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Conference Announcement

Chekhov on Stage and Page

Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

December 2-4, 2010

In honor of the 150th anniversary of Anton Chekhov's birth, the Slavic Department at Ohio State University, in conjunction with the North American Chekhov Society, announce an international conference devoted to Chekhov's work.

We welcome proposals for panels and individual papers as well as staged scenes and short plays from US, Canadian, and European scholars, writers and actors. Topics suggested so far include Chekhov and American Fiction (Lyudmila Parts, McGill University), Chekhov on the Pages of His Biographers (Galina Rylkova, University of Florida), and "Writing under the Influence of Chekhov" (Michelle Herman, OSU MFA program). Cinematic stagings of Chekhov (Maria Ignatieva, OSU) as well as interpretations in opera and ballet could be explored.

Please contact Profs. Angela Brintlinger and Irene Masing-Delic, Ohio State University (brintlinger.3@osu.edu and delic.1@osu.edu) or the NACS board, with your ideas and thoughts. The sooner the program begins to take shape, the sooner we will be able to apply for funding.

Editor's Note

This issue features two essays: one on "Poprygun'ia" and the other on *Ivanov*. Carol Apollonio (Duke University) offers a more complex reading of Chekhov's story, an interpretation that was first explored in a paper that Carol read at the Chekhov Centennial Conference at Melikhovo in 2004. Then, John McKellor Reid, who is Principal Lecturer in Drama in the School of English and Drama of the University of the West of England, provides a perspective on Chekhov's play that differs from the angle taken by Bradley Lewis in *The Bulletin* two issues ago. John's essay is reprinted with the permission of *Modern Drama*, which first published it in its Spring 2006 issue, and of the Edwin Mellen Press, which published John's book, *The Polemical Force of Chekhovian Comedies: A Rhetorical Analysis*, in 2007.

A review of a recent collection of articles follows as well as a select bibliography of books and articles on Chekhov published in the last two years.

Finally, for those who have not yet heard of the deteriorating condition of the Chekhov Museum in Yalta, I should like to refer you to the English website, www.yaltachekhov.org, set up by Rosamund Bartlett, Elena Michajlowska, and Alexander Walsh. The site explains in detail the problems of the museum and the campaign on its behalf. Donations are also accepted on the site.

Scenic Storytelling in Chekhov's "Grasshopper"

Carol Apollonio
Duke University

The 1892 story "*Poprygun'ia*", most commonly known in English as "The Grasshopper," is one of the most autobiographical of Chekhov's works.[1] In spite of the author's protestations to the contrary, the reading public and Chekhov's own friends recognized the prototypes of its characters in the painter Isaak Levitan and the artistic dilettante and salon hostess Sofia Kuvshinnikova, as well as in a number of other members of their circle. The details of Kuvshinnikova's marriage, her activities in the art world, and her affair with the painter figure prominently in the story. The story's publication led to a scandal in Moscow's literary and artistic world and a public and painful rift between the author and those of his acquaintance who identified themselves as caricatured protagonists. This episode has been addressed in every biographical study, and the evidence does not need to be reproduced here. But the story's origins make it an excellent potential source for insights about the creative process, both in general and in the particular case of Chekhov.

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[1] See the editors' notes to the story in Volume 8 of Chekhov's collected works, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem, Sochineniia* (Moskva: Nauka, 1977), t. 8, pp. 429-33, and Chudakov, "Poètika i prototipy".

It is remarkable that a story distinguished by its *correspondence to real life*—with all its complexity and abundance of fine details—should take the form of *a fable*, which is, after all, one of the simplest and most schematic of literary forms. Somehow Chekhov managed to make his heroine recognizable both as an individual and as the protagonist of Krylov's famous fable about the dragonfly (a.k.a. grasshopper)[2] and the ant. The grasshopper sings and dances all summer while the ant toils in preparation for the winter. When winter comes, the grasshopper, naturally, is left out in the cold. In Chekhov's story Olga is the frivolous grasshopper, and her husband, the gentle, hardworking and gifted doctor Dymov, is the ant. This literary relationship between story and fable is as well documented in the criticism as the story's origins in the Kuvshinnikova-Levitan love affair. It is immediately recognizable to the Russian reader in spite of the fact that the plots of the two works lead to very different outcomes: in Chekhov's story the ant dies, and the grasshopper lives to tell (or recall) the tale; in the fable it is the ant who will reap the fruits of his summer's labor.

Chekhov chose to combine obviously real-life material with a primitive literary model. It is in the nature of a fable to offer a moral message, and indeed, the external details of the story seem to offer readers a simple, obvious lesson affirming good and condemning evil. Diligence is rewarded, and betrayal condemned. A superficial reading of the story identifies Olga as a flawed character whose frivolity and self-centeredness leads her into sin. For readers inclined to taxonomy, she exemplifies a prominent Chekhovian type, identified by the late Thomas Winner as the "narcissistic and beguiling woman, who deceives herself as well as others."[3] The prominence of this type in Chekhov's work has naturally brought on frequent charges of misogyny, and the temptation to simplify the gender issues has brought down many good critics.[4] On a more subtle level, given the fact that Olga is a would-be artist and her lover is a painter, the story can be read as a condemnation of artistic activity—which like Olga herself is superficial and concerned only with surfaces—as opposed to medicine, which gets to the essence of things. The surface simplicity—fabular and factual—of "The Grasshopper," with these schematic oppositions between good and evil, works against an interpretation of the story as an example of literary realism.[5] The point is well taken; on the other hand, the accusation of misogyny is in itself a reduction of artistic complexity to a superficial political message. And given the centrality in fable of the moral, it is significant, not to mention puzzling, that, though diligence is to be rewarded and art punished, it is *Dymov* who dies.

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[2] The word itself, the feminine version of "попрыгунь," calls to mind a number of insects. It translates variously as "fidget," "flibbertigibbet," or more literally, "scamperer." The heroine of Krylov's fable is "Попрыгунья Стрекоза" (Scamperer-Dragonfly). Chekhov's title is translated into English variously as "The Grasshopper" (Garnett and Magarshack), "The Butterfly" (Hingley), and "The Fidget" (Pevear-Volokhonsky). For simplicity, I retain the "grasshopper" of the most prominent translations and of the English versions of Aesop's fable.

In one of the finest interpretations of "The Grasshopper," George Pahomov traces the doctor's simple virtues of industriousness and self-sacrifice to specific antecedents in Russian hagiography. The polarities of good and evil remain identified with the specific characters, as in the fable, but Dymov is no longer a simple front man for goodness. Rather, he is a *complex* front man for goodness. Juxtaposed with his frivolous, sinful wife, he represents a "subtle, passively affirmative repository of the traits that the foregrounded [and morally condemned] figure lacks" (34). Patient, tolerant, forgiving, and nurturing, Pahomov's Dymov continues the self-sacrificing tradition of the Russian saints into a secular age.

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[3] Winner, p. 69.

[4] For example, in a chapter of her book *Anton Chekhov and the Lady with the Dog* entitled "Misogyny," Virginia Llewellyn Smith writes that in spite of some "rather sickening" aspects in Dymov's character, "'The Butterfly' remains a damning indictment of woman's triviality." (pp. 19-20).

[5] For Donald Rayfield, for example, the story is "marred by Tolstoyan defects in its overall scheme […]; black is jet-black and white is snow-white. […] 'The Grasshopper' reflects too well Chekhov's intermittent misogyny and his distrust of aesthetes."

In an equally subtle psychological interpretation, Douglas Clayton highlights the moral ambiguity and sense of balance that is so central to Chekhov's poetics. Examining the story's narrative structure, Clayton concludes that Olga is no guiltier than Dymov himself. "It is a story of two characters who are dependent on one another in an almost infantile way, and yet are unable to establish any real contact with each other and so become concerned instead with maintaining appearances." The simple moral message gives way to a complex artistic "vision that accounts for all the complexity of life and refuses to force reality into a procrustean bed of preconceptions."[6]

These superb interpretations respect the subtlety of Chekhov's reworking of the fable using modern material and make it impossible to return to a reading of the story as a mere transcription of everyday facts. Still, it would be folly to take Chekhov at his word when he denies the real-life background. Artists use the material at hand, and Chekhov was no exception. The solution is to treat this level of interpretation as a mere step along the way to a deeper understanding of the story as art. If "The Grasshopper" is a grafting of fable onto real life, then the question of how real life becomes art becomes central. "The Grasshopper" can, and will, be read as an allegory for the artistic process itself.

It seems counterintuitive to apply the primitive term "allegory" to Chekhov's complex narrative poetics. Nevertheless, a remarkable number of his works are strongly allegorical in nature. Characters whose wealth of physical attributes anchor them securely in the material world serve as repositories for particular values. So, for example: "A Nervous Attack" ("Припадок," 1888) can be read as an encounter of forces representing Art, Medicine, and Law; *Uncle Vanya* (*Дядя Ваня,* (1890-96): Art, Idleness, and Work (or Criticism and Art); "The Bishop" ("Архиерей," 1902): Institutional Religion and Spirit; "House with a Mezzanine" ("Дом с мезонином," 1896): Visual and Narrative Art[7]; *The Cherry Orchard*: (*Вишневый сад*, 1903-4): Love and Work; and so on. Chekhov makes it easy to propose such interpretations by giving his characters suggestive names (*Liubov'* [love] Ranevskaia; Elena (Helen of Troy; "*len'*"[idleness]), or by identifying them more by profession than by name, as in "A Nervous Attack," where the protagonist's brothel-crawling companions are identified by their academic areas of concentration: "the artist" and "the medic." Certain patterns emerge. Science is diligent; Art is lazy. Idleness is beautiful; Work is ugly. Love and Marriage can never occupy the same space. Practicality kills Love. What is interesting here is that all of these values are strongly represented in the author's own life. This of course will be true of any artist who writes about his own profession (and it is possible to argue that all art can be interpreted as being about itself[8]). But in Chekhov's case the clues are repeated too often, and they correspond to his own extra-artistic life too closely to be ignored. "The Grasshopper" features a marriage between a doctor (and academic) [Medicine and Science] and a dilettante artist who is having an affair with a painter [Art] and whose circle of friends includes representatives of all the arts: Music, Theater, Literature. . . . Chekhov was a doctor, a scholar, and a writer whose circle of artistic friends is duplicated in the story. The characters of the story are Chekhov himself, and "The Grasshopper" tells the story of its own creation.

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[6] Clayton p. 603.

[7] See my "Art and Idleness: Chekhov's 'The House with a Mezzanine'," *Russian_Review* (July, 1999): 456-66.

One of Chekhov's master metaphors is that of the "shell." It appears in many stories, and figures as the central image in the famous "Man in the Shell" («Человек в футляре», 1898). The secret, inner truth of each individual is inaccessible to others, masked as it is by external appearances. In most of Chekhov's work, the gap between interior and exterior is shown to be unbridgeable. Only in "Lady with the Dog" (1899)—justifiably his most famous prose work—does Chekhov allow the inner life of two characters to achieve real, meaningful contact, in spite of, or indeed perhaps because of, the external shells—the physical distance, the moral strictures, the limits of language and convention—dividing them. In addition to its thematic function within his works, the metaphor of the shell applies on a higher level of abstraction as well. For the creative process entails enclosure—or veiling—of life essence in the tangible shell of artistic form. Visual art would of course be the most obvious example of this process. As we shall see, Chekhov subtly manipulates the means available in narrative—setting, point of view and plot—to communicate this message.

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[8] Maureen Quilligan's argument for a generic definition of allegory reacts against this all-inclusive approach (p. 15), but it is true that all literary art can be seen as programmed for allegorical interpretation. See Frye, p. 89.

"The Grasshopper" depicts the activity not of writers, but of painters, as they transform life into art. A Bohemian salon, the summer camp-workshop of itinerant painters, an artist's studio—such are the backdrops for Olga's story. Chekhov's heroine herself is associated with perception and appearance; she is all exterior and marked by leitmotifs of clothing, decoration, and visual art. Her husband Dymov, the doctor, represents the true inner essence of human life, the body underneath the clothing, the body that needs to be studied, nurtured and cured. The human shell layers itself outwards, metonymically, from the body. Thus the decorations of Olga's apartment represent simply another, more exterior shell, a projection of her soul, a shell which expands to the exterior landscape of her summer travels. Olga's habitat and itinerary (her city home, her dacha, her trip down the Volga) serve as the story's visible stage. As the plot moves forward, the stage shifts, but retains its distinguishing features.

The doctor's work takes him *in the other direction*, into the body. In addition to his therapeutic work as a healer, he carries out research, probes into the bodies of sick people, and performs autopsies. We do not see his patients, and in fact the line between live and dead patients is not clearly drawn. For example, presumably both living and dead patients provide data for Dr. Dymov's medical discoveries, and he shares fluids with patients in both states—saliva from the boy with diphtheria, blood from a cadaver. As his colleague Korostelëv reports in what is essentially the punch line of the story, his research leads to significant breakthroughs in the field of medical knowledge. In contrast to Olga, Dymov's field of activity is offstage. He works elsewhere, in places *invisible and inaccessible* to the reader.

Olga's summer journey into the countryside and back serves as the basic plotline. She accompanies a group of artists on a painting expedition down the Volga River.[9] But there is a queasy circularity to her plot. Chekhov creates a subtle sense of *déjà vu* by repeating key elements in the succession of settings he creates for Olga's story. Olga's apartment in the city reflects her sense of the picturesque and her yearning for the Russian countryside—conventionally representing "real life:"

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[9] Such journeys down the Volga were part of a creation of a specifically Russian view of the "picturesque" in the latter half of the nineteenth century. See Ely's fascinating article for a detailed discussion, including the role played by landscape artists in this movement.

> Ольга Ивановна в гостиной увешала все стены сплошь своими и чужими этюдами в рамах и без рам, а около рояля и мебели устроила красивую тесноту из китайских зонтов, мольбертов, разноцветных тряпочек, кинжалов, бюстиков, фотографий… В столовой она оклеила стены лубочными картинами, повесила лапти и серпы, поставила в углу косу и грабли, и получилась столовая в русском вкусе. В спальне она, чтобы похоже было на пещеру, задрапировала потолок и стены темным сукном, повесила над кроватями венецианский фонарь, а у дверей поставила фигуру с алебардой[10] (PSS 8: 9).

> She completely covered the walls in the drawing room with sketches, her own and others', framed and without frames, and she cluttered the area around the piano and furniture with objects: Chinese parasols, easels, various-colored rags, daggers, busts, photographs… She papered the walls of the dining room with cheap peasant prints, hung bast sandals and sickles on the walls, stood a scythe and a rake in the corner, and the result was a Russian folk-style dining room. She draped the ceiling and walls in the bedroom with dark cloth to make it look like a cave, hung a Venetian lamp over the beds, and placed a statuette with a halberd by the door.

The framing of the images and artifacts heightens the sense of their artificiality in this urban setting. Given the strong metonymic link to the hostess, the reader immediately judges Olga herself as trivial and superficial in her preoccupations. But the element of "artfulness" [искуственность], which dominates here, will gain profundity as the reader accompanies Olga out into the countryside, to the places where these objects originated. Her journey is not a mere summer romance; rather it is the story of the origins of art. The reader next views her through the eyes of her husband, who comes to see her at their dacha outside of town:

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[10] All citations from the story come from *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, Vol. 8. Henceforth page numbers are given parenthetically in the text.

> На даче, очень неприглядной на вид, с низкими потолками, оклеенными писчею бумагой, и с неровными щелистыми полами, было только три комнаты. В одной стояла кровать, в другой на стульях и окнах валялись холсты, кисти, засаленная бумага и мужские пальто и шляпы, а в третьей Дымов застал трех каких-то незнакомых мужчин (13).

> The dacha, which was quite unappealing in appearance, with its low ceilings and its walls covered with writing paper, and with its uneven, drafty floors, had only three rooms. The bed was in one of them; another was littered with canvases, paintbrushes, soiled paper and men's coats and hats; and in the third Dymov came upon three men who were strangers to him.

The details echo the décor in Olga's apartment, but are now "real." The dacha is an intermediate space, between city and country. Here the tools for the creation of art are the center of attention, and the dwelling, the shell separating and protecting its inhabitants from the elements, is unstable and porous. The shift in point of view is significant, for generally Olga's perspective has dominated in the story up until this point. Dymov has moved out of the secure domestic space of his married life, with its tame, shrunken decorative objects, into an uneasy, transitional location. From the husband's increasingly alienated perspective, human beings—his wife's artistic friends—are themselves objectified.

The settings continue to reinforce the emotional distancing. Olga's artistic journey leads her farther into the Russian countryside, to a painters' hut along the Volga. She has now physically entered the world that she had attempted to duplicate in the décor of her city apartment. Whereas before flat, visual, picturesque elements dominated, now the olfactory and tactile senses are put to work:

> В избу вошла баба и стала не спеша топить печь, чтобы готовить обед. Запахло гарью, и воздух посинел от дыма. Приходили художники в высоких грязных сапогах и с мокрыми от дождя лицами, рассматривали этюды и

> говорили себе в утешение, что Волга даже в дурную погоду имеет свою прелесть. А дешевые часы на стенке: тик-тик-тик... Озябшие мухи столпились в переднем углу около образов и жужжат, и слышно, как под лавками в толстых папках возятся прусаки …(19).

> The peasant woman entered the hut and lackadaisically began to light the stove for dinner. There came a burning smell, and the air turned blue with smoke. The artists entered in their filthy, high-topped boots, with their faces wet from the rain, looked over their sketches and comforted themselves by saying that even in bad weather the Volga had its charms. And the cheap clock on the wall went tick-tick-tick... Flies, suffering from the cold, crowded together in the corner near the icons, buzzing, and cockroaches rustled loudly in the thick portfolios under the benches.

It is hard to breathe. Chekhov’s air is stuffy, smoky, smelly, and damp all at the same time. The only thing that remains of the city is the faint lexical ghost of Olga’s husband in the blue smoke (*dym*—Dymov) that fills the room. There is no trace of art—not in frames or in the tools of the artists— just the assault of raw, unmediated material reality on the senses. Instead of her husband, it is the peasant woman who brings the food, and she brings it not to Olga, but to Riabovskii, and peasant dirt pollutes the food:

> В это время баба осторожно несла ему в обеих руках тарелку со щами, и Ольга Ивановна видела, как она обмочила во щах свои большие пальцы. И грязная баба с перетянутым животом, и щи, которые стал жадно есть Рябовский, и изба, и вся эта жизнь, которую вначале она так любила за простоту и художественный беспорядок, показалась ей теперь ужасными (19-20).

> Then the peasant woman brought him a plate of cabbage soup, carrying it carefully with both hands, and Olga Ivanovna saw both thumbs immersed in the soup. And the filthy woman with her cross-belted belly and the soup, which

> Riabovskii started wolfing down, and the hut, and this entire life, which she had loved so much at first for its simplicity and artistic disorder, now seemed terrible to her.

In all three scenes, the basic props—peasant implements, artists and their sketches, paintbrushes, artistic clutter, the smell of cooking—have not changed. But everything is different now. The change in setting reflects a change in Olga's consciousness, and on a deeper level, a movement into the depth of things under the visual surface.

Chekhov's manipulation of setting is truly remarkable, and utterly appropriate for his message. The succession of scenes tells its own story—a story about the creation of visual art, the movement from art to material reality and, ultimately, back again (as the narrative genre permits, back again with *wisdom*)—in tandem with the sordid romance on the story's surface. The theme of artistic inspiration and the hard work of creation is inextricably bound up in the story of a marriage, and here, too, the scenery reinforces the plot elements. Point of view is fluid. The plot progresses through a set of permutations of a single image of a wedding, presented in turn literally, symbolically, and ironically, with the heroine at the center both of the narrative itself and of each scenic image. As we shall see, Chekhov uses these staged pictures ultimately to subvert them and to reassert the power of narrative art.

We first see Olga—from outside—costumed in her wedding dress: [a]Артист говорил Ольге Ивановне, что со своими льняными волосами и в венчальном наряде она очень похожа на стройное вишневое деревцо, когда весною она сплошь бывает покрыто нежными белыми цветами" (8) ("The artist told Olga Ivanovna that with her flaxen hair and in her wedding dress she looked just like a slender cherry tree in the springtime when it is completely covered with tender white blossoms"). Then—out at the dacha—she stages a wedding, just like her own, with the same "shy, bear-like, strong, silent" groom (Dymov, too, is "bear-like"), herself in a pretty dress, and a trip to the newlyweds home after the wedding—all the same ingredients as her own Chapter I wedding, but now staged, fake, all visual, a setting for artists to paint: "Представь, после обедни венчанье, потом из церкви все пешком до квартиры невесты… понимаешь, роща, пение птиц, солнечные пятна на траве и все мы разноцветными пятнами на ярко-зеленом фоне—преоригинально, во вкусе французских экспрессионистов» (14) ("Just picture it, after mass the wedding ceremony, then everyone walks to the bride's apartment…you understand, a grove, birds' singing, patches of sunlight on the grass and all of us different-colored patches on a bright green background—so original, in the style of the French 'expressionists'"). This wedding is a painting dreamed up by Olga herself, a painting of her own wedding. She is in the picture; and her husband serves as a link to the "real world", where dresses and food are kept.

This series of *tableaux vivants* tells the story as powerfully as the surface of the narration does. Olga's artistic journey—her plot—leads to a climax: her seduction by (or of) Riabovskii at what we will assume is the mid-point of the summer (a quiet July night). The setting, too, is a mid-point in the geography: the deck of a steamer on the Volga river, detached from the land—both of the city and of the landscape. It is a point of infinite beauty and promise, in a sublime natural setting, colorful, enigmatic, made for a painter. Perhaps this is the moment when, according to Christopher Ely, the distinctive view of Russian nature became firmly established: "By the 1890s the shift to a scenic representation of the Volga was complete: almost every guidebook represented the river as uniquely Russian, and especially picturesque, natural space" (675). The spirit of Russian nature has entered the world of landscape art. The elements of the wedding scene recur: Olga stands on the deck listening to Riabovskii's seductive words and pictures, and, here she is yet again in her dress, the center of attention: "Когда она, не мигая, долго смортрела вдаль, ей чудились толпы людей, огни, торжественные звуки музыки, крики восторга, сама она в белом платье и цветы, которые сыпались на нее со всех сторон. Думала она также о том, что рядом с нею, облокотившись о борт, стоит настоящий великий человек, гений, божий избранник…" (15) ("When she stared into the distance for a long time without blinking, she seemed to see crowds of people, lights, the sounds of festive music, exclamations of delight, and there she was herself, in a white dress, with flowers sprinkling down on her from all sides. She also thought about the fact that here, next to her, leaning against the railing, stood a genius, a man of true greatness, one of God's chosen"). Olga's dream is truer than she knows; on the surface, the story offers no data to deny that Riabovskii is an artist of genius; and her dream is true on a deeper level, *whether the man is Riabovskii or her husband*. In the former case Olga will have become a *painting*; on exhibit before an adoring crowd with the proud painter standing beside it; on the other, she is a famous man's wife.

Thus this is also the story of the painter's use and abuse, for the purpose of art, of a living, breathing, human being. In September Olga finds herself deposited onshore with the disillusioned, embittered and depressed Riabovskii on *his* territory:

> После чая он, мрачный, сидел у окна и смотрел на Волгу. А Волга уже была без блеска, тусклая, матовая, холодная на вид. Всё, всё напоминало о приближении тоскливой, хмурой осени. И казалось, что роскошные зеленые ковры на берегах, алмазные отражения лучей, прозрачную синюю даль и всё щегольское и парадное природа сняла теперь с Волги и уложила в сундуки до будущей весны, и вороны летали около Волги и дразнили ее: "Голая! голая!" (17)

> After tea, he sat gloomily by the window and looked at the Volga. And the Volga had lost her shine, was now dim, dull, and cold looking. Everything, absolutely everything served as a reminder of the approach of sad, gloomy autumn, and it seemed that nature had stripped the Volga of everything fancy and fashionable--the lush green carpets on the riverbanks, the diamond sparkles reflecting the sun's rays, the blue, limpid sky--and had packed it all away in trunks for next spring, and the crows flew around over the Volga and taunted her/it, "Naked! Naked!"

As in his most memorable works, Chekhov manipulates point of view to masterful effect. We see through the eyes of both the disillusioned artist and his "used" model, with the boundaries between them and the landscape blurred. The auditory elements reinforce the message: Olga *is* the Volga. Both are feminine; both have been the objects of Riabovskii's attention (the aggression of the artist and the lover); both are forlorn, sad, and drab. The Russian pronoun allows an ambiguity that the translator must eliminate; "it" (the Volga) is in fact "she" as well (*ona—ee*). Unclothed, unmasked, unclean, used up, Olga has become part of the landscape.[11] The visual elements accumulate in an inimitable Chekhovian crescendo, only to climax in the sudden discordant shriek—the intrusion of the auditory element, the expansion into three dimensions— of the crows. The pointed ambiguity of the pronoun, the rhymes of their names[12], and even the epithet "naked" (*golaia*) merges Olga completely with the river: Olga-Volga, her name now is "Golaia"; like the riverbank stripped of its summer color, she too has lost her beautiful exterior shell, her wedding dress. The filth that she now sees everywhere is of course not only the Russian earth that lies under the surface cleanliness of landscape painting, purged by the artist's manipulation of color and light, but also the impurity of her own moral transgression. No wonder she now craves husband and home. And somehow, though the painter is equally guilty, it is Olga that the reader condemns.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the sketch she takes to Riabovskii's studio as a feeble excuse to see him is a still life (a *nature morte*—literally dead nature), and that she has been replaced in his studio with some other woman, a new source of inspiration. The woman is hiding behind a veiled painting on an easel in the studio, just where Olga herself used to hide—invisible, but framed. This is the studio echo of the Volga bank scene, where in the painters' hut Olga was concealed behind a partition (17). Riabovskii's new girlfriend is Olga's own pale ghost. It seems clear by now that this is not simply the story of a frivolous woman's love affair, but a record of the artistic process from beginning to end. This plot proceeds as follows: Olga, nurturer of art, gathers artists around her until one of them is inspired enough by her to turn her into a painting. The wedding dress mutates into a stage-prop, then a painted costume. The process of turning life into art entails the removal of everything clean and picturesque from the surface of the painting, leaving behind the earthy, dirty, sinful essence. Olga's spirit enters the painting, or rather the space behind it, and her colorful exterior shell is projected onto its flat surface. The painting is complete. The exhausted artist has no further use for the model, and he will look elsewhere for inspiration. Olga's shipboard dream of being displayed at the center of attention of an adoring crowd, at the side of a "great man," turns out to be not a real-life dream of marriage, but a ghostly projection of a work of art that has not yet come into being—on exhibit to an adoring public. The fact that we do not ever see Riabovskii's picture itself, and that we are given to understand that it is a landscape, is no obstacle to this interpretation. It has, after all, been made quite clear that in the process of serving as the artist's inspiration, *Olga has merged with the landscape*.

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[11] In his new study, *Seeing Chekhov*, Michael Finke offers a stimulating analysis of the importance of the motif of seeing and observing in Chekhov's work both as a doctor and an artist. The theme was foremost on Chekhov's mind, especially during the early and mid-nineties. Analyzing one of the longest stories of this time, "Three Years" (1895), Finke shows how a character—female, again—merges, not into the landscape, but into a Levitan-esque painting of the Russian landscape. This might be considered the end-point of the process, the "consumer's" experience. See Finke, pp. 128-35. Though Finke's analysis is highly relevant to our analysis of how life becomes art, "The Grasshopper" does not depict this moment of consumption of the finished work. Rather, in a sharp ironic twist, when she visits the artist's studio, Olga *is jealous of* Riabovskii's next picture (Ольга ревновала Рябовского к картине и ненавидела *ee* (the ambiguous pronoun can refer to both her and it [the painting]). And when a subsequent visit coincides with a visit by Riabovskii's new lover, Olga looks straight at a painting (significantly not described), and sees only the *invisible* "other woman" hiding behind it (p. 22).

[12] Even allowing for the palatalized "l" of Olga's name, the auditory resonance in the three words is striking.

Opposing exterior shell and interior essence we suggested that Dymov was the nurturer of the body. Indeed, he provides sustenance for Olga's body: shelter, food, and clothing (that summer dress). Dymov falls fatally ill with diphtheria, and Olga is overcome with anguish, guilt, uncleanliness, and *fear of exposure*. The story ends on a trope of reversal, which functions on multiple levels of the text. The deathbed scene represents an inversion of the initial wedding and salon scenes. The healer lies sick. The places of Olga's artist guests are now occupied by doctors, who are strangers to her, just as her guests were strangers to her husband's world. "Artistic disorder" has been replaced by medical disorder. Olga is disheveled and sloppily dressed. A strange man is snoring on her divan. And now, with everything turned inside out, Olga comes to her moment of "recognition," that point in tragic art where, as Aristotle explains, there takes place "a change from ignorance to knowledge, bringing the characters into either a close bond, or enmity, with one another, and concerning matters which bear on their prosperity or affliction."[13] It is a moment of wisdom that only narrative can provide. Olga learns from

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[13] Aristotle, p. 43. This realization, of course, comes with Chekhovian irony. Moments of understanding are granted provisionally in his works, and are anchored in individual

Korostelëv (or at least is told by him) that her husband—not some painter—is a truly great man. As in the greatest tragic art, this recognition "occurs in direct conjunction with reversal." (Aristotle 43). For Dymov is now all exterior, and she is all spirit, and as her nakedness before had filled the Volga landscape, now her guilt fills the room, spilling over onto the white canvas of the bed sheet. Dymov's grief-stricken friend and colleague, Korostelëv, moans:

> Добрая, чистая, любящая душа—не человек, а стекло! Служил науке и умер от науки. А работал, как вол, день и ночь, никто его не щадил, и молодой ученый, будущий профессор, должен был искать себе практику и по ночам заниматься переводами, чтобы платить вот за эти…подлые тряпки!
>
> Коростелев поглядел с ненавистью на Ольгу Ивановну, ухватился за простыню обеими руками и сердито рванул, как будто она была виновата (30).

> A good, pure, loving soul, not a man, but glass! He served science and died from science. And he worked like an ox, day and night, no one spared him, and a young scholar, a future professor, was forced to develop a practice for himself and do translations at night in order to pay for these…these loathsome rags!
>
> Korostelëv looked at Olga Ivanovna with hatred, seized the sheet with both hands and tore it angrily as though it [*she*] were guilty.

He tears the sheet just as Riabovskii had slashed his canvas. In both cases it is an attack on Olga, for yet again, as in the Volga riverbank scene, the pronoun referent is ambiguous: the guilty one is *both* the sheet *and* Olga. The sheet, by its association with Olga's guilt, is itself, a "loathsome rag."

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characters' perceptions. Here, Olga's understanding is mediated by the clearly biased and embittered Korostelëv.

This reading assigns all the guilt to Olga. She represents sin; her husband represents goodness. But things are not that easy in life, or in art that moves beyond fable. One man’s saint is another’s neglectful or impotent husband:

> Молчаливое, безропотное, непонятное существо, обезличенное своею кротостью, бесхарактерное, слабое от излишней доброты, глухо страдало где-то там у себя на диване и не жаловалось. А если бы оно пожаловалось, хотя бы в бреду, то дежурные доктора узнали бы, что виноват тут не один только дифтерит. (28)
>
> The silent, uncomplaining, incomprehensible creature, depersonalized by its meekness, without character, weak from an excess of goodness, was mutely suffering somewhere there on the divan in its room and not complaining. But if it were to complain, even in delirium, then the attending doctors would realize that it wasn’t just diphtheria that was at fault here.

This Dymov is a completely neuter (even, considering the “ox” epithet, neutered), sexless man. A man who only serves his wife as a source of money and clothing is not, as Clayton points out, fully engaged. Between two people one is never completely at fault. This is not the story of two equal partners; rather, as the fabular structure implies, one partner is presented as all guilty, and the other is innocent and infantile as a child. Instead of begetting children, the husband stays out nights working, calls his wife “mama”, and feeds her. What one lacks, the other has in excess, and a strange sterility dominates at the center of their family life.

This modest story asks deeper questions about the relationship between art and nature. Dymov is a neuter being (referred to, for example, by the word “creature” [существо], so close to “essence”— [сущность]). But his death leaves him inert, just another physical object in Olga’s city apartment. Meanwhile Olga *lives*. Dymov, like Chekhov himself, spent a lot of time doing autopsies, and as Chekhov famously said: “Когда вскрываешь труп, даже у самого заядливого спиритуалиста необходимо явится вопрос—где тут душа?» (*Письма* 3, 208) (“When you dissect a corpse, even the most inveterate spiritualist must ask the question: where is the soul here?"). Indeed, the question remains as to the nature of the soul's embeddedness in the body, and if we may put it this way, art's embeddedness in material reality.

Chekhov does not grant his characters full understanding. We should not trust the narrator who says, "and the character realized… ."[14] That is something that takes place on the surface level of the text. The moment of recognition in "The Grasshopper" is not Olga's, but *ours*. We realize that what we have just read is an allegory for the creation of *narrative* art—an allegory in which storytelling, with its extra dimension of time, conquers the simple, flat reductionism of a landscape painting. True to Chekhov's artistic credo, the story does not answer questions as to the relationships between essence (that neuter "being" that is so passive) and exterior (those dresses, those paintings, that flamboyant display). Deliciously, Chekhov does take revenge on the foibles of his acquaintances. But it is a revenge that uses the exterior shells of these real people, of their habitats, and of their stories, and elevates these earthbound creatures to serve immortal art.

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[14] Chekhov limits his statements about the truth to what is observable in each individual case, rather than to the transcendent and general; we see only each character's truth. See Kataev, especially p. 98.

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Ivanov: The Perils of Typicality

John McKellor Reid

Disenchantment, apathy, the ready yielding to fatigue, deterioration of the nerves are the inevitable consequence of inordinate excitability, and such excitability is characteristic to an extreme degree among our young men and women. Take literature. Take the present times. – Socialism is one kind of excitement. But where is it? It is in Tikhomirov’s letter to the Czar. The Socialists have taken wives and are criticizing the zemstvos. Where is liberalism? Even Mikhailovsky is saying that all the checkers are mixed up nowadays. – And what price all Russian fads? The war has tired us out, Bulgaria has tired us out to the point of irony, Zucchi has tired us out, so have operettas.

—Chekhov to A.S. Suvorin, 30 December 1888, Yarmolinsky 99[1]

I'm frightfully bored with *Ivanov*. I can't read about it and I feel awful when people start giving ingenious explanations of it.

—Chekhov to A.S. Suvorin, 5 March 1889 298.

It was Turgenev who taught Chekhov that, in an age of censorship, objectivity could have the force of polemic without overtly disclosing its critical intents. In the appropriate rhetorical situation, objectivity can function as a mode of "hidden polemic," a crucial part of the weaponry of the ironist. Even if the objectivity of Turgenev's presentation did not always guarantee that provocative voices and attitudes would evade the censor's pen, the mask of objectivity was a subtle rhetorical tool for any writer concerned with social and political criticism.[2] Does *Ivanov* need to be recognized as a play exploiting the rhetoric of objectivity? Can one deploy a rhetoric of objectivity and yet remain committed to an ethics of objectivity? In polemical terms, objectivity has its limits, since, functioning as an ironic mode, its "non-statement" is a severe form of understatement – and, as such, subject to the vagaries of indeterminacy. It is the threat of such indeterminacy, I think, that leads Chekhov to create a play in which the objective is always in tension with the grotesque and the satirical: but understatement counterbalanced by statement still runs the risk of remaining indeterminate. Many modern productions and readings of the play assume that there is a limited form of polemic in the work insofar as it offers an objective, psychological case study of a social stereotype of the time, the "superfluous man" – a reading that was calculated to challenge the clichés of the time. But the polemic at work in *Ivanov* goes beyond mere psychologism. *Ivanov* is a political play that, as surely as *Coriolanus*, asks that individual diagnosis be read as sociopolitical and cultural diagnosis. Any claims of objectivity in relation to cultural diagnosis can rarely be made good, and today Chekhov would probably be found guilty of "hubristic objectivism."[3] In theatrical terms, the play has already been found guilty of "hubristic objectivism" insofar as it has been subject to the ideological reprocessing associated with revisions, versions, and adaptations. But such treatments tend to assume that the play works solely at the level of individual diagnosis. To do justice to the play's polemical force, we need to recognize the extent to which the individual diagnosis is part of a cultural diagnosis. My argument will focus initially on the nature of the individual diagnosis and the terms in which it is presented.

There is a series of intriguing paradoxes at the heart of *Ivanov*. The play aims to be the last word on a national psychological type, while satirizing the whole tendency to read human beings as mere "types." Through the use of the commonest Russian surname as the title of the play, a contemporary audience would have been led to expect Chekhov to offer some kind of "hero of our time" piece, or at the very least, a play about a significant type. It is clear from his letters that Chekhov remained apprehensive that his protagonist would be summed up as that familiar, Russian literary stereotype – the "superfluous man." Yet, at the same time, he wanted to insist that part of the originality of his project was that he had summed up everything that had been written about such depressed, whining people and had created a new type: "I've created a type of some literary importance" ("To Alexander Chekhov," 10, 11, or 12 October 1887 41).

Chekhov exhausted himself and suffered a serious bout of depression through his efforts to secure a more enlightened response from audiences, directors, and critics. Imagine the budding playwright's frustration when, having driven himself close to a nervous breakdown worrying away at revisions designed to clarify the contours of his new literary type, the director of the second production, in Petersburg, turned out to be someone who "considers Ivanov a superfluous man in the Turgenev vein" ("To A.S. Suvorin," 30 December 1888, Yarmolinsky 96). But would he have felt any better if he had been present at the first production by the Moscow Art Theatre in October 1904, when Vasily Kachalov played Ivanov as a neurasthenic? or in 1976, when Innokenty Smoktunovsky played him as an unsmiling psychiatric case in the final throes of clinical depression? Undoubtedly, in the latter instances, the attempt to present a *scientific* type rather than a *literary* type would seem to be wholly in accord with the spirit of Chekhov's long, detailed letter to Alexei Suvorin of 30 December 1888, where he outlined a distinctly clinical syndrome as the bedrock of the character: excessive excitability, tendency to fatigue, loneliness, boredom, a guilt complex, self-confusion, and heightened irritability were among the key indicators specified by Chekhov.

It is true that, at different times in his career, Chekhov invoked the disinterested, objective perspective of the medical professional, and in the controversy over Ivanov, it is evident that he wanted his protagonist to be *understood* rather than judged and condemned. The "superfluous man" had become a convenient peg for all sorts of social and political prejudices. Chekhov challenges the stereotype through offering a revisionary account of what lies behind such labels. The exposition certainly suggests that Ivanov's past self is a ghostly presence overshadowing the play, with many characteristics associated with the familiar "superfluous" type: "[t]here are so few of us, there's so much work to be done, so much! God, how much!" (*Ivanov*, trans. Fen 113).[4]

It is crucial to note that Chekhov sets his play in "one of the provinces of Central Russia" (36). Like earlier superfluous men, Ivanov is a sensitive, educated, young nobleman who returns to the stagnant backwaters of the provinces. Excitable and full of reforming zeal, he throws himself into district council work, peasant education, scientific farming, liberal politics, and so on and then collapses under the strain of these Herculean labours. Modern historians are quick to point out the structural peculiarities of nineteenth-century Russia and the sheer inertia of a social system that was still in thrall to its feudal origins. Censorship discouraged writers from seriously exploring the political factors that might be distinctively Russian about this sluggish resistance to social change. Since the whole social and historical phenomenon of the superfluous man had already been digested by the public along predictably stereotypical lines, Chekhov's non-judgemental depiction of the psychological decline of such a burnt-out case was bound to frustrate political snap judgements.

Chekhov's long letter to Suvorin was an attempt to defend his protagonist from uncomprehending critics who labelled Ivanov an immoral scoundrel, a scandalous villain, a psychopath, and so on. Chekhov had anticipated this kind of captious phrase-mongering with Ivanov's dismissal of Lvov's reductive tendencies:

> How simple and uncomplicated! A man is such a simple, uncomplicated machine … No, Doctor, we all have too many wheels, and screws, and valves inside of us to be judged by first impressions or by a few external traits. I don't understand you, you don't understand me, and we don't understand ourselves. ("To A.S. Suvorin," 30 December 1888, Yarmolinsky 91)

Instead of a static "type" defined by a few external traits, Chekhov's concept of typicality appears to be based upon an appeal to a range of variable inner dimensions that can only be glimpsed in dynamic interaction with the character's world. Chekhov seems to have felt that he was drawing attention to a peculiarly Russian kind of depressive reaction: "In my view all Russian fiction-writers and dramatists have felt the need to portray despondency, but they've all done it by instinct, without any definite conception and view of the matter" ("To A.S. Suvorin," 7 January 1889 296). The play is designed to bring issues of typicality and depression into sharp focus through limiting the action to the final phase of Ivanov's decline. The hero is a representative figure of the eighties whose career has now run its course and ended in disillusionment and premature exhaustion. Ivanov may have left university full of ideals and enthusiasm but, at thirty-five years of age, he is a broken man – a burnt-out case. His self-diagnosis is that he has strained himself through taking on (too soon) a burden of work beyond his powers: like Hamlet, Ivanov has a remarkable capacity for self-diagnosis even if his most distinctive trait is his repeated claim that he doesn't understand himself. Something is clearly rotten about the state of provincial Russia, and one of the attractions of such Hamletism is that it allows Chekhov to link individual and national pathology.

If we ask, what precisely is it that Ivanov does not understand about himself? the answer would appear to turn upon his psycho-physiological make-up. "Excitability" is the key term that recurs in different forms throughout Chekhov's letter to Suvorin. Ivanov is analysed as "highly-strung, excitable, easily roused to enthusiasm" and his "excessive excitability" invariably generates its alternate phases of satiation and exhaustion (30 December 1888, Hingley 291): "Disillusionment, apathy, failure of nerve, exhaustion – that's what you must expect if you get over-excited, and such excitability is highly typical of young Russians" (293). Chekhov was well acquainted with the works of the French physiologist Claude Bernard but, unlike Zola, he was not anxious to impress his audiences or readers with direct appeals to scientific typologies:

> When writing the play, I kept only the essence of the thing in mind – that is, the typical Russian traits. The over-excitability, the guilt complex, the tendency to fatigue are purely Russian.[…]

> Of course I haven't used such terms as "Russian," "excitability," "tendency to fatigue" and so on in the play, trusting my readers and audience to pay attention and not need every i dotted and every t crossed. (295)

The insistence upon "typical Russian traits" makes clear the extent to which Chekhov hoped to apply a clinical typology to a national type. So, when Chekhov protests that other writers have attempted to treat of depression without "any definite conception and view of the matter," he makes an implicit appeal to the privileged, professional understanding available to contemporary psychiatric knowledge. From the latter perspective, the "ordinariness" Chekhov associates with Ivanov that helps to undercut the romantic excesses of Hamletism is that of a familiar clinical type within the psychopathology of everyday Russian life. Chekhov's plot throws up competing interpretations of the protagonist and it frustrates the audience's tendency to rely upon either the "superfluous man" stereotype or the equally predictable, stock reaction that "social conditions are to blame." While the casual abuse of psychiatric labels has always been a much-favoured source of stereotypes – one that the play debunks – the stage history of the play reveals that actors and directors have often felt driven to adopt a reductive, "clinical" reading of the hero. Why should this be so?

The stage directions for Ivanov could readily be taken to encourage a clinical reading because they so frequently draw attention to the limited range of extreme emotional states within which the hero appears to be imprisoned.[5] Chekhov wanted an actor who could portray rapidly alternating emotional states, who could be tender and furious by turns. The early acts of the play are dominated by Ivanov's irritability and agitation, but increasingly, he is engulfed by waves of rage and anger. In the 1887 version, the intensity of the hero's introverted aggression is such that he suffocates in an ocean of blackest self-loathing, his agony thus terminated by "natural" causes. While the medical logic of this psychological implosion appeared wholly plausible to Dr Chekhov, it left audiences as confused and unimpressed as the play's antagonist, Dr Lvov. As a dramatic device, death by emotional suffocation suffers from the grave disadvantage of sheer atypicality and thereby prompts audience bemusement. Reluctantly, Chekhov equipped his suicidal hero with a revolver.

It is true that, if an actor were insensitive enough to rely upon the stage directions as the clue to interpreting the role, then Ivanov could emerge as merely a neurasthenic, confined to a narrow set of recurrent states. But Chekhov was well aware of the dangers of repetition and one-dimensionality in the theatre, and he expected actors to be on their guard against using a "typical" trait as a key to characterization. His advice to Meierkhold, playing the part of Johannes Vockerat, the neurotic hero of Hauptmann's *Lonely Lives*, could easily be adapted for an actor unsure about how to handle Ivanov's "irritability." Since Hauptmann's hero is a burnt-out case bearing remarkable filial resemblances to Ivanov, it is unsurprising that Chekhov's advice flows freely even when he has been unable to consult his copy of the play.

> One must not underline this nervous temperament, because the highly strung, neuropathological nature would hide and misrepresent the much more important loneliness, – the loneliness experienced only by fine, and at the same time healthy (in the fullest sense of the word) organisms. Depict a lonely man and represent him as nervous only to the extent indicated by the text. Do not treat this nervousness as a separate phenomenon. Remember that in our day every cultured man, even the most healthy, is most irritable in his own home and among his own family, because the discord between the present and the past is first of all apparent in the family. It is an irritability which is chronic, which has no pathos, and does not end in catastrophic consequences; it is an irritability that guests cannot perceive, and which, in its fullest force, is experienced first by the nearest relatives, the wife, the mother. It is, so to say, an intimate family irritation and nervousness. Do not spend much time on it; present it only as *one* of many typical traits; do not stress it, – or you will appear, not a lonely young man, but an irritable one. ("To V.E. Meierkhold" 184)

Chekhov is at pains to ensure that the typical does not dwindle into the mere "type" in *Ivanov*, just as it seems to be part of his modernity to understand that depression happens to a person. His naturalist sympathies are never a licence for simplification or reduction.

In fact, there are aspects of Ivanov's characterization where Chekhov must have felt that he was breaking new ground, ground that only someone with his medical background could break. First, in relation to the literary stereotype, the ironic principle guiding Chekhov's conception of Ivanov was the anti-romantic notion of a character who would feel his whole being degraded and diminished by the suggestion that he could be "typed" by others as a Russian Hamlet or a superfluous man. To some extent, the "wit" of the entire comedy thrives on this conceit. Second, Chekhov attempts to create a "living character" by showing a *person* struggling with his illness rather than a psychiatric type bristling with symptoms. Part of Ivanov's liveliness is achieved through a kind of psychological legerdemain whereby the sheer chanciness and uniqueness of his thinking and feeling (his sorry state rarely checks his wonderful articulateness) constitute their own kind of interest. But the play is also a kind of psychological thriller – the audience are invited to play psychological detectives with a continually elusive quarry. Chekhov deliberately juggles the boundaries of normality, but he does make the audience register the fact that it is a continuum that creates those boundaries – and that is one reason for making shame and self-disgust so central to the psychodynamics of Ivanov's particular experience of depression.

In her philosophical analysis of shame and pride, Gabriele Taylor focuses on the extent to which shame functions as "the emotion of self-protection" (81). It is the ghost of his past self that haunts and shames Ivanov: the remnants of his self-respect feed a chronic sense of shame. But Chekhov is keenly aware of how the waves of affectlessness and disorientation that afflict the depressive can leave him exposed to the anguish of emotional weightlessness. Ivanov does not understand why he has become such a stranger to his own feelings, particularly in relation to his dying wife. It was remarkably daring of Chekhov to risk alienating his audience with such unsparing psychological realism in this sensitive domestic area. But Ivanov's failure to feel for his suffering, terminally ill wife and his anguished sense of emptiness when confronted with his own failure take the audience beyond moral judgement in an instant. They should be ambushed by the psychological complexity of what is happening. This is only the first in a series of such challenges.

Most modern actors and directors have little difficulty in capturing the imagination of an audience with the psychological ironies that this play possesses in abundance. But it is rare to see a production that brings home to an audience the subtle, psychological *logic* of the hero's disturbed patterns of feeling. The action offers glimpses of a complex interplay of feeling that remains fraught with unresolved ambiguities. Can a person mired in self-contempt respond to love? especially the love of someone whose first love was for that earlier lost self, now mourned, in his depression? He knows that he should love, that this fine woman deserves and needs his love, and yet, the emotional cupboard is curiously bare. And so, this barrenness prompts further shame. But shame seems to beget shame, insofar as the unflagging love and anxiety of the victim wife turns the screw of self-loathing to such a pitch that the avoidance of love itself becomes a survival strategy. Ivanov should take us into this psychological labyrinth, make us sense the bitter irony of each inevitable step of the descent.

One way of describing the psychological trajectory of *Ivanov*, given that the protagonist has to confront increasingly stressful situations in each act, would be to see it as a relentless process of "complexification." While Chekhov's dramaturgy is clearly indebted to Turgenev's drawing room comedy, with its amusing gallery of portraits and its delicately nuanced interplay of feelings, there is little in Turgenev that can match either the full psychological complexity of Ivanov's characterization or the rumbustious, Gogolian excesses of the comic melodrama. In some respects, *Ivanov* is a summing up and condensation of all that Turgenev had written on the "superfluous man" type – but this is a cliché tradition that Chekhov seems determined to overthrow. Chekhov's youthful enthusiasm for the brilliance of Turgenev's typological analysis in *Hamlet and Don Quixote* gave way to a much more sceptical, polemical stance in his stories.

Belinsky's criticism had taught Turgenev the way to strike through the play of historical contingencies to social–psychological types who could be representative of epochs of social change in Russian society.[6] But in spite of the subtleties of characterization, Turgenev's superfluous men seem to be condemned to permanent adolescence. Even if they are married, erotic fulfillment seems to elude them. But the most convenient given of these Hamlet types is that they are rarely exposed to the raw complexity of adult relationships. Rudin, the Hamletesque hero of Turgenev's first novel, prefigures the limits within which the type is expected to work. In the final chapters of the novel, we are given tantalizing, second-hand glimpses of Rudin "gone to seed," confiding, in a letter, that he will die a failure: "My God! At thirty-five still to be trying to set about doing something" (Turgenev 144). Rudin recognizes that it is his "strange, almost comic fate" (144) to remain incapable of giving himself to another, and in the epilogue, the ageing hero, suffering from "an ultimate exhaustion of spirit" (166), recounts a schematic, intellectual rake's progress of successive failures – in scientific farming, business, and lecturing.

Although Turgenev touches on the element of masochistic self-humiliation in Rudin, his psychological analysis has little of the coruscating vigour and penetration that shocked and delighted the audiences of *Ivanov*. Turgenev's art often seems limited to the revelation of the hero's character, to the evocation of atmosphere, to the intimate psychological drama of the genteel encounters that are the vehicle for portraying the hero. But the discreet charm and slightness of the story seem to ensure that, in spite of his critical treatment of the type, Turgenev's hero is invariably insulated from the threat of more testing emotional realities. It is symptomatic, I think, that Rudin is given a dignified exit, charged with muted notes of romantic tragedy, when he dies on the barricades in Paris in 1848.

Chekhov's story "On the Road," printed on Christmas Day, 1886, is a significant piece of anti-Turgenevian polemic. It was written against the grain of the Turgenevian superfluous man, and it is notable that, in Chekhov's hands, the type is purged of any trace of romantic victimization. The ambience of the story is one of prosaic tragedy, but Chekhov's contemporaries failed to comprehend the broad polemical thrust of the story. Rudin claimed that he was "born a rolling stone" (Turgenev 178) and Chekhov's hero, Likharev, is a grim vision of such a rolling stone still on the road in his forties – it is clear that he is going nowhere. This Rudin-like character is now little more than a threadbare, impoverished landowner, taking refuge at a rough wayside inn with his travel-weary young daughter. A young gentlewoman is sheltering at the inn, and she succumbs momentarily to the charismatic fervour of this compulsive talker whose gift of the gab has not deserted him.

The most prominent features of Chekhov's grimly ironic portrait of this Rudin-type are Russian excitability and religiosity. Likharev as a type becomes a mirror of the nineteenth-century Russian intellectual whose progress can be viewed as a continuous series of "beliefs and passions" ("On the Road" 14). He is an intellectual everyman who has been "endlessly passionate" (16) about one ideological enthusiasm after another: he has been carried away by scientific idealism, by nihilism, by Slavophile populism and, most recently, by Tolstoyan non-resistance to evil. In the course of the story, the half-crazed ideologue talks himself into a new enthusiasm – the chauvinistic cult of the "noble slavery" of woman (18). Likharev's dead wife would appear to have been the cult's first martyr, since she changed her faith each time her husband did and sacrificed her life to his enthusiasms. The listening gentlewoman is spellbound by the Savonarola-like intensity of Likharev's confession, but a crucial structural irony of the story is that he only recognizes his potential power over her at the last moment and she is lucky enough to escape enslavement to him.

There are many obvious links between "On the Road" and *Ivanov*, but the political dimension of the play is missing or is misrepresented in modern productions insofar as it is often limited to what is assumed to be Chekhov's satire on the *petit bourgeois*. One might have expected a political playwright like David Hare to make more of the political undercurrents, but his version of the play, presented at the Almeida theatre in 1997, limited its argument to the Ibsenite thematics of "a play which asks what real honesty is" (Hare ix). Chekhov's treatment of Likharev provides some useful clues to the nature of the play's political argument. At the end of the story, the snow-covered Likharev remains rooted to the spot "like a white boulder," but the final image is of his restless eyes "still seeking something in the snowclouds" (23). This unquenchable restlessness is not an index of heroic striving or romantic agony: it suggests an almost sub-human source of energy. For what is incorrigible about Likharev is his excitability, his atavistic tenacity, his obsessional but ultimately pointless intensity.

Chekhov's contemporaries misunderstood Likharev as readily as they misunderstood Ivanov. They could not accept that Chekhov's diagnosis was both objective and polemical – the good doctor demanded a response to the diagnosis. Contemporary reception suggests that if they responded to the hints of entropic decline and fossilization, they assumed that the burnt-out ideologue was merely a victim of more cynical times. If they were troubled by his predatory chauvinism, they shrewdly deflected its critical force by seeing Likharev as an apostate from the political ideals of the 1860s. Even those who recognized, like Merezhkovsky,[7] that with only minor adjustments Likharev could be interpreted as a wholly contemporary type, representative of a wide range of Russian radicals, had little to say about the nature of the diagnosis. But how could it be otherwise? Is Chekhov fair to his readers and audiences in assuming that, even if they do not share his psychiatric typology and non-judgemental "scientific" perspective, they can still achieve a non-stereotypical understanding of the central characters?

Both Likharev and the heroine are presented as having a partial understanding of the energies shaping their brief encounter. But even the reader's privileged position is largely restricted to the dominant norms of the female character-focaliser, and she veers between conflicting impressions of Likharev either as the high priest of her destiny or as simply "small, in the way that an enormous ship seems small after it has crossed the ocean" ("On the Road" 21). There is little transparent access to the norms of the narrator-focaliser, but a close analysis of the story's poetics reveals a highly critical view of Likharev as a kind of religious fanatic. Against the surface naturalism of his contemporary story, Chekhov sets up subtle generic tensions with the worlds of the Christmas story, legendary tale, and mummer's play. He counterpoints the details of the secular encounter between Likharev and the lady with iconographic images and motifs drawn from one of the Russian, church-militant versions of St George and the Dragon – St George the Victory-Bringer. In Chekhov's wholly secular inversion of the icon story, Grigorii Likharev becomes a destructive, unheroic image of Russian religious passion. Behind the iconic mask of the typical Russian face ennobled by faith, Chekhov uncovers a portrait of intense, brooding morbidity, and he dares to hint at an unquestioning, murderous anti-Semitism.[8] Likharev's long history of misfortune, bitterness, and resentment feeds his fanaticism. According to Likharev, all Russians possess, like him, an inherited capacity for faith, so that even if a particular Russian does not believe in God, that is just a way of saying that "he believes in something else" (14). Ironically, that is also the heart of Chekhov's diagnosis.[9]

Without resorting in any overt fashion to psychiatric concepts or discourse, Chekhov has conducted an exercise in exploring a national psychological type in this story. Looked at in terms of deep structure, the core dimension, organizing widely dispersed yet interrelated details, appears to be excitability/emotionality. Henry James's praise for the disguised polemic of Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* drew attention to "the cumulative testimony of a multitude of fine touches" (James 282). Chekhov's story also relies upon such cumulative testimony to realize its polemical force. It is not surprising that contemporary readers were foxed by the absence of a clearly spelt-out indictment because the handling of the symbolic plane of the story makes considerable demands upon the reader. The failure of Likharev's charismatic power over Ilovaiskaia becomes, on the symbolic plane, an ironic inversion of a familiar Russian version of St George and the Dragon. St George is defeated. On the secular plane, this defeat is given tantalizing ideological force. But to deal with such a "political" type without displaying any immediately recognizable tendentiousness was to defy the norms of a tendentious age.

It is not surprising that Chekhov encountered the same (if not greater) problems with *Ivanov*. Some of the difficulties come to the surface in Chekhov's long explanatory letter to Suvorin because, with the advantage of hindsight, it is clear (I think) that Chekhov's play diverges in many complex ways from the racy reductiveness of the letter. There are dangers in appealing to this letter as a hermeneutic aid because it is a highly complex piece of discourse in its own right. In the letter, Chekhov displays an extraordinary ability to think in detail at two different levels of discursive practice. He can pander to Suvorin's conservative prejudices about progressives who become such "premature Weary Willies" ("To A.S. Suvorin," 30 December 1888, Hingley 292), but a moment later, he can challenge that stereotype with realistic details that illustrate Ivanov's divergence from the type. Conversely, he can complicate the portrait by fleshing out a whole range of psychological dimensions and then appear to undercut the evident complexity of his diagnosis through a dismissive allusion to the "depraved, neurotic spinelessness" of such "broken men" (293). It is a chameleon-like performance – but letters allow us to be chameleons.

Nevertheless, "excitability" remains the dominant dimension at the scientific level of discourse, and although Chekhov insists that "such excitability is characteristic to an extreme degree among our young men and women" ("To A.S. Suvorin," 30 December

1888, Yarmolinsky 99), it is not youth *per se* but a Likharev-like association between excitability and tendentiousness that underpins his typology. Thus, when Chekhov wants to generalize about the all-pervasive effects of excitability, he gestures towards contemporary arenas of tendentiousness: “Take literature. Take the present times. – Socialism is one kind of excitement” (99). It is the latter framework of assumptions that appears to inform the argument of Chekhov’s play at several different levels. The whole typology is, of course, highly tendentious, but to Chekhov’s way of thinking it was probably a guarantee of objectivity and even-handedness – hence, his protests against any suspicion of tendentiousness on his part: “If the audience comes away from the theatre feeling that the Ivanovs of this world are villains and the Lvovs heroes, I can only give up and let my writing go to hell” (“To A.S. Suvorin,” 30 December 1888, Hingley 294). Nevertheless, it is clear from his letter to Suvorin that, although Lvov is an inexperienced young doctor, he also serves as a token for a political type – the radical socialist whose holier-than-thou ideological stance makes him a case study of “tendentiousness personified”:

> He’s the decent, blunt, hot-headed type, but narrow and obsessive – what some wits have dubbed “the well-meaning fool.” Breadth of vision and straightforward reactions are outside his scope. He’s a walking cliché – tendentiousness personified. He looks at everything and everyone through narrow blinkers, and his opinions are all prejudiced. He adores anyone who yells “make way for an honest working-man” – thinks anyone else is a money-grubbing swine. There’s no golden mean. […] All men are sinners, but that’s not enough for Lvov – he must see everyone in black or white.
>
> He arrived in the district already biased. He at once took all the richer peasants for profiteers, and Ivanov, whom he doesn’t understand, for a crook. The man’s wife’s ill and he visits a rich woman of the neighbourhood, so what else can he be? He wants to murder his wife and marry an heiress. Obvious, isn’t it?
>
> […] Lvov’s blunt and honest. He’s a straight-shooter who doesn’t spare himself. If

> need be he'll throw bombs at a carriage […], punch a visiting inspector on the nose or tell people what crooks they are. He'll stop at nothing, and he never feels a qualm – why be an "honest working-man" after all, if you can't give short shrift to the "forces of reaction"?
>
> Such people fill a need and are mostly likeable. To caricature them, even to make good theatre, is dishonourable and pointless. (293–94)

It is significant that, in Act Two, Shabyelsky caricatures Lvov in terms remarkably close to those of Chekhov's letter: "His views are remarkably profound. Any peasant who's well-off and lives decently must be a scoundrel on the make. I wear a velvet coat and have a valet, so I'm a scoundrel and slave-driver. Oh, he's very honest, in fact he's bursting with it. And he can never relax. I'm actually afraid of him, I really am. You feel he'll punch you on the jaw any moment or call you a filthy swine – all from a sense of duty" (*Ivanov*, trans. Hingley 190). But Ivanov promptly undercuts the caricature with honourable, yet pointed, tolerance: "I find him terribly trying, but I do quite like him – he's so sincere" (190). In Elisaveta Fen's translation, it remains clear that the radical critics of the 1860s, Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky, must be reckoned among Lvov's tendentious ancestors: "'Make way for honest labour!' He lays down the law at every step, like a parrot, and he's got it into his head that he really is another Dobroliubov. Anyone who doesn't lay down the law is a cad" (*Ivanov*, trans. Fen 67). As a type of the ideologue, Lvov's tendentiousness appears to have its roots in the populist socialism of radical literature:

> He was brought up on the novels of Mikhailov; in the theater he saw the "new people" portrayed on the stage – i.e., the kulaks and sons of this age, as drawn by the new dramatists, the go-getters […] He had put this in his pipe, but packed it in so tightly that while reading *Rudin*, he inevitably asks himself, "Is Rudin a scoundrel or not?" Literature and the stage have so conditioned him that he approaches every person in life and literature with the same question. ("To A.S. Suvorin," 30 December 1888, Yarmolinsky 100)

The Russian critic, G. Berdnikov, suggests that Chekhov tried “to depict in Lvov a psychological type from that part of the nonaristocratic intelligentsia which not only had preached about ‘the people’ a short while before, but even threw real bombs under real carriages” (98). Berdnikov also claims that, while Chekhov’s contrast between Lvov and Ivanov points up their “community in ideological areas,” that does not undermine “the sharp distinction between them as ‘psychological types’” (98). But it could be argued that, rather than sharp distinctions, we find characters presented as existing along a continuum where “excitability” is the dimension guiding Chekhov’s explorations. If we look at some of the evidence supporting my contention, the play does not depend upon a bipolar typology as does Turgenev’s *Hamlet and Don Quixote* but on one that subtly insists upon similarities.

From his first appearance, Lvov’s characterization is carefully grounded in his underlying excitability: an excitability that continually undermines his professional objectivity. When Ivanov confides his doubts about whether he can afford either the time or the money for a trip to the Crimea with his ailing wife, Lvov’s latent excitability makes him quick to display his indignation: “All right, I won’t argue. Now then, the main cure for tuberculosis is absolute rest. But your wife never has a moment’s peace, she’s always worried about how you treat her. I’m rather excited, sorry, but I shan’t mince my words. What you’re doing is killing her. (*Pause.*) Let me think better of you, Ivanov” (*Ivanov*, trans. Hingley 172). In the mirror of his own virtuous feelings, Lvov cuts a fine upstanding figure, but it is amusing how delicately Chekhov places this self-flattering self-righteousness. In production, it would be important to give weight to Lvov’s pleasures in denunciation, for this is one of the most characteristic ways in which his excitability is felt. In the earliest version of the play, Lvov’s public denunciation of Ivanov in the last act “kills” the hero. When Shabyelsky disputes Ivanov’s high opinion of Lvov’s sincerity in Act Two, scene four, the physical symptoms he caricatures would appear to be symptoms of excessive excitability: “And what sincerity! Last night he came up to me, and, *à propos* of nothing, said, ‘You are profoundly repugnant to me, Count.’ Thank you very much! And all this isn’t just naïveté, it’s done with a purpose: *his voice trembles, his eyes burn, his knees shake….* The devil take his pig-headed sincerity!" (67).

There are several opportunities in Act One where the actor can disclose the extent of Lvov's dominant excitability. The contrast between Ivanov and Lvov in terms of this characteristic is riddled with ironic possibilities that gather comic momentum as the act goes on. Most of the time, Ivanov, the potential "patient," calmly and objectively catalogues the symptoms that oppress him, listens carefully to Lvov's fervid denunciation of him, and patiently tries to take account of the other's point of view. By contrast, the inexperienced young doctor is easily misled by the apparent randomness and sheer variety of the presenting symptoms, displays total ignorance about psychiatric matters, and pounces upon what he takes to be Ivanov's moral apostasy, hypocrisy, and selfishness. Lvov's failure to diagnose his patient is bitterly funny, and the funniness helps to register that failure with the audience in a way that points up how far Lvov's crude judgementalism is insensitive to the genuine complexity of Ivanov's state and his character.

When Lvov and Ivanov return from the garden where Ivanov has clearly taken pains to explain himself, Chekhov underlines the fact that Lvov is once again in an excitable state. According to the stage directions, he is "agitated" when he speaks and this lather of moral indignation climaxes in the somewhat infantile outburst that he struggles to blurt out:

> LVOV (*agitated*) Nikolai Aleksyeevich, I've heard you out, and … and – forgive me – but I want to speak frankly, without beating about the bush. In the way you talk, in the very tone of your voice, to say nothing about what you say, there's so much heartless egoism, such cold inhumanity... Here there's someone near to you, dying just because she's near to you; her very days are numbered, and yet it's possible for you not to feel any affection for her at all, to walk about, to give advice, to show off… I can't express it very well, I'm not clever at talking, but … Really, you revolt me!
>
> IVANOV Perhaps, perhaps…. You can see better from outside. Maybe you can see through me. Probably I am very much to blame. (*Listens*) It sounds as if the

> horses are ready. I must go and change. (*Walks towards the house, then stops.*) You don't like me, Doctor, and you don't conceal it. That does you credit… (48)

Ivanov's diffident, self-deprecatory response is decidedly low key; it quietly insists upon the excess of Lvov's revulsion. Yet, at the same time, Chekhov partly licenses Lvov's grotesque misreading of Ivanov, through the casualness with which Ivanov welcomes the possibility of escape. The audience should be able to see *why* Lvov misconstrues his host: Ivanov's calmness is darkened by a suspended emotional chord – the audience may feel that such calmness could resolve into indifference. (Chekhov turns the screw more tightly on this comedy of misreading and misconstruction with each successive act.) Lvov (understandably) feels that his indignation is wholly justified and Chekhov uses Lvov's soliloquy to further underline the degree to which he is a victim of his own excitable temperament:

> LVOV (*alone*) I could curse myself…. I missed the chance again! I didn't speak to him as I ought to have done…. I can't talk to him calmly. I've only got to open my mouth and say one word, and something here (*points at his chest*) begins to suffocate me and turns over inside me, and my tongue seems to stick to my palate. How I hate this Tartuffe, this pompous imposter! I hate him with all my heart…. (48)

Not only does Chekhov use such revelations to wean the audience away from judging (even unsympathetic) characters by simple moral stereotypes or unitary motives, but he also raises questions about matters of agency and autonomy. The advantage of pressing points of similarity between Lvov and Ivanov is that the binary thinking that confidently identifies heroes/villains, successes/failures, is effectively discouraged. The notion that Lvov's hyper-excitability can lead to emotional gagging or suffocation creates a potential link between antagonist and protagonist: the difference is that, in the final act, Ivanov is almost suffocated by anger directed against himself whereas Lvov is overwhelmed by outer-directed anger. Nevertheless, the similarities in emotional temperament shared by the two characters are underlined by the discussion between

Lvov and Anna Petrovna at the end of Act One. Like that of her husband, Anna's candour and unselfconsciousness contrast sharply with Lvov's evident immaturity, but his indignant denigration of Ivanov and his entourage prompts Ivanov's wife to observe a crucial resemblance:

> ANNA PETROVNA (*laughs*) He used to talk just like that.… Exactly like that.… But he's got bigger eyes than you, and when he began to talk with passion about anything, they used to glow like burning coals.… Go on talking.… (53)

Reflecting on his earlier self, Ivanov later confides to Lyebedev, "I got too excited, as you know" (87), a fact that made him both happier and unhappier than anyone else in the county. But Lvov's excitability seems to create nothing but emotional turbulence. By the end of Act One, the audience is invited to view his excitability as a predictable comic handicap. (It is a mistake to underplay the character in order to conjure up naturalistic depth, as modern actors often do.) He *is* a superfluous man insofar as his passionate outpourings are an immature irrelevance. His anger and confusion when he is left alone onstage in the final lines of the act shade into vaudeville:

> LVOV I absolutely refuse to treat anybody in these conditions! It's not merely that they don't pay me a farthing, but they upset me, too. No, I've finished. Enough of it! (54)

One of the most important parallels between the two male characters focuses on the link between excitability and loss of control. Although Ivanov is burnt-out, events conspire to rekindle *his* capacity for anger. Sasha's rash appearance in his house (confirming Lvov's vilest suspicions) pressing her unwelcome love suit only provokes Ivanov's anger against himself. But Borkin's mercenary speculations on what he assumes, with customary over-familiarity, to be a promising marital match trigger a rare moment of outer-directed aggression on Ivanov's part. It is while he is in this state of high excitability that his distraught wife aligns herself with Lvov and with the play's chorus of malicious gossip, accusing her husband of betrayal and deception. Initially, Ivanov meets her despairing accusations with tears, but the sheer injustice of the attack turns his own despair to anger. He warns her that he feels “absolutely suffocated with rage” (98) and that he will lose control. His first cruel insult, “Be quiet, Jewess!” (99), is shouted out in angry despair, but unlike Lvov’s explosive denunciations, this outburst is a bizarre form of self-defence. The final psychological blow – “you … will die soon” (99) – is beyond the pale, but it is also beyond the bleakest outposts of self-lacerating despair: only Strindberg and Albee have exposed modern audiences to such heart-chilling blankness.

The fourth act plots a final collision between the excitable protagonist and the excitable antagonist: on the face of it, a satisfyingly ironic resolution of a deeply ironic structure. By this stage, Lvov’s “superfluous man” credentials have been developed in a way that suggests *he* has taken on more than he can cope with. Since his discomfiture in Act One, his obsession seems to have taken him further and further downhill. By Act Three, he is protesting to Ivanov – “You’ve worn me out and poisoned my mind” (91) – a self-diagnosis that appears to be confirmed in the final act. (The psychological comedy depends upon a whole range of characters who can provide some sort of commentary on their own inner states.) At the opening of Act Four, a year after Anna’s death, Lvov is still fuelling his obsessive indignation with the same kind of quixotic misconstruction of Ivanov’s behaviour. But now, he vacillates before the final showdown, confiding that he has “completely lost the power to think things out” (100): we later learn that even Kosyh notices that he is very pale, agitated, and looking “like nothing on earth” (102). In his uncertainty, he feels driven to ask Kosyh, an empty-headed card-player, for his opinion of Ivanov: Kosyh is a member of the Lyebedev menagerie and has previously expressed the utmost contempt for Lvov. Kosyh’s reply undercuts Lvov’s earnest agitation, partly through sheer absurdity (“He’s no good. Plays cards like a cobbler” [101]), partly through its crude, unthinking prejudice.

The final denunciation, on the day of the wedding, is delivered in total ignorance of Ivanov’s honourable struggle to break off the proceedings and is fittingly anticlimactic:

LVOV (*comes in, to Ivanov*) Oh, you’re here? (*Loudly.*) Nikolai Aleksyeevich

Ivanov, I want to tell you publicly that you're a cad!

IVANOV (*coldly*) Thank you very much. (114)

Since Ivanov has spent the previous scenes ruthlessly denouncing himself to Sasha and Lyebedev, with such brutal accuracy, candour, and detachment, Lvov's insult is laughably inadequate. But the contrast also points up the shallowness of Lvov's feelings. For Ivanov, in emotional terms, Act Four is a reprise of the previous act. When he appears at the Lyebedev's, ready to call off the wedding, he is "boiling over with anger" (107) against himself. As his shame deepens with each wave of self-criticism, his anger increases until he is swaying unsteadily "suffocated with anger" (113). In the first revision, Lvov's insult completes this process of suffocation insofar as the hero apparently succumbs to a stroke. The final version allows Sasha to administer Lvov's well-deserved rebuke with a passionate diatribe that simultaneously helps to revive Ivanov's youthful self and leads to a proud, decisive act of suicide.[10]

No version of the dénouement is entirely satisfactory. The first version exposes how far Chekhov was intent on working through his highly schematic typology of "excitability." But the final version results, for the hero, in a curiously jagged line of emotional resolution: after suffocating with self-hatred, he must perform a series of rapid emotional somersaults and exit buoyantly suicidal. Such "jaggedness" could be justified in a production that fearlessly assimilated all the hysterical energies of the comedy: the rhythm and pace of the action are always pushing beyond naturalist conventions. The savage ironies that end each act are important clues for the highly ironic style demanded by this experiment in tragi-comedy. But the keynote for the comedy is best defined by Chekhov's treatment of that crucial aspect of Russian Hamletism: the attractiveness of the superfluous man to younger women.

In a letter to Suvorin, Chekhov suggests that the attractiveness of Ivanov resides in his excitability: "She [Sarah] loves him while he is excited and interesting …" (*Letters on the Short Story* 139). But the same letter had, of course, attributed excitability to both young men and women. The notion that Sasha might be a victim of excitability is hinted at in Ivanov's shrewd observation that, when she wants to "save" him with her love, "the expression on your face gets quite naive, and the pupils of your eyes get bigger, as if you were staring at a comet, or something" (94). Ivanov warns Sasha that her love is little more than a version of Bovarysme: "It's beautiful, but it's only like what happens in novels" (93). By Act Four, her over-excitable phase has given away to fatigue and boredom, and she finds it difficult to keep her fantasy alive in the face of Ivanov's demand that they give up their histrionics: "I've acted Hamlet and you've acted a high-minded young woman – but we can't go on like that" (108). The tempo of the final act is one of rising hysteria and high comedy. When Ivanov suddenly proposes that she give him up, Sashas's weary bewilderment is expressed through a question that seems to capture the punch-drunk state of the audience as well as of the heroine:

> SASHA Oh, Nikolai, if you knew how tired you make me! You've worn my spirit down! You're a kind, intelligent man – ask yourself: *is it fair to set me these problems*? Every day there is some problem, each one harder than the last. (110; emphasis added)

The exasperation and exhaustion of the Lyebedev family in the final act, their yearning for a simpler psychological world, provokes the kind of laughter that lifts an audience onto that imaginative plane that is special to tragi-comedy. It is laughter that does not undercut the play's deepest concerns, for it encourages the audience's acceptance of Ivanov's most baffling behaviour. When the comic pace of a production reaches that plateau of sustained hysteria, Ivanov's suicide is not felt as a histrionic false note but as a moment of grotesque vitality – decisive and elegant. Chekhov had little doubt about the audacity of his play, but too many modern productions fail to respond to the nonchalance and brio ("light as a feather" was the author's phrase ["To Alexander Chekhov," between 6 and 8 October 1887]) with which this unashamedly theatrical piece can jettison its surface naturalism.

At its best, *Ivanov* can be an exhilarating, dark play. Instead of the decorum of Turgenev's drawing room comedy, there can be the startlingly raucous, Gogolian energies of that ghastly menagerie of grotesques in the Lyebedev household; there can be the *Twelfth Night* drollery of Shabyelsky, Lyebedev, and Borkin in their cups (visited by two kinds of Malvolio); there can be the exhausting psychological comedy that makes the audience want to cry out with Sasha, "[I]s it fair to set me these problems?" For Chekhov not only prided himself on observation and analysis; he prided himself on his ability to make his contemporaries laugh at their pathology.

Written in the late 1880s, *Ivanov* has a "jazziness," an improvisatory waywardness that always threatens to break loose from its well-made play origins. At the heart of that "jazziness" are the character of Ivanov and Chekhov's wonderfully imaginative attempt to create a modern Hamlet, with all the complexity, oddity, and uniqueness of an identity that defies the conformist world that threatens to engulf it. Ivanov's speeches do not define a "character"; they are designed to suggest an identity beyond conformity – an intimate selfhood that is felt in all its unfinalizable "presentness." The abruptness of that selfhood's disappearance is defined as a moment of supreme rejection of conformity – "Leave me alone!" (115) – and that cry is a fitting climax to a play that sets out to deconstruct its audience's need for stereotypes.

In focusing upon what I take to be the polemical heart of the play, my reading is an invitation for actors and directors to rethink the thematic possibilities of a modern production, in order to bring alive Chekhov's sceptical appraisal of political idealism. By recognizing the ways in which "excitability" is not simply a characteristic of the hero but embraces other key roles, like those of Lvov and Sasha, there is the challenge of staging a much less hero-centred account of the play.

NOTES

1 Two translations of this important letter are cited in this article, Hingley and Yarmolinsky. Citations specify, where it is important, which translation is being referred to.

2 The class resentments of Shpigelsky, the scheming doctor in *A Month in the Country*, resulted in some significant acts of censorship upon Turgenev's text. The hidden injuries of a class society are shrewdly captured in the potted biography that Shpigelsky confides to his intended, Lisaveta (Act Four). Chekhov taps into a remarkably similar kind of class resentment with Lopakhin in *The Cherry Orchard* but, subtly, holds back the full force of such resentment until Lopakhin's drunken dance of triumph in Act Three – the serf's revenge is sweet – and sour.

3 Within a Marxist perspective, objectivity and truth are ideological fantasies: history is always in the service of the politics of the time – to believe otherwise would be, as Francis Barker insists, "to advance a hubristic objectivism" (13). The contemporary perils of objectivism are tactfully surveyed by Richard Levin in "Interpreting and/or Changing the World, and the Dream of a Lost Eden."

4 Quotations from Fen's translation of *Ivanov* are cited as "*Ivanov*, trans. Fen"; quotations from Hingley's translation are cited as "*Ivanov*, trans. Hingley".

5 Variants on "irritated," "agitated," "anger," and "rage" (in that order) are among the terms for negative reactions that increase in frequency as the play progresses. At various points, Ivanov describes his own

symptoms with extraordinary clarity and his frustration that his reactions no longer relate to their proximate causes as they did in the past. The plot of this darkly ironic comedy depends upon exposing the protagonist to a whole series of increasingly stressful situations. There is certainly good evidence to support Walter Smyrniw's claim that Chekhov had a clear understanding of the phenomenon of stress, in terms both of the psychogenic origins of stress and of the role of non-specific factors. John Tulloch suggests that a lecture by the Russian psychiatrist Merzheyevskii on Morel's degeneration theory, adapted to Russian conditions, must have inspired Chekhov because it focused on the intense stress created by the demands of a newly created intellectual culture pitted against the unmoveable object of Russian stagnation.

6 In his "Reminiscences of Belinsky," Turgenev quotes some of the key letters from his friend and mentor, drawing particular attention to the astuteness of the letter advising that "your true vocation is to observe actual facts and describe them after letting them filter through your imagination" (qtd. on 156). The documentary exactness of the Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* amounted to a telling indictment of serfdom, but while realizing Belinsky's call for a literature of social awareness, the sketches left unanswered any probing questions about where objectivity lives. Confronted by all the glaring contradictions and disunity in Russian society, Belinsky's articles had insisted upon the social function of literature and the need to address the disaffections of a class society: "There is a prevailing spirit of disunity in our society: each of our social estates possesses specific traits of its own – its dress and its manners, and way of life and customs, and even its language … The spirit of disunity is hostile to society: society unites people, caste divides them" ("Thoughts" 3). Belinsky's famous denunciatory "Letter to Gogol" (1847) remained the bedrock of Turgenev's literary and political credo. At his own request, Turgenev was buried beside his mentor, Belinsky.

7 "Add to Likharev the feature of simple, naïve caddishness and take away the futile pretence, the desire to appear a hero and you get an utterly contemporary type of very many Russian 'social activists'" (qtd. in Rayfield 43).

8 Chekhov presents Likharev's capacity for faith as inseparable from his capacity for hatred – but it is a hatred that is subtly masked. The "wild, inhuman music" ("On the Road" 9) of the storm is an atmospheric music in sympathy with the confused intensities of feeling that whirl about in Likharev's soul: a discordant music that intermittently warns of the hidden power of "a resentful sorrow, an unsated hatred, and the wounded powerlessness of one formerly used to victory …" (9). In the narrative of his messianic past, Likharev confides how much he had "burned with hatred" (15), how often he had "hated with all my soul" (17). His emotional response to the carol singers, stamping his feet in time with the carol, hints at the darker music of unsated hatred. There is a menacing ambivalence about the only audible lines of the folk carol ("Hey you, little boy / Take a little knife / We'll kill the Jew / The sorrowful son …" [21]) that is complemented by the expressionist starkness of both the appearance and the performance of this bizarre troupe of carol singers. The discordant "roaring" (21) that they produce would appear to have dark affinities with the "wild, inhuman music" that is Likharev's natural element.

9 My reading of the polemical thrust of "On the Road" goes hand in hand with my sense of what is at stake, in polemical terms, in *Ivanov*. But many modern readings of the story fail to respond to its polemical dimension. For example, Savely Senderovich develops a structural analysis of the semantic and lexical motifs in the story in order to demonstrate the way in which the iconic image of St George impaling the dragon resonates throughout the text – and constitutes the symbolic plane of the work. Senderovich recognizes that the fundamental theme of the story is "the meaning of faith in Russian life" ("On the Road" 144), but since he discounts the importance of the "superfluous man" as a subject, he fails to register the full breadth of Chekhov's critique. In claiming that "the story is not ultimately a parody" and that the "parodic–ironic plane […] does not dominate the story" (143), Sendorovich underestimates the force of the ironic reversals and inversions achieved by counterpointing the symbolic and naturalistic planes: in particular, the displacement of the divine into the secular. Instead of praising Chekhov for the ironic complexity shaping both the thematics and the poetics of the story, Senderovich offers the more modest appraisal that Chekhov "reformed the genre of the Christmas story" (143) and seems anxious to foreground the tragic dimension in Chekhov's treatment of the Russian faith. It is hard to reconcile this conservative estimate of the story with the terms of the letter that Chekhov wrote to his friend and fellow writer, Kiseleva: "[y]ou read my "On the Road" – Well, how do you like my audacity? I write of intellectual matters and am unafraid. In Petersburg I caused a furor" ("To M.V. Kiseleva, 14 January 1887," Yarmolinsky 43).

Surely, what demanded courage and audacity was the creation of an ironic perspective collapsing distinctions between political and religious faiths. Making Likharev's latest faith the exalted slavery of womankind is crucial to Chekhov's parody of the "superfluous man" tradition because it forges ironic links between faith and power. Within that tradition, there was nothing new about this article of faith. Lermontov's Pechorin was one of the first to confide his insatiable craving for power over women: "my chief delight is to dominate those around me. To inspire in others love, devotion, fear – isn't that the first symptom and the supreme triumph of power?" (Lermontov 127).

10 In his analysis of the play's textual history, Hingley examines revisions across four versions or recensions of the play. In the most radical revision, arrived at by recension two, Chekhov rewrites the closing scenes to incorporate Ivanov's shooting himself rather than, as in recension one, his succumbing to a stroke brought on by Lvov's insult. In the first two stages of revision, Chekhov was highly resistant to appeals from Suvorin that Sasha should be brought on at the end of Act Four. In relation to my argument about Sasha's "excitability," Chekhov's correspondence at this stage of revision makes clear that he wanted Sasha to be seen from a critical not a sentimental perspective. There was also the fear that, at the climax of the play, the women might become distracting centres of attention. However, in recension one, at the end of Act Four, Sasha staggers out of the ballroom to confront Lvov briefly, and by recension three, her role in Act Four has expanded to include her withering denunciation of Lvov. It could be argued that these revisions achieve a delicate balancing of forces, since Sasha's clear-headed denunciation of Lvov see-saws with her unchanging incomprehension of the suicidal hero.

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Review

Current Issues In Chekhov Scholarship

a collection of essays,
edited by Leonard A. Polakiewicz (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis), assisted by Liia Bushkanets (Kazan University). The essays were printed in *Canadian American Slavic Studies*, Vol. 42, nos. 1-2.

Ralph Lindheim
University of Toronto

This collection of essays in Russian emerged from an international conference held under the auspices of and dedicated to the 85th anniversary of the Dom-Muzei A. P. Chekhova v Ialte in April 2006. All of the contributors to the present volume, with the exception of two, participated in the conference, but some submitted papers other than the ones they read at the conference. And the published collection was then dedicated to the memory of Aleksandr P. Chudakov, whose death continues to be deeply mourned by his colleagues, students, and readers. I shall comment briefly on each of the essays, in the order in which they appear in the volume.

The editors open the volume with Aleksandr Chudakov's appraisal of A. D. Stepanov's book, *Problemy kommunikatsii u Chekhova*, submitted as his doctoral dissertation. The way in which Stepanov's work fits into the tradition of Russian criticism attuned to issues of linguistics is noted together with how the theory of speech genres formulated by Mikhail M. Bakhtin is elaborated to offer original and profound insights into the problem of communication, which is a main interest of Chekhov and which is, in Chudakov's words, "always unstable, fraught with the threat of failure and incomprehension, and never completed." Despite some interpretive flights of fancy, inspired by the undisciplined looseness of intertextual musings, Stepanov's work is a rigorous, seminal study, with which Chekhov scholars and critics must engage in the future. Especially fertile, according to Chudakov, is the interpenetration of linguistic and sociological analyses laying bare central components of Chekhov's poetics and also illuminating individual stories. And the examination of the main components of Chekhov's "adogmatic world" Chudakov hopes to see broadened and extended.

Vladimir E. Kataev, in his short essay, "*The Island of Sakhalin*: The Possibility of New Approaches," responds to a recent essay by Ewa M. Thompson, "Anton Chekhov and Russian Colonialism: The Denial of Identity in *Ostrov Sakhalin*." Kataev accepts Thompson's call for new, more contemporary readings of Chekhov from the perspective of postmodern approaches to texts, both literary and non-literary, and thinks that no Chekhov text needs a more radical and thorough rereading than Chekhov's account of his visit to this Russian penal colony in the Far East. He considers it a remarkable book, much of which is still misunderstood, and believes that, after the complete text of the book as well as letters by Chekhov, including those written during his journey to Sakhalin, have been published with the cuts made earlier restored, a fuller, richer image of Chekhov and his creative work will be attainable. He goes on to suggest how some modern critical approaches—gender analysis, narratology, intertexuality, communication theory—will prove fruitful, but slams Thompson's postcolonial analysis of Chekhov's Russian nationalism and imperialism as deeply flawed and prejudiced.

Irina E. Gitovich, in a long and densely packed essay, "The Freest Genre," appreciates the value of scholarly commentary on the works of Chekhov and his contemporaries and makes a strong case for the scholars who were or will be engaged in, as I. N. Sukhikh wrote, "returning Chekhov to his time." Rejecting the commonly accepted view of commentary as a thankless task barely acknowledged as creative and thus not highly valued—it is too often considered, as she puts it, "not written but compiled"—Gitovich insists that only careful commentaries will puncture the simplified and fanciful myths about Chekhov's life and art, and uncover the complex multidimensional realities of his biography, especially his relationships with others and the way others related to him, and his place in the literary life of his day. The distance between contemporary readers—those who do any reading at all—and Chekhov must be recognized, and the valuable work of commentators will guide us back to an ever receding past and reveal the linguistic, psychological, social, and cultural realities Chekhov both reflected and re-fashioned.

In "Chekhov's Alternative Existence" Tat'iana K. Shakh-Azizova considers one of the most pressing issues confronting contemporary Chekhov criticism, both the changes made in stage and screen reworkings of his stories and plays—alterations in time, in space, in the construction of the lives of characters barely mentioned in the texts in which they appear or of the destinies of major characters that are projected in ways unanticipated by their creator—together with the translation of his stories and plays into different artistic mediums. There seems to have accumulated what she considers "a critical mass" of these remakes, many though not all, especially those that seem to consider the original text a pretext, are successful. The last section of her essay deals with two radically different but compelling ballet reinterpretations of *The Seagull*: John Neumeier's ballet of the same name, which is admired for the complexity of the characters, the subtle radiation of a subtext of inner emotions, and the poetry of the production as a whole and Pavel Adamchikov's more contemporary ballet, *Bol'she, chem dozhd'. . .* , based on selected motifs from the original play.

Liia E. Bushkanets, in "Chekhov and the Utopian Conceptions of the Russian Intelligentsia at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century" accentuates the cult of Chekhov among the common readers who belonged to the Russian intelligentsia. Unlike Tolstoy, who towered above his readers, Chekhov embodied their fervent hopes and debilitating doubts and hesitations, gave voice to their desires and fears, described their strengths and especially their weaknesses: he was able to announce their strong but vague longing for a better, more noble, ideal way of life, together with their uncertainty about how exactly to proceed to their desired utopian ideal. Not only was he "the singer of gloomy people living in the twilight of Russian life" ("pevets khmuryx liudei, zhivushchikh v sumerkakh russkoi zhizni"), but his own short life, lived with his heroes on the brink of despair, was read in the light of a traditional figure in Russian religious thought, an innocent victim rather than an activist, a passive martyr silently accepting suffering and early death, who loved his fellow men and was endowed with a special spiritual insight that brought him closer to God. And the ebb and flow of this cult, established in the writer's lifetime, at later, significant moments in Russian history is touched upon at the end of the article.

Despite Chekhov's famous exaltation of human freedom in his 4 October 1888 letter to A. N. Pleshcheev, Andrei D. Stepanov in his rich essay "Chekhov's 'Absolute Freedom'' and the Chronotope of the Prison" focuses on the overwhelming absence of true freedom in Chekhov's writings and the spectrum of obstacles to freedom from the simplest constraints of space to the most complex denials, both externally and/or internally imposed, of human rights. Stepanov catalogues various types of imprisonment—from violent oppression at one end of the spectrum to mentally draining squabbling among husbands and wives, friends, and neighbors on the other—suffered by Chekhov's characters, the loss of freedom that affects both prisoners and warders and is reflected structurally in the abundant reminiscences of a time past when their lives were so free and eventful, the vain attempts of some to flee their situation, vain since many wait too long to liberate themselves while others exchange one type of imprisonment for another, and the waves of despair that end in either explosions of long accumulated hostility or in a degrading indifference, for which one's identity as a human being is the ultimate price.

Alla G. Golovachëva in "'The Man with a Hammer' and the 'Wonderful Knocker' (A.P. Chekhov and C. Dickens)," draws connections, at times tenuous, between Charles Dickens's cycle of Christmas stories, the most famous of which is *A Christmas Carol*, and two of the three stories in Chekhov's little trilogy. Rather than discussing the Christmas tales written by Chekhov, since they seem to parody the genre, she focuses on the similarities among, on the one hand, Scrooge and his partner Jacob Marley, and, on the other hand, Belikov and Nikolai Chimsha-Gimalaiskii. And the miraculous transformation of Scrooge is compared to Ivan Chimsha-Gimaliskii's moral resuscitation, though the latter's is predicated on his insight into the oppressive majority of contented people in his world while Scrooge's change is triggered by visions of the suffering poor. She also attempts, less persuasively, to relate the "man with a hammer," whom Ivan longs to place behind the door of every contented person, with a door-knocker that plays a role in the conversion of the hero of Dickens's novella.

In a rambling essay entitled "Chekhov and Edgar Allan Poe: Themes, Motifs, Images," Margarita Odesskaia finds echoes of the American writer's texts, both his fiction and criticism, in Chekhov's art. Though she notes only two mentions of Poe in Chekhov's letters, neither of which concern the creative work of the American writer, the very fact of his influence on postromantic writing in Europe and postrealistic writing in Russia justifies, she feels, a discussion of the impact he must have had on Chekhov. Similarities in their treatment of Gothic chronotopes are singled out, together with their remarkable combination of interests in psychology, the natural sciences and metaphysical issues, and their mastery of the short story, which contributed to the undermining of the novel's dominance. Odesskaia's essay offers me a long-sought opportunity to quote Thom Gunn's wonderfully wicked epigram on Poe and the disconnect between his writings and their reputation:

> Though Edgar Poe writes a lucid prose.
> Just and rhetorical without exertion,
> It loses all lucidity, God knows,
> In the single, poorly rendered English version.

Vladimir Ia. Zviniatskovskii and Aleksei O. Panich contribute a fine article on the figure of the lackey and the motifs and themes associated with this figure in a surprising number of Chekhov's stories and plays. The authors trace the evolution of the writer's treatment of this figure, concentrating on the social ramifications and the psychological implications of those who remain lackeys as well as those who try to rise above the station into which they were born. But their main focus is Iasha in *The Cherry Orchard*, a secondary character whom they try very hard and, ultimately, very controversially to rehabilitate. They do point out the importance of this character's reflections of and contrasts with so many of the other figures in the play, and attempt to ward off any simplistic judgment of him and of his desire to rise. But the explanation for his success—Ranevskaia has taken him from Russia and will take him back to Paris because he reminds her of the son who had drowned 7 years before—together with the exploration of the implications of his biblical namesake push the boundaries of the plausible.

Leonard Polakiewicz's detailed study, "'The Princess' by A. P. Chekhov: A Diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder," affirms the writer's commitment to scientific accuracy and medical truth in his establishment of character and depiction of behavior. In this tale the eponymous figure anticipates the findings of Freud and later psychologists and psychoanalysts and reflects most of their descriptions of the debilitating effects of rampant narcissism. Yet Chekhov's commitment to art was as profound as his insistence that it not run counter to medical reality. And this goes far in explaining both the significance of another character, the doctor, who in so many subtle ways mirrors the aristocratic target unmasked in his tirade, and the suggestive structure of the tale that, as often happens in Chekhov, shows the lack of any substantial change despite the hostile intensity of the characters' seemingly climactic encounter.

Elena E. Panich in her short article, "Biblical Motifs in Chekhov's Story 'The Murder,'" comments on the major characters of the story, the publican Iakov Ivanovich Terekhov and his cousin Matvei, whose apparent conflict over their religious beliefs comes to reveal an essential and a fundamental similarity, a spiritual quest for righteousness that, in different ways and at different times, results in their overcoming and transcending the worst aspects of their identities. The ritualistic features of the story's central event announced in the title, including the different parts and destinies of all its participants, are presented together with other references to the New Testament, which Chekhov's story either offers or, better, suggests. The ending is, as the critic writes, characteristic in that the author distances himself from the main character and does not affirm that the new faith acquired by the hero is the final and true goal of his quest.

This collection touches on a number of issues that scholarship and criticism devoted to Chekhov will want to address: the need for the full and complete disclosure of works and letters by him as well as a greater understanding of works and letters addressed to him; a re-examination of familiar motifs, themes, characters, and stylistic devices from more contemporary angles; a broader awareness of the influence on Chekhov of foreign writers and thinkers and vice-versa; and explorations of the writer's impact on both the readers of his time and the arts and audiences of our time.

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