other stories that occur to me, "Gusev" approaches parable or allegory in that the two characters are so sharply drawn as opposing qualities.)

Except for his irrational dislike of all Chinese, the title character, a simple peasant, is representative of the nature of the soul by his longings and acceptance; to his opposite, an embittered radical, Chekhov gives much of his own recent alienation. (That radical malcontent, so ostensibly concerned with social justice, is as self-centered and as concerned—his envy and hubris reveal it—with his own status as anyone could possibly be. Does such an ironic awareness come from Chekhov's earlier view of student radicals as well as his detached insight into his own recent

emotional disturbance with all of its resentments?) Both characters die; both are dumped after brief ceremonies into the sea.

As the title indicates, Chekhov is more interested in his peasant. The end of the story employs a double vision: the narrator follows Gusev's descent—he continues to call him by name, for Gusev remains a presence to him, not a corpse—as he sinks ever deeper and is attacked by a shark; but that narrator also is watching the sun as it sets above the water. I know of no other depiction, in fiction or poetry or essay, that so well manages to convey simultaneously the transcendent glory of the natural world and its complete indifference to the death and dissolution of its individual inhabitants, destined as they are to return to their origins within that world. We are presented with the sublimity, the terrifying beauty, of the merger of water and sky at sunset (I don't think it too fanciful to consider it, in human terms, a fusion of body and soul), a moment of such splendor and union that "it is hard to find a name" for it, as the final line says, "in the language of man." Is this vision prophetic of the destiny that underlies the human search for happiness and pure freedom? I imagine so, and can accept it as such. And Walt Whitman, that most American, that most democratic of writers, shares something with Chekhov here, in his view of death as returning us to the unity of our natural origins in sea and grass.

Historically, we Americans have thought that true freedom could be obtained in our lifetimes, right here on Earth. Like the Russia of Chekhov's time, America once seemed a vast expanse; but the Russian vastness never gave Chekhov the innocent beliefs that ours gave us. For us, the magnitude and richness of our land were such that it could absorb all people who wished to find in its resources an amalgam of their material hopes and spiritual desires; our nation's optimism was nourished by, and depended upon, our material possibilities and achievements. That observation is anything but original: ever since the publication of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, his title character—who thought his spiritual longings could be satiated in the material world—has been the most enduring fictional representation of who we (in our ignorant nobility, in our innocent crassness) once were and apparently still want to be, despite the depletion of our resources and our increasing dependence on foreign countries not only to supply us the goods to be found in our shopping malls and car dealerships but to loan us the money that permits us to buy them.

Gatsby's transcendent dreaming ended up in disenchantment and death. Such dreams, though, have been a major factor in American optimism from our nation's beginnings. My father, born toward the end of the 19th century, exemplifies that optimism to me. He had in mind an indefinable "bracket" to which he aspired, believing his strenuous efforts would achieve it. That destined bracket must have been spiritual, for none of his considerable achievements or periods of prosperity ever satisfied him. Maybe because his dreams were less grandiosely romantic than *Gatsby's*—because they never transformed any mortal, imperfect woman into a transcendent ideal—they never defeated my father. (In this regard, at least, he seems to me a more quintessential American than *Gatsby*, or, for that matter, Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.) Hope sustained him, and that has much to do with the growing admiration I had for him in his later years, for he carried his optimism to the grave, despite financial setbacks and the illnesses that came with age. I was among those at his bedside as he was dying from the malignant growth that had spread from his pancreas. His last words, spoken as the blood was pouring from his mouth, were the cry of an unvanquished spirit: "I don't have cancer!"

How much has American optimism depended all along on illusions that make us brave like that? My father died on his 77th birthday, and I am now his elder by six years. No doubt I have sustaining illusions of my own. For that matter, so did Chekhov. Physician though he was, he deluded himself for years into believing he wasn't a victim of tuberculosis (a mortal illness in his day), despite the blood he frequently coughed up. The characters of his stories and plays certainly possess illusions of the sort we rarely admit might be ours—that is, wholly subjective

interpretations of reality, including the interpretations they impose upon the daily events of their lives. But nothing that I know of in either Chekhov's own life or imaginative work denies what I take to be his underlying insight, always implied but never stated: that being, our existence as mortal creatures, is separate from becoming, that the desire of the soul for unity and pure freedom is as distinct from any material goal as it is from any rigidly imposed political or religious belief.

The general definitions of the words *conservative* and *liberal* are self-evident to nearly all of us: the conservative defends the status quo, as exemplified in stable institutions, while the liberal supports reform of those institutions for the sake of the individual's freedom and economic well-being. In principle, conservatism is working toward closure, liberalism toward openness, in an already established system: neither, then, represents radicalism, which would overthrow the system itself.

For decades beginning with the Great Depression, liberalism in America was in the ascendancy, the federal government under Franklin D. Roosevelt instituting social reforms intended to make the individual citizen as free as possible from want and social neglect. The success of those reforms have never been more than partial: the problems were, and remain, complex, growing in size (in keeping with a growing population that has more than doubled in my lifetime), and seemingly intractable. The attempted solutions sometimes resulted in bureaucratic mismanagement as well as a labyrinth of regulations perceived by many as interfering with business enterprise and even the enterprise of individuals dependent upon governmental support.

Ever since the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980, liberals have come to represent paralysis rather than change, and all the charges leveled against them when they were healthier—that they support laxity and indulgence and have contributed to a decline in religious values—are now used to attack the reforms they managed to gain. Conservatism has become such a dominant political force that liberalism seems a pejorative term not only to most politicians, regardless of party affiliation, but to those citizens whose liberal leanings once caused them to ally themselves with the Democratic Party: they now either call themselves “progressives” or simply say that the conservative-liberal dichotomy has outlived its usefulness.

Recent historical events, especially the attack on the World Trade Center, have given conservatism an even greater power over an already moribund liberalism. After 9/11, the nation that had emerged to be the world's single remaining superpower suddenly found itself vulnerable in a way few had been able to imagine. Such a continuing threat made inevitable the use of our superior military power and brought about a dramatic strengthening of Christian fundamentalism and political conservatism—both representative of the movement toward closure of individual freedom to protect a cherished status quo.

While writing this last sentence, I found myself remembering a passage I read some years ago in the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*. He uses the sea anemone, a creature “devoid of a brain and equipped only with a simple nervous system,” to describe a “fundamental duality” found in all biological life, including the human species. When the environment surrounding it is favorable, the anemone “opens up to the world like a blossoming flower,” but it will “close itself into a contracted flat pack” whenever it senses danger and vulnerability. Damasio's account of the anemone's behavior is similar to a nation's movement toward openness or closure, an analogy worth our consideration, unsettling though it may be to wonder if a simple biological reflex underlies our political polarities.

I share Chekhov's distrust of labels. A tag on the toe of a stiffened body in a morgue may give that body a name, but it tells us little about the mixtures that constituted the living person's nature. Because, like Chekhov, we contain both liberal and conservative inclinations, Americans, at least in times of peace, tend toward compromise and moderation. Politicians in both our major

parties support their personal positions on a given issue by saying it is what the people want or demand. I have no idea what an abstraction like “the people” actually want. War and perceived threats tend to unify people in all nations, of course. Equally obvious is the fact that the closeness of the last two major elections in the United States reflects a deep and continuing division among those who voted, despite this unifying impulse in the most recent election. Polls might provide the statistics that I can only guess at: the number of Americans in both parties who have been made uneasy by their perception that the current conservative ideology has distorted their religious and political beliefs into an orthodoxy unfamiliar to them.

Such a situation inevitably breeds both resentment and alienation, those feelings that Chekhov, at a critical moment in his life, must have despised himself for having, as impediments to his wish for a freedom that always lay beyond his grasp. According to biographical evidence, those feelings help to account for his decision to leave Russia “perhaps never to return”—or so he wrote in justification of the unusually bitter tone of his letter to the editor of a journal that had just named him as one of “the high priests of unprincipled writing.” Was it a conscious or unconscious act of therapy on Chekhov’s part to undertake a solitary, arduous, and sometimes life-threatening journey across Siberia—a journey in which he traversed a quarter of the world’s circumference—to investigate the prison colony on the remote island of Sakhalin, where climate, poor soil, and rugged terrain contributed to the misery of convicts exiled from their homeland for the rest of their lives? (Upon completing the terms of their punishment, the former convicts became colonizers forever forbidden to return home.)

I happened to read Chekhov’s *Sakhalin Island*—a book whose impressions of what he learned there is so replete with facts and statistics that it becomes a compelling documentary—during the Vietnam War, a time of such personal and national crisis that I doubted the integrity of my own beliefs. My reading of that book was as therapeutic for me as his far more venturesome trip turned out to be for him. Chekhov’s journey became enough of a paradigm for me, as well as a possible model for others in time of crisis, that years ago I wrote a book about it, *To a Distant Island*. Near the end of my book is a passage that connects Chekhov’s spiritual desire for a freedom beyond our moral striving with that of the prisoners on Sakhalin:

It is tempting to search . . . [Chekhov’s] book—God knows, I’ve done that more than once—for a particular encounter that could have provided him with a renewed or heightened awareness of his link with all mankind. Might it not have come as he was interviewing a convict baker, a person he admired—“a simple, openhearted and obviously good man,” . . . [Chekhov] says of him—who managed not only to escape the island but to trudge across Siberia to his own village for a reunion with his wife and children before he was recaptured and sentenced to the inevitable flogging and longer term? Or might it not have come from his acquaintance with the “old convict woman” briefly assigned to him as a servant who found his personal possessions, including his blanket and the books she probably couldn’t read, of extraordinary worth, for they recently had been in the country of her own dreaming? I doubt, though, that any single encounter had such a dramatic effect, for nearly all of the convicts he met equated a lost Russia with an ideal freedom, with the kind of happiness never to be found in any corner of the real world; and except for one—a sick and elderly man now securely fettered to his iron ball—all those he spoke with who had attempted the flight to freedom were glad they had chanced it, whatever their punishment.

Surely Chekhov’s growing knowledge of these suffering people, particularly, of what he shared with them, would have been a key necessity to his release from the subjective prison of his own alienation, though his *Sakhalin Island* doesn’t tell us this: like his more imaginative work, it aspires to objectivity. But what he learned on that island obviously underlies the spiritual depth of

“Gusev.” During the 14 years remaining to him—he was only 44 when tuberculosis ended his life—he wrote all of the other work on which his reputation is most firmly based.

Like other Americans, and like Chekhov, I may be more optimistic about the future than present evidence warrants. But it seems inevitable to me that we, again, like Chekhov, will regain a balance that currently has gone askew. I should add, though, that I have been aware throughout this essay of the hazard that confronts all readers of Chekhov who find in him a mirror of their inner selves. This danger has much to do with mirrors—the possibility that the writer we admire is but a reflection of the ideal we posit for ourselves. If that’s the case, don’t we merge with all the characters whose illusions he exposes so brilliantly, whether they consider themselves radicals, conservatives, or liberals? He once said that the duty of the writer is to provide questions; readers must provide the answers, for they are the jury. But if the answers provided by this jury member unwittingly reflect his ideal self, they at least permit his conscious awareness of what that ideal consists of. I can’t imagine a more useful service for a writer to provide, at this or any other moment in our history.

**Chekhov, Anton. *The Complete Plays*.
Trans., ed., and annotated by Laurence Senelick.
New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006. ix, 1060 pp. 39.95 USD (cloth).**

**Reviewed by
Hugh McLean (University of California, Berkeley)**

The general public of English-speaking Chekhov lovers—actors, directors, audiences, and especially readers—have received a substantial new resource: a huge, 1000-page volume containing in English translation all the works Chekhov ever wrote in anything resembling dramatic form, including not only all the major and minor plays, but all their surviving variants and in addition some twelve “Humorous Dialogues and Parodies.” These texts are preceded by a brief biography, a chronology of Chekhov’s life, and a general introduction; each play is also provided with an introduction of its own. Furthermore, the texts are annotated more fully than is usual in editions of this kind, not only explaining literary and other allusions and unfamiliar Russian realia, but also adducing appropriate quotations from Chekhov’s letters and recorded oral statements bearing on how he thought a given character or situation should be interpreted. In short, the offering is very rich indeed.

The purveyor of all this wealth is Laurence Senelick, Fletcher Professor of Drama and Oratory at Tufts University and recipient of the St. George Medal of the Russian Ministry for Culture “for his services to Russian theater.” Professor Senelick is already known to Chekhov scholars for two previous books, *Anton Chekhov* (1985), in the Macmillan series on modern dramatists, and *The Chekhov Theater: A Century of the Plays in Performance* (1997). Some of his translations (*Chekhov’s Selected Plays*) were also published by Norton last year. This new imposing volume of translations and essays thus comes from the hand of a man who has fruitfully devoted a substantial part of his life to the study of Chekhov on the stage. One would therefore like to celebrate the occasion on these pages with a paean of praise and gratitude. Praise may indeed be deserved and offered, but alas, as with most human artifacts, it must to some extent be qualified. Much of a reviewer’s painful duty must therefore be to register the qualifications, measuring the distance between the existing text and the “might have been” of perfection. While performing this obligation, however inadequately, I will therefore try to balance my strictures with applause for some of the book’s many successes.

Of the introductory essays, the one simply entitled "Introduction" struck me as one of these successes. Here Senelick's (hereafter LS) deep and wide familiarity with the drama and stage of many countries is given full play. He presents Chekhov's dramas in a global as well as in a Russian context, marking their astounding ascent to universal classic status at the very summit of the worldwide canon, there placed by such a connoisseur as Andrzej Wajda alongside "the Greeks and Shakespeare." Later adaptations—or, as some would say, mutilations—of Chekhov's plays are seen simply as confirmation of their universality in time as well as space. Chekhov has "never stopped being Chekhov our contemporary."

The essay on "Anton Chekhov's Brief Life" is unfortunately somewhat marred by errors. Such mistakes as "Nikolay Leykin, editor of the periodical *Splinters of Moscow Life*" (p. xvii) [in fact, Leikin edited a *Petersburg* periodical called *Oskolki (Splinters)*, to which Chekhov contributed a column with this title] are perhaps unimportant for the wide public to whom this volume is addressed. One might also object mildly to LS's succinct account of the famous disastrous opening night of *The Sea Gull* in 1896: "the actors misunderstood it; the audience misapprehended it" (p. xxiii), a neat phrase carried over from the 1985 book (p. 12). The latter is undoubtedly true of most of the audience, which had expected an evening of laughs at a benefit for the comic actress E. I. Levkeeva. But as LS himself noted in the earlier book (p. 71), the cast included one of the greatest actresses of her time, Vera Komissarzhevskaja, in the role of Nina Zarechnaia, who surely understood the play perfectly, and other actors in the cast were "strong." Some of the responsibility must also no doubt be placed on Chekhov himself, for perversely labeling a "comedy" a play with "five poods" of unhappy loves, ending in the suicide of a leading character (thus giving countless erudite commentators an opportunity to display their learning and ingenuity in parsing the word "comedy").

The "Chronology of Chekhov's Life" likewise contains some errors. It occasionally ventures into general history with such dubious statements as "1861. Tsar Alexander II abolishes serfdom, but without providing land for the emancipated serfs" (p. xxvii) [in fact, the ex-serfs got about half the land]. Dmitry Grigorovich was not an "eminent Russian critic" (p. xxix), but a writer of fiction. LS lists under 1888 the "decree that all Jews must live within the Pale of Settlement in Eastern Poland," but in fact such a decree had been in force, with certain exceptions, since the time of Catherine II. And there are other historical oddities.

The plays are presented in strictly chronological order, a strategy that may have some drawbacks, though I have no ready alternative. One worries a bit about enthusiastic students who, after some early exposure to one of the great plays, wish to plunge in deeper and buy this volume. If they begin conscientiously at the beginning, they are confronted with 221 jejune pages of "Untitled Play" (= *Platonov = Bezottsovshchina*) and may well put the book aside in disappointment.

Now the translations. We must recognize that translating in general, and especially for the theater, is an exceedingly difficult task. One must render not only the semantic content of the original, but also try to capture its tone, its nuances, its undercurrents of implication and emotion. The task is especially difficult in Chekhov's case in view of the delicacy, precision, and subtlety of his language. Do we want a text that will "play" in English and North American theaters, be comprehensible to Anglophone audiences as meaningful illustrations of universals of human life, in language that is readily intelligible in oral projection, or do we want texts that will reproduce as closely as possible the original Russian context of Russian life as Chekhov observed and embodied it, in spite of the basically insuperable anomaly of groups of very Russian Russians speaking English to one another? Or some compromise between these two poles? Take names as a particular case. Do characters speaking English use the whole gamut of Russian modes of address—surname with honorific title, first name + patronymic, first name alone, diminutive? Will Anglophone audiences have any idea what social and emotional symbolisms are conveyed by these alternatives? Or is it better to simplify, bring the modes of address closer to what the audience is familiar with, even

calling Andrei Andrew and Mar'ia Mary? Readers of novels can be given a chart with all the variant names, as is done in some editions of *War and Peace*, for example, and the *Dramatis Personae* of the printed play, and even a printed program distributed in the theater, might serve the same purpose. LS, however, does not take advantage of this opportunity. He simply translates the *Dramatis Personae* as they appear in the Russian original, without nicknames. Stresses are also not marked there, though a list of names with stresses is provided among the front matter. (At least one of these, Serébyakov for Serebryakóv is clearly wrong; Treplév [i.e., Treplëv] for Tréplev is disputed by many Russians, but LS preempts the choice by spelling the character's name Treplyov.)

In passing judgment on the translations I divide the verdicts into four categories, beginning, perhaps invidiously, at the bottom. (1) Gross failures, mistakes, “howlers,” where the sense of the original has been misunderstood. Fortunately, there are not many of these, and I do not mean to create the impression that the size of these categories is in any way statistically equal. (2) Renditions that are not downright errors of sense, but seem to me in some way “off,” out of tune, correct in meaning but not in tone. (3) The vast majority, reasonably satisfactory renditions, providing an acceptable approximation of both the sense and the style of the original. (4) Outstanding successes, real pearls of ingenuity and linguistic creativity. I am happy that there may be enough examples in category (4) to balance the disasters of category (1). In illustrating, I will limit myself to the five major plays, excluding *Leshii* and all the one-acters.

We must begin with the blunders.

1. In *Ivanov*, Anna asks Dr. Lvov, who has just told her that his father is dead but his mother alive, “*Vy skuchaete po materi?*” [Do you miss your mother?]. LS renders this “Does it bore you when your mother's around?” (p. 471), which of course would be appallingly insensitive, intrusive, and out of character for Anna.

2. In *The Sea Gull*, Sorin says to Masha, “Would you kindly ask your dad to have the dog chained up, the way it howls” (p. 744). The original says “*otviazat' sobaku*,” i.e., untie it. There is nothing about chains and certainly no reason to think that a chained dog is less likely to howl than a free one. The odd thing is that later in the play LS has *otviazat'* nearly right, as “unchained” (p. 759).

3. Also in *The Sea Gull*, a point that may seem minor but to me has great significance. We are given very little information about Gavriil Treplev, Kostia's father. We know only the invidious passport designation, “*kievskii meshchanin*,” and the fact that he *was* a famous actor. Telling this to his uncle, Kostia puts the acting career in the past tense, “*byl*,” but the “*kievskii meshchanin*” is in the present, the Russian zero present-tense copular verb (“*Moi otets ved' kievskii meshchanin*”). This present tense suggests that Treplev *père* is still alive, making his apparently total abandonment of this son all the more hurtful. LS, however, has inserted a “was” into this sentence (p. 748), implying that the father is dead. His absence from his son's life is thus only an accident of fate, not a conscious act.¹

¹ In a personal communication my friend and colleague Harai Golomb, along with other useful suggestions for this review, has offered a comment on this point which I consider so acute that it must be quoted here. “[T]his is a tricky point in interpretation, and it seems to me a rare case of authorial carelessness, even irresponsibility, in Chekhov, who hardly ever leaves loose ends untied. [...] [T]hat Gavriil fellow is literarily and dramatically mistreated, or at least neglected. If Chekhov had lived up to his own high standards of authorial precision, he would either have killed Gavriil off when Kostia was a child, or said MORE about him, developing his potential as a character. It is unconvincing that a live father should be so much ignored by everyone, so perhaps he IS dead, and the present tense here is either careless on Chekhov's part, or an indication that he is emotionally alive when Kostia mentions him in connection with his passport, which lives on through his son, more than when he refers to him in the past tense as an actor. At any rate, Gavriil's (non)existence is not one of Chekhov's achievements in this play. Nina's father, even her stepmother, and Masha's 'father complex,' oscillating as she does between Shamraev and Dorn [...] get more authorial attention than the man who is presumably central enough to be Arkadina's ex-husband and Kostia's father (compare Ranevskaia's reference to her dead ex, which is so brief and yet so telling!). In

4. In *Uncle Vania*, (p. 854), in the climactic confrontation between Astrov and Elena, the stage direction says, under Elena Andreevna, "*kladët Astrovu golovu na grud'.*" In his translation LS has the wrong head on the wrong breast: "Puts Astrov's head on her chest."
5. Early in *The Cherry Orchard* Lopakhin recollects the comforting speech addressed to him by Ranevskaia years before, when he was a boy and his drunken father had bloodied his nose. She used the stock formula, "*Ne plach', muzhichhok, do svad'by zazhivët*" [Don't cry, little peasant, it will heal before your wedding]. LS has apparently misread *zazhivët* as *zazhivësh'*, the latter misunderstood, and translates, "You'll live long enough to get married."
6. A little further Duniasha's suitor, the accident-prone Epikhodov, knocks over a chair during a very marked exit. Duniasha then confides to Lopakhin that Epikhodov has proposed to her, a revelation that draws from Lopakhin only an ambiguous "Ah!". In LS's edition, no doubt through an uncorrected printer's error, this "Ah!" is assigned to a miraculously reappeared Epikhodov (p.983, who thus would have overheard her revelation).

These are all examples of what I consider Category 1 errors. I repeat, I did not find a lot of them, but they are nevertheless serious flaws. Limitations of space likewise necessitate including only a few examples of Category 2 errors, passages that are rendered correctly in sense, but seem out of tune in context.

1. In *The Sea Gull*, Shamraev refuses to supply horses to take Arkadina to the station. When she makes a scene, he angrily affects to resign his position as manager of the Sorin estate and stalks off. Sorin, the owner, who could simply order the horses provided or accept Shamraev's resignation, is much too timid to do anything so decisive. Out of Shamraev's hearing he shouts, "Unbearable man! Despot!" but then says, "*Da, da, èto uzhasno... No on ne uidët, ia seichas pogovoriu s nim*" [He won't leave, I'll have a talk with him.]. LS, however, has rendered the last phrase, "I'll give him a talking-to," i.e., scold him, have it out with him. But such an interjection is out of character for the spineless Sorin, who is afraid of Shamraev and allows him to consume his, Sorin's, entire pension on various chimerical schemes for improving the estate.

2. One brief, but squeaky, discordant bit from *The Three Sisters*. Irina responds irritably to a barrage of questions from Kulygin, "*Ne zadavaite voprosov... Ia ustala.*" To this Kulygin replies, "*Nu, kapriznitsa. . .*" which LS renders, "My, what a scatterbrain!" (p. 923). 'Scatterbrain' seems to me quite the wrong word. Kulygin is faulting her mood, not her intelligence. A better rendition would be, "How touchy (or grumpy) you are!"

3. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Duniasha reports to Ania that Petia Trofimov has arrived and is sleeping in the bathhouse. Referring to Petia, a gentleman (however down-at-the-heels), the servant Duniasha uses the deferential/obsequious third person plural: "*V bane spiat, tam i zhivut.*" LS renders this "The gent's sleeping in the bathhouse, the gent's staying there" (p. 985). One recognizes an attempt to echo Duniasha's language, but those "gents" seem to me exactly wrong—both disrespectful and vulgar, reminding me of the "Gents" signs on toilet doors in low-class bars.

So much for complaints. Let me repeat, however, that the vast bulk, probably 90% of the translated text, falls in Category 3, i.e., satisfactory renditions that fully convey the sense and as nearly as possible the tone and overtones of the utterance. I therefore turn with more pleasure to celebrate some of the translation's exceptional successes. I by no means claim that the following list is complete; it is only a sampling.

LS is particularly good at rhymes and jingles. In *Ivanov*, Shabel'skii's formula, "*Zhid kreshchënyi, vor proshchënyi, kon' lechënyi—odna tsena*" is deftly conveyed, "A kike baptized, a thief unchastised, a horse hospitalized are not to be prized" (p. 465). In the same play, Lebedev evokes the

short, since Chekhov probably never thought it through, he may even be indebted to LS for making Gavriil's too scant presence more plausible by killing him 'in the shell,' (as Brutus says in *Julius Caesar*).

famous drinker's quotation from Davydov: "Zhomini da Zhomini, a ob vodke ni polslova." LS makes this, "Only warlike talk is heard, but as for vodka, not a word" (p. 494).

In *Uncle Vania* LS is quite right to inveigh against translators who render Serebriakov's cliché formula, "nado delo delat'" as "one must work." The phrase carries a heavy connotational baggage impossible to convey succinctly in English. LS's solution, "One must take action," is certainly better, and his footnote (p.826) offers still better alternatives: "One must do something," "be active, committed," "get involved."

Finally, I learned from LS's commentary that the word "nedotëpa," Firs's tag epithet in *The Cherry Orchard*, is not to be found in any Russian dictionary before the late 1930s. When it does appear, the only examples are Firs's speeches from Chekhov. LS says that the word was originally Ukrainian for "an incompetent, a mental defective" (p. 988n) and mocks the efforts of prior translators who "grow gray over the word." LS's solution "half-baked bungler" at least conveys the notion of incompleteness. (Etymologically, the word is presumably derived from *tepti* or *teti*, "to strike," thus *nedotëpa*, "incompletely struck.") A one-word equivalent would doubtless be preferable, but despite my abundant gray (even white!) hairs, I can't think of anything better than "whippersnapper."

In conclusion let me commend Professor Senelick for completing this enormous task. It may have been a labor of love, but it must have taken at least "five poods" of that scarce commodity. In the essays and commentaries he has brought to bear his massive erudition in the drama and his long years of experience with editions and productions of Chekhov's plays. In the translations he has tried to render the original Russian as accurately as he could into English that sounds as natural and spontaneous as he could make it. It is to be hoped that his versions will help both readers and performers to experience the great Chekhov plays in all their subtlety, depth and beauty.

**Michael C. Finke. *Seeing Chekhov: Life and Art.*
Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2005. 237pp.**

**Reviewed by
Jerome H. Katsell**

"All great writers have good eyes..."
Vladimir Nabokov

An intense, highly informed and non-dogmatic search for the keys to Chekhov's art and personality characterize Michael Finke's new book. He defines "seeing" quite broadly as "seeing, being seen, hiding and showing," and makes good use of this polyvalent concept complex to deeply explore Chekhov the man and his art. A signal distinction is drawn between Chekhov the more comfortable, hidden, prose writer, secreting his essential self behind a narrative voice, and the dramatist, pulled willy-nilly into the play, into the very theatre that "draws attention to and makes a spectacle of the author..." (25). The story "Rasskaz neizvestnogo cheloveka" is fore-grounded as a narrative that quintessentially expresses the broad range of seeing in Chekhov: anonymity, pseudonymity, professional (mis)identity, health/degeneration and illness, the voyeur and eroticism, the seeing and not being seen involved in reading and writing.

Structurally, *Seeing Chekhov* consists of an overarching introduction followed by four chapters that: 1) elaborate a Chekhov who remained mostly unseen to those closest to him and the public while managing the visibility of an ever-more-famous story writer and dramatist; 2) explore

psychoanalytically Chekhov's scopophilia, scopophobia, and exhibitionism; 3) ponder where science fits into Chekhov's elaboration of the self and the understanding of the other; and 4) define the place of myth and the erotic in Chekhov's oeuvre. A concluding chapter delves illuminatingly into the prosaic world of Chekhov's "White Dacha," his Yalta home (really more of a privately owned residence, an *osobniak*) and the space and the objects with which he surrounded himself. Finally, we are led right into the Badenweiler hotel room where Chekhov died, and then to a reading of his body and the cultural discourses that assigned meaning to it. Chekhov may never have had quite such a penetrating gaze directed *autour de sa personne*.

Central to Chapter 1, "To Be Seen or Not to Be Seen," is the story "At Sea," ("V more"), upon which is performed a psychoanalytic reading. Published several times, first in 1883 and with a final revision in 1901, "At Sea" is the first printed story signed *Anton Chekhov* at the author's insistence. Finke finds good cause for this authorial departure by the young Chekhov in that the story may be interpreted as depicting "a son overtaking the father..." (47). The story highlights a father-son pair of would-be scopophilic sailor voyeurs who have won a drawing to secretly observe the honeymoon night of upper class newlyweds, a pastor and his bride, traveling on their ship. "At Sea" is found to be "so laden and ready to burst with motifs of Oedipal strivings" that Dr. Chekhov appears to have anticipated Dr. Freud's "first public discussion of Oedipus and Prince Hamlet in *The Interpretation of Dreams...*" (44).

While the story in the son's first-person narrative certainly portrays peeping on the pastor who shockingly pimps his new bride to a fellow passenger, a banker, it also, I believe significantly, focuses on other senses besides the ocular. Finke quotes a key passage: "I felt out my aperture ("svoe otverstie") and extracted the rectangular piece of wood I had whittled for so long. And I saw a thin, transparent muslin, through which a soft, pink light penetrated to me. And together with the light there touched my burning face a suffocating, most pleasant odor, this had to be the odor of an aristocratic bedroom. In order to see the bedroom, it was necessary to spread the muslin apart with two fingers, which I hurried to do" (45). Here we have the touch, heat, and smell that are necessary adjuncts to the seeing in a passage that suggests a penis's eye view of a virgin about to be deflowered. In "At Sea," seeing itself is accompanied by sensations such as pressure, fear, tachycardia, burning, scalding and tearing: "*Ia plotnee prizhal grud' k stene, kak by boias', chtoby ne vyskochilo serdtse. Golova moia gorela. ... ia pozhiral glazami ee litso. ... Ia otskochil ot steny, kak uzhalennyi. ... Mne pokazalos', chto veter razorval nash parokhod na chasti*" (*Sob. soch. v 12-ti tomakh*, M., 1960, p. 95). The heavy clouds over the sea at the story's beginning that discharge their watery burden over the sea at the story's end seem to parallel what is going on below decks: "...uzhe shël nastoiashchii osennii dozhd'" (95).

Chapter 2, "Looking the Part" has much to do with the "vicissitudes of seeing and professional identity" of doctors (53). On this point Finke recruits to good effect Veresaev's *Memoirs of a Physician* (*Zapiski vracha*, 1901) and Bulgakov's *Notes of a Young Physician* (*Zapiski iunogo vracha*, 1926-27), demonstrating the centrality in those works of seeing and being seen, hiding and showing. But the most interesting reading in this section deals with the story "The Mirror" ("Zerkalo"), 1885. The heroine, Nelli, who sits before her mirror, holding a mirror, herself motionless like a mirror, divines her future as she drops off into a dream state, seeing in the mirror her future life with her husband, who is gravely ill with typhus, and children—she will have five or six "chubby babes," one of whom will "most likely" die (*Sob.*, 403). In her dream Nelli fetches the district doctor, Stepan Lukich, who is himself exhausted and suffering from typhus, and hectors him, including a threat of legal action, into accompanying her forty versts to the bedside of her husband.

Finke sees a "biographical context" to the story. Chekhov had recently lost two Ivanov sisters under his care to typhus, was by late 1885 clearly ill himself with tuberculosis, and must have been contemplating his future as a doctor and husband because of his engagement to Dun'ia Efros. For Finke Nelli's divination in her mirror puts her in the role of a mirror for the reader, or as "Charles

Isenberg reminds us ... frame tales are always implicitly metaliterary and mirroring in that they thematize the situation of narrative transmission" (85). Following Radislav Lapushin, Finke interprets the doctor and the sick husband not only as doubles of each other, but as a shadowy appearance of Chekhov in these characters. "If Chekhov is visible in this story, it is because he simultaneously stimulates the desire to see him (he has seduced us into reading), acknowledges it, and flees from it into that space beyond the mirror's surface. You can have it all, Chekhov says, but in the end all you get is the ending: death" (86). Seeing finds its double—impenetrable, chilling darkness, the absence of seeing: "*Nad zemlëi visit t'ma: zgi ne vidno . . . Duet kholodnyi zimmii veter*" (*Sob.*, 403).

The idea of a mirror in the text (*mise en abyme*), representing Chekhov's own narrative, is continued in the final chapters ("Self and Others Through the Lens of Science," and "Erotic and Mythic Visions"), along with a number of other themes and insights. Thus, "Three Years," through Iuliia's experience of a Levitan-like painting, where she imagines herself entering the painting and walking over a wooden bridge into an eternal landscape, is read as "a desire on Chekhov's part to draw readers into the inner worlds of his characters, . . . [by] rendering, rather than realistic indications of three years' passage, the lived experience of time" (133). Particularly insightful into Chekhov's psyche are the pages in *Seeing Chekhov* dealing with his relationships to Dun'ia Efros and Olga Knipper (especially, 149-152). Finke convincingly demonstrates Chekhov's fears of becoming a Jew if he married Efros without her conversion to Orthodoxy, and his retrospective application of traits associated with Efros to Olga Knipper when he later married. Chekhov's vision of hell is equally well portrayed in Finke's description (155-171) of the descent of the hero theme (katabasis) in *Sakhalin Island* (*Ostrov Sakhalin*) and several key plays and stories such as *Wood Demon* (*Leshii*, 1889), "Ariadne," (1895) and "A Doctor's Visit," ("Sluchai iz praktiki," 1898).

The "Conclusion" concerns the prosaics of Chekhov's world in his last years in Yalta. It deals with "the things he kept around him, the objects that he arrayed in the threshold space between himself and the outside world" (172). Chekhov's "White Dacha" became a major undertaking in which he participated closely. Finke posits a symbolic dimension to the physical space of Chekhov's home. The house commanded the heights above Yalta, in contrast to the near-shore home built by his father, Pavel Egorovich, which miraculously escaped the shelling of Taganrog by the English in 1854. In addition to its elevation, Chekhov's house was on the periphery of the town, and, once landscaping appeared, it was somewhat obscured from the roadway and Yalta below. In this Finke discerns "a wish to position oneself in a particular way in regard to one's own gaze and that of others . . ." (177). While Chekhov very much tried to hide himself from the public, his Yalta study "showed visitors—and *himself*—who he was, where he had been, what he had done" (180). Artifacts included diagnostic medical instruments, part of what Finke identifies as Chekhov's professional gaze. Also present are "instruments for sounding and listening—precisely those that would be of greatest service in diagnosing Chekhov's own illness, tuberculosis" (186).

Finke postulates Chekhov's sartorial meticulousness as a strategy for rendering his body unreadable, "for obscuring telltale signs of the degenerate patient masquerading as a physician" (195). Like seeing and being seen, with respect to his illness Chekhov practiced what Finke calls "a kind of double consciousness or self-deception . . . , a simultaneous—or at times serial—knowing and not knowing" (197). After a major set of hemorrhages in March 1897, no amount of well turned-out clothes could hide the fact of Chekhov's ill body. Finke concludes that "Chekhov struggled hard to deny the metaphoricity of his disease, and his self was defined not by the disease but by the struggle" (200). Such a struggle, implicating not only seeing, being seen, hiding and showing, but also hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting, spitting, touching and sensing outwardly and simultaneously with one's inner being, characterizes not only Chekhov but his art at its best.

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The North American Chekhov Society Annual Report for the year 2005

The Inaugural NACS AATSEEL panel and annual meeting took place at the AATSEEL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. on December 29, 2005, with Professor Robert Louis Jackson presiding. Three papers addressing Chekhov's prose (Radislaw Lapushin), drama (Yanina Arnold), and letters (Carol Apollonio Flath) were presented.

The NACS Constitution was approved by unanimous vote of members present.

Attendees of the panel, as well as the other Chekhov-themed panel, which took place on December 30, were provided with membership forms for NACS and copies of the NACS Bulletin. These materials were also made available to conference participants in the publishers' exhibition room. NACS membership now stands at roughly 85 members and some 15 Russian scholars, from whom dues have never been required. Annual membership dues remain \$10, which covers the production of the NACS *Bulletin* and other expenses related to conferences. Annual renewals are due on Chekhov's birthday—old or new style, January 16 or January 28, 2006.

On behalf of NACS, Professor Jackson and Radislaw Lapushin eulogized the great scholar Alexander Chudakov, whose tragic loss this fall has affected all of us deeply. Led by Cathy Popkin, Radislaw Lapushin, and Michael Finke, the NACS organized a fund drive to cover the costs of a gravestone in Moscow. As of the end of 2005, NACS had gathered \$975, which Cathy Popkin will arrange to be sent to Professor Chudakov's widow with our condolences.

Professor Jackson aired a proposal to consider ways to celebrate the upcoming sesquicentennial of Chekhov's birth, which will take place in just four years (2010). The NACS will consider potential locales and sources of funding for a commemorative conference.

Other issues discussed included the possibility of expanding the NACS Bulletin and membership recruitment, the establishment of a NACS website, the extension of Ralph Lindheim's tenure as editor of *The Bulletin*, and the organization of a Chekhov panel for next year's AATSEEL Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.

respectfully submitted,

Carol Apollonio Flath
January 10, 2006

