

# The Sea-Gull

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by  
Anton Chekhov

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**Anton Chekhov**



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# THE SEAGULL

By ANTON CHEKHOV  
Adapted and Directed  
by ROBERT FALLS

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**<http://education.goodmantheatre.org>**

# The Seagull and Me

BY WILLA J. TAYLOR, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There have been many times in my life when I have been madly in love with someone who loved someone else. There have also been times when I have questioned exactly where all the time has gone and wondered – sometimes despairingly – if I have accomplished anything with my life. Maybe that is why Chekhov's *The Seagull* is one of my favorite plays. Watching the too familiar anguish and the longing play out on a dacha in Russia is somehow comforting in its apparent universality.

Like Mary Beth Fisher, the brilliant actress who plays the narcissistic Arkadina in our production, I first got to know the play on television. I had been assigned the play to read one summer. There was a fabulous series produced at the public television studios in New York called *Great Performances*. Although now the series is almost exclusively music, dance and opera, back then it featured a lot of theatrical productions re-staged for the screen. This particular one starred some of my favorite actors – Frank Langella, Blythe Danner, Olympia Dukakis, and Lee Grant. Unbeknownst to the mother, the librarian, I found out it was going to be on television. It was the same production that had run at the famous Williamstown Theater Festival outside Boston. I figured this would be just as good and a lot easier than trying to understand an old Russian play when I could be hanging

with my friends.

When the performance started, I thought the impossible had happened; a TV show more boring than the book! But within a matter of minutes, it all changed. From the moment Danner ran on as Nina, I was hooked. Here were these young characters who were just like me – Masha, rebellious and restless, deeply in love with Konstantin; Nina, desperate to be a famous actress; and Konstantin, passionately obsessed and desperate for his mother's approval.

Now, so many years later, I have seen – and worked on – countless productions of the play. I have watched it transported across cultures to become Regina Taylor's *Drowning Crow*; and transplanted from Russia to the Hamptons, New York, in Emily Mann's *A Seagull in the Hamptons*. I have attended really awful productions at colleges, and wonderfully realized ones at tiny theaters in small cities. But each time I see it, whether the production is brilliant or flawed, whether it's in its original form or a contemporary adaptation, I am reminded of that first staging. I think about the comically tragic costs of living; of how easily time and love can slip by us without notice; and how exquisite it is to experience the artistry of actors on a stage telling my story.



Interior of the Owen Theatre, a great example of its flexible stage during a production of *House and Garden*. Photo courtesy of Goodman Theatre.

# The Process of a Production

BY WILLIAM LANDON

So you're finally at the theatre. No technology, no cell phones, no distractions. The house lights dim and the show begins. The story unfolding onstage is massive in scale and scope. Everything works like a well-made machine – the transitions between settings are smooth, the lights come on and fade off when they're supposed to, the actors' movements are precise and powerfully convey emotion. You wonder how a play can get to this point. It doesn't start out this fine-tuned. It has quite a long journey first, a process that begins months and sometimes years in advance. Just like a living creature, a play grows from a simple beginning, can change as it evolves, and ends as something much different than it was at the start.

Before anything can be done, the director has to choose the play to be produced. Usually the director has already read the play and has a clear idea of the concept, or what he or she wants to do with it. Sometimes the person in charge is the artistic director of a theatre, and that person may choose both the director and the show to be produced. Here at the Goodman, many of our directors come from the Goodman artistic collective.

*"Bob recognizes that Chekhov has written a far more complex and difficult play than it may appear to be..."*

— JULIE MASSEY

Artistic Director Robert Falls, is also a member of the collective and chooses to direct at least one show each season. Once selected, the director chooses which designers will most fully realize his/her concept for the production. The designers are charged with creating the "look" for each of the technical areas of the production. The first designer meeting helps all of the designers start thinking about how they will contribute – either through lighting, sound, costumes, or scenery – to the overall concept. They present their ideas on the director's concept so the production has a cohesive look - from

lighting and sound to costumes and scenery. Then they begin their work. The designers draw or write plans for their designs and pass these on to head technicians, who assemble their crews and begin their work to shape the physical world of the play through sound and sight.

The director - in conjunction with the casting director - also selects the actors who are best suited to the roles in the play. Working from the character descriptions in the text, the casting department identifies actors with the range and physical characteristics in the script and as requested by the director. At Goodman, actors are called to audition for specific parts (casting has a database of actors they can choose from) and read from the script for their audition, either by themselves or with another actor.

Rehearsals begin once the artistic team (actors and designers) are in place, and usually start with presentations from the designers and a read-through of the script. During the standard four-week rehearsal period at Goodman, actors are not only rehearsing their lines, but blocking the show (blocking refers to learning the movements and paths they will take across the stage and playing area.) The actors rehearse the entire play, practicing specific scenes or parts of scenes – called "beats" or "units" – at first, and eventually running



Heather Wood as Nina in the play-within-a-play. Photo by Liz Lauren

through the show as a whole. The rehearsal process ends with technical rehearsal, or “tech”.

While the director and cast are in rehearsal, the designers and their technicians have been hard at work on all of the other components such as lighting, sound, costumes, scenery. Tech is the period when all of these elements finally come together on the stage. This period – usually lasting a week – is as much a rehearsal for the technicians and stage crew as it is a final rehearsal period for the actors. This will be the actors’ first time on stage in costume with full set and props. Here the timing in the scenes must be tested to determine “cues.” This could be a lighting cue, such as when lights come up or go down, or a sound cue, such as music or a telephone ring. Cues can also be used to describe entrances and exits of actors. Technical bugs are also worked out with the actor’s costumes and quick changes, as well as actors’ relationship to the set (i.e. entrances and exits).

Tech ends in the final dress rehearsal which is the last rehearsal before the audience comes to see the show. In this final rehearsal, the show is performed in its entirety with the actors in full makeup and costume as they would be for a performance. After final dress, the show starts a week of previews, a series of public performances used to fine-tune the show. During the preview period, changes can be made to all elements of the production. When the house lights dim and the curtain rises on opening night, the production is set (no more changes) and a new show is born.



Check out more rehearsal photos from *The Seagull* at: <http://education.goodmantheatre.org>

### Robert Falls’ *Seagull*

Goodman’s Artistic Director is doing something very different with this new production of *The Seagull*. What sets this production apart is the way in which the actors and company deal with the play. In this instance, every detail of the production – from sets and costumes to the overall concept – was discovered during rehearsals. A radical departure from the usual process, Falls came to the production without preconceived ideas about set or period, casting a company of actors - and hiring a team of designers - who were able to “find” the concept through the text and the interplay of characters. Giving



Director Robert Falls. Photo by Liz Lauren

each of his actors an idea of what their characters should be doing, he allowed them to find their own movements around the stage without blocking. By directing this way, the show will evolve with each performance.

Mr. Falls is very aware of the challenges involved with this approach. According to Julie Massey, Mr. Falls’ personal assistant, “Bob recognizes that Chekhov has written a far more complex and difficult play than it may appear to be, and he has an appropriately healthy respect for the demands that this places on him as a director.”

### Connecting on a Personal Level – Mr. Fall’s Journey

Many directors and actors choose to embark on a project because they feel a personal connection to the work. This is certainly the case with *The Seagull*. Both Falls and Mary Beth Fisher, who plays Arkadina, first encountered the play when they were young. Then they identified with the play’s young and impressionable and aggressive artists: Konstantin and Nina. Typical for their age, Bob and Mary Beth (like Nina and Konstantin) no doubt regarded the future as a destination with endless possibilities and opportunities for personal fulfillment. Just like Konstantin, Mr. Falls wanted to create something new and defy traditional theatrical conventions. With this production, Mr. Falls is coming at

*The Seagull* “with the intensity, imagination, excitement and ambition of a young director, but also as a man deeply affected and informed by the cumulative ups and downs of his own personal and professional life.”

Ms. Fisher saw her first production of the play on television as a child. Adapted for television by Williamstown Theatre Festival, this PBS Great Performances broadcast featured an acclaimed cast of Broadway actors - Frank Langella, Blythe Danner, Olympia Dukakis, and Lee Grant. Ms. Fisher says watching Danner’s portrayal of Nina is what inspired her to become an actress.

Having experienced the successes and failures attendant to careers in the theater, both Mr. Falls and Ms. Fisher feel a greater affinity for the older characters in the play, characters who are acutely aware that time is no longer on their side.

Falls also understands the relevancy of the play for contemporary audiences. Despite being written more than 100 years ago, it isn’t just an old play to him. Much like the adventurous and sometimes stubborn Konstantin he wants to “rattle the cage” and challenge his audience to see the modernity and timelessness of the play, its characters and ideas.



From left to right: Chamberlain (Trigorin), Fisher (Arkadina), Guinan (Sorin), Jaeck (Dr. Dorn). Photo by Liz Lauren.

# Picture Perfect

BY ELIZABETH MORK

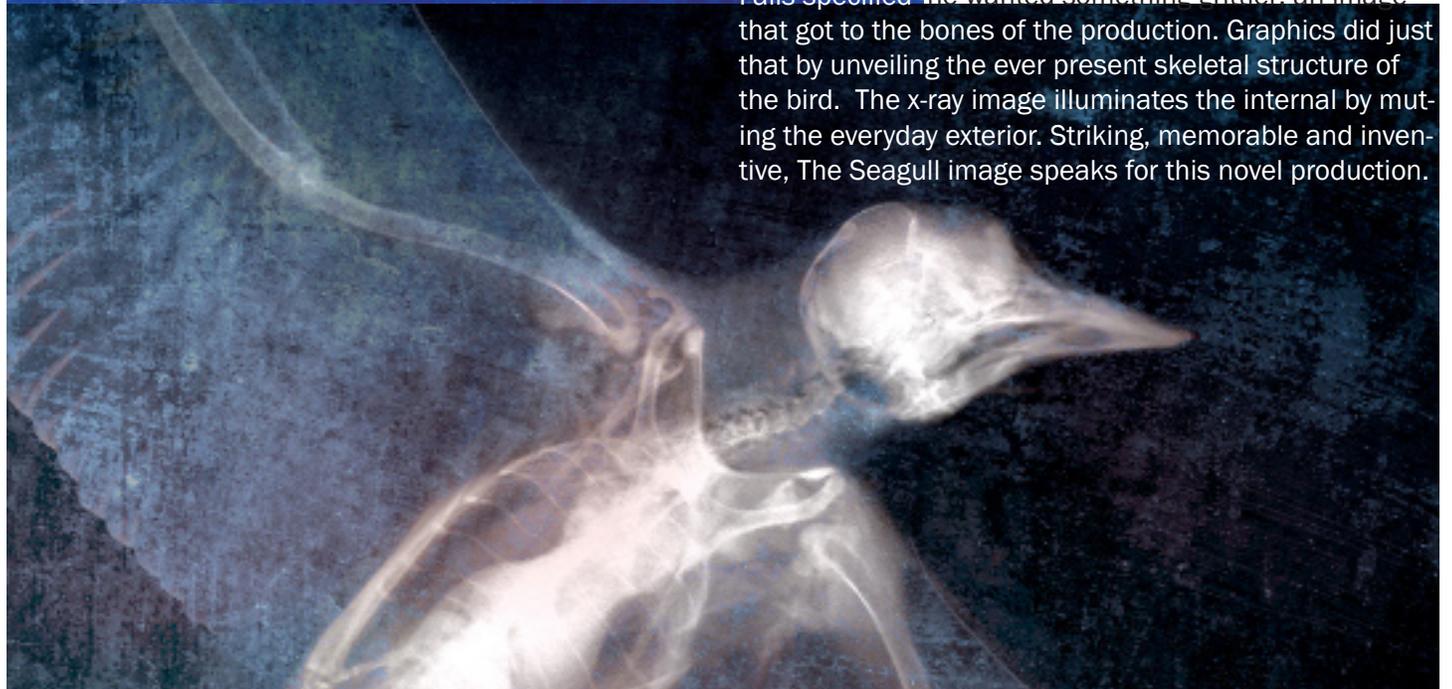


A picture is worth a thousand words, yet which ones? Are these words of love, peace, or sorrow? The theatre is thick in language both written and spoken. How does a theatrical production make its image known outside of the stage?

Every play done at the Goodman receives its own unique image. This signature artwork publicizes the production and illustrates qualities of the play itself. Traveling through the Goodman's archives will unleash a world of imagery which documents the wide range of material for each and every season. A unifying trademark of Goodman Theatre advertising is the use of identifiable human features, such as faces or hands. This hallmark remains consistent throughout productions ranging from *King Lear* to *Animal Crackers*.

Examine the current landscape of Goodman Theatre imagery. The *Seagull* sets itself apart from the collective of human hands, smiles, and shining eyes. Robert Falls' production image portrays nothing human at all, but rather the bones of the symbolic seagull. What exists now has been born out of multiple attempts to capture the essence of the show.

Prior to the x-ray artwork, *The Seagull* image consisted of a silhouette of a live bird in flight bleeding a string of red rose petals. When presented with this initial attempt, Falls specified he wanted something grittier: an image that got to the bones of the production. Graphics did just that by unveiling the ever present skeletal structure of the bird. The x-ray image illuminates the internal by muting the everyday exterior. Striking, memorable and inventive, *The Seagull* image speaks for this novel production.



# The How and Why of Adaptation

BY ELIZABETH MORK

You rush home, eager to tell your family that your favorite artist will perform tomorrow night and that you won a coveted ticket to the show. They are so happy to see you so happy. But then the questions begin: Why do you like this artist? You almost blurt out “the lyrics!” but you pause. Will your loved ones understand the explosive, streetwise and, most importantly, novel nomenclature of your favorite singer-songwriter? You mumble something about “Tik Tok” to a blank-eyed audience. How do you bridge this language gap when you’re both speaking English? It’s not your intention to rewrite the song in your explanation. Deep down, you know that once they understand, they too will appreciate the artist’s bohemian message.

Were you aware that is an issue that playwrights and other writers often face? The trick to preserving the meaning of the original work in a new form is known as **adaptation**. Different from translating between two languages or creating something entirely new, adapting texts transforms the work into a new form while still retaining the original’s message, structure and tone.

This complex idea may leave many wondering why adapt anything at all? Why not compose a completely original work? Many important works of literature were

written in other languages, cultures and time periods. To complicate the situation, language and meaning regularly change from generation to generation. Just as certain family members have no basis for words you use today, they too possess a unique vocabulary that defines their own time. Adaptation is a challenging yet deeply rewarding process, capable of sharing ideas across cultures and time.

## Universal Chekhov:

Anton Chekhov’s works continue to transcend time in their relevance to modern issues, characters and themes. Goodman Theatre’s artistic director Robert Falls’ newest adaptation of *The Seagull* is one of many Chekhov variations done at the Chicago theater. In 2002 Regina Taylor crafted her own rendition titled *Drowning Crow*, which focuses upon modern African-American culture. And showing this season will be Tanya Saracho’s adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*, *El Nogalar*, which details corruption in modern Mexico.

How is it that these works, such as *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* written in 19th century Russia, carry significance in modern America?

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## Adaptation in Practice:

Below are two examples of adaptation. The first is from Regina Taylor’s *Drowning Crow*. Taylor’s Constantine Trip (Constant Trip, or C-Trip), is an adaptation from Chekhov’s original Konstantin. C-Trip’s name highlights qualities of the character that are familiar to a modern audience; just as Chekhov’s original Russian names had significance for his public. In the piece below, C-Trip/Konstantin expresses his frustration that Hannah/Nina might be late to his performance.

### ***Drowning Crow:* (Regina Taylor)**

**C-Trip:** “If my Hannah is late the effect is F’d up. She shoulda been here by now. Her mom and pop watch her like a hawk watches a chicken / breaking out of San Quentin/ is easier than her escapin’/ her cage.

Hey unc-you look tore down-you know like bushwacked-  
“(Taylor, page 5)

### ***The Seagull:* (Robert Falls)**

**Konstantin:** “And if Nina’s late, then of course the whole effect will be ruined. She should have been here by now. Her father and stepmother are always watching her. Getting out of that house is like escaping prison. (fussing with Sorin) Look at you-you’re a mess. Can’t you do something about this hair?”

The differences in language between the two texts are obvious, but the tone and quality of the piece remain the same. Taylor’s and Falls’ each manage to retain the situation of the scene, as well as the character’s particular frustration.

Here are two further examples of adaptation from later in the play. In a strong piece of symbolism, C-Trip brings to Hannah a dead crow he has recently killed. They then discuss the changes each character is experiencing in relation to the other. Taylor's piece ends with the entrance of famous television writer Robert as he muses about the character of Mary. In Robert Fall's adaptation of *The Seagull*. Konstantin lays the dead seagull he has killed at Nina's feet, leading the two to discuss their changing relationship. The famous author, Trigorin, interrupts the dialogue as he enters writing about Masha.

### **Drowning Crow: (Regina Taylor)**

**C-Trip:** A crow. I shot it.

**Hannah:** Why'd you shoot it?

**C-Trip:** I saw it flapping in the water-It looked it was drowning-so I shot it.

**Hannah:** Maybe it would have survived if you hadn't shot it. You are so whacked.

**C-Trip:** Naw. I killed it for you and soon I'm gonna kill myself just like that-for you.

**Hannah:** I don't know you.

**C-Trip:** Yeah. And I stopped knowing you first. You changed on me.

**Hannah:** You've been freaking out at the drop of a hat-and everything you say means something else - Like this black crow - Excuse me - I'm just too stupid to understand you.

**C-Trip:** I'm talking and you can't hear me- I mean, what's to understand? Nobody liked my play - you hated it - think I'm a loser. A nothing, like everybody else . . . that much I know. I burned it. Every last word. I'll never write again-for you.

(Sees Robert approaching, reading. Hannah no longer sees or hears C-Trip).

Now here comes true talent - Mr. Hamlet himself - he comes with the same little books - "words, words, words..." Your standing in shade and melting in his light. I'm outta here. (He exists into the audience.)

**Robert:** (taking notes in his book)  
...she does coke and drinks rum. Always in black. The teacher loves her.

### **The Seagull: (Robert Falls)**

**Konstantin:** I've been a bad boy. I killed this gull today-I lay it at your feet.

**Nina:** What is wrong with you?

**Konstantin:** (pause) Soon I'm going to kill myself in exactly the same way.

**Nina:** You're not making any sense.

**Konstantin:** No. I'm not. Not since you stopped being the person I thought you were. Look at you-You can hardly bear to look at me.

**Nina:** Because you're acting crazy. Nothing you say makes sense. This is obviously meant to be some kind of symbol-but of what? I guess I'm just too stupid to understand.

**Konstantin:** I burnt my play. I thought you'd like to know. (she looks at him) I can't believe you're acting like this-so cold. It's like I woke up one morning and found the lake had dried up - or vanished from the earth. You think you're too stupid to understand? What's so hard to understand? My play was a failure; you think my ideas are shit, you think I'm completely worthless - just they all do. I understand- I get it. I feel like a snail is being driven into my brain-Goddamn it! And my pride - sucking my blood - suck it like a leech!

(Trigorin enters)

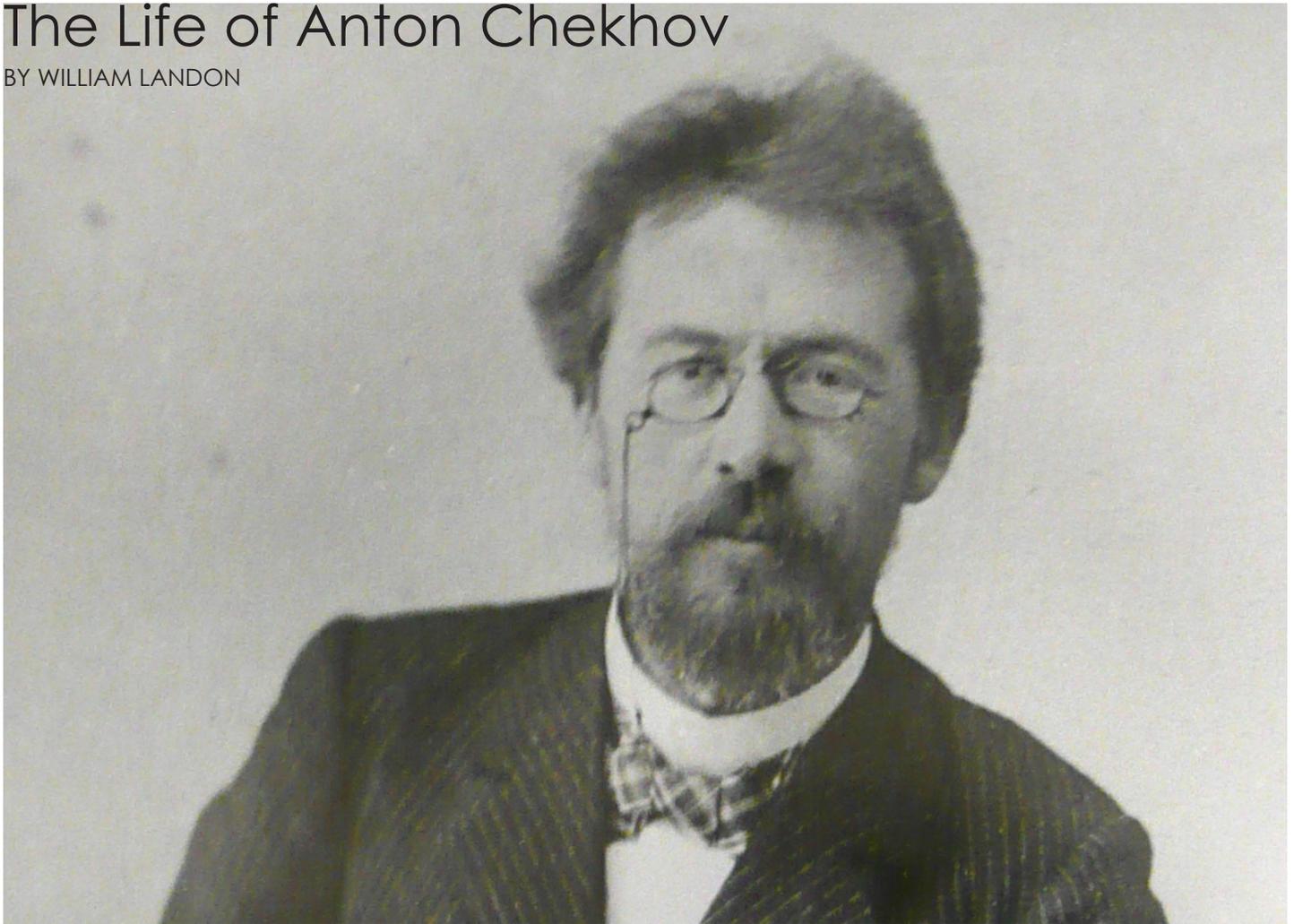
Ah, here's the man with real talent. Behold he enters! Just like Hamlet- 'Words, words, words...' Well...I won't stand in your way.

(Konstantin runs off)

**Trigorin:** (writes) ...takes snuff, drinks ... always wears black. The schoolteacher's in love with her-

# The Life of Anton Chekhov

BY WILLIAM LANDON



*Anton Chekhov in 1901. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

An interesting thing about human history, and one to always remember, is that great people often come from very humble beginnings. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born in the small seaport town of Taganrog in Ukraine on January 17th, 1860. His father Yegorovich was a grocer who years earlier bought his freedom from serfdom (a forced position that was much like slavery). His mother, Yevgeniya, was the orphaned daughter of a cloth merchant. His family was a part of the Russian “moveable class” – their social and economic status depended on Yegorovich’s ability to pay his dues. When Chekhov was only 16, his family went completely bankrupt and moved to Moscow to start a new life. His father fled to the city in 1875, and his mother finally had to follow in 1876. Chekhov remained behind and supported himself by tutoring younger children. Three years later, he had saved and worked enough to attend Moscow University Medical School on scholarship. He rejoined his family in the city.

It was during 1879 and 1880 that Chekhov began writing – not because he realized he had stories to

tell, but more likely for financial reasons. He started developing his craft as a journalist at first and quickly gained fame as a writer. In 1884, he began practicing medicine officially. Even as he began his career as doctor, he had already published several stories. His first story as a writer free of the magazine had been published in 1880, and another of his early works was translated into English. He spent almost every spare moment of the day writing, and never spent more than one day on any story! He quickly became known for his wit and satire combined with tragic subjects, as well as his mastery of the short fiction form. At the beginning he had many harsh critics, and despite his success he often felt desperate to create a truly great piece of literature. He was criticized, partially, because he never wrote on politics. Those issues were far removed from his subjects and interests. This choice, it turned out, was an advantage as well as a disadvantage. Unlike other writers who wrote heavily about politics, Chekhov was more often the target of government censorship than his peers were.

After graduating, he continued to explore his life as a writer while he worked as a doctor. During this time he worked for several magazines that published his work. He wrote incredible amounts of short fiction, some of which gained him praise from specific critics as well as fame in the cities. Not all was well, though; in the mid-to late 1880s his health began to fail and he showed signs of tuberculosis. He decided travel would improve his health, but not before his first publication in the prestigious literary magazine *New Times* in 1886. That became one of his most productive years; he wrote more than a hundred stories. Then, the course of his career changed forever: he began to write for the stage. His first play *Ivanov* was produced in 1887 in Moscow. It received mixed reviews – some reacted positively to his daring style, but many audiences had trouble with Chekhov’s failure to portray even the most despicable characters as particularly good or bad.

Throughout the following years he continued to fall deeper in love with the theater. Over the next two decades he worked often with theaters in Moscow while also known as Doctor Anton Chekhov. By 1892 he had amassed enough money to purchase the Melikhovo estate, which became a hub of artistic activity and meetings throughout the rest of his life. While writing for the stage was nothing new to him, from 1896 to 1904 he wrote the four plays for which he would be known throughout the world: *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*.

Around this time he met his future wife, Olga, an actress with the Moscow Art Theatre. Not much is known about his love life. Prior to this engagement and marriage he had been involved with women in the art scene as well as some family friends, but this was his only marriage. They began a long romantic affair and finally married, as Chekhov spent the last few years of his life travelling back and forth from Moscow to the resort town of Yalta in Ukraine. As a result of his poor health and her work in the city, they spent little time together. In part due to his incredibly busy lifestyle and the course of time, his health went into a steady drop. He began coughing up blood and grew steadily weaker. Chekhov made his final



Chekhov in 1889. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

trip to Yalta in 1904, just after completing *The Cherry Orchard*. One night he called for the doctor and a glass of champagne, knowing he was about to die. His last words were “I haven’t drunk champagne for a long time.” In a strange detail that Chekhov would have appreciated, his body was transported for burial in an ice truck marked “Oysters.” This was made even stranger by the fact that one of his early short stories shares this title.

## The Good Doctor Chekhov

Many people know Anton Chekhov for his writing; his short stories and plays are still read and performed today. What many people don't realize, however, is that Chekhov attended university to become a doctor. The medical profession was his chosen career for much of his life, and it wasn't until much later that his writing earned him greater fame and success. Many scholars believe that Chekhov's years as a doctor helped him to develop his almost off-hand and subtle treatment of tragic events in his plays and stories. In fact, his life as a doctor had quite an impact on his writing as a whole. Chekhov wrote what he knew, and he wrote about the private lives and problems of doctors long before medical dramas and comedies like *Scrubs* or *ER* were ideas on anyone's desk. He was part of a class of Russian doctors who felt they owed much to the peasantry, and worked out of duty and perhaps guilt on their behalf, often for little pay.

Many of Chekhov's written works are also, in small ways, autobiographical. While very rarely are any of his characters deep reflections of who he was, he drew on his own experiences in the theater and in the private lives of himself and his friends to breathe life into his characters. This explains why many of his characters are doctors. In *The Seagull*, one can guess that Dr. Dorn is one of these characters; Chekhov drew on his own experiences as a doctor to make this fictional doctor believable, and that could have added to Dorn's weary and ambivalent approach to life. We also can see evidence of Chekhov's medical life in the character Trigorin. When Trigorin goes into his speech about the mind of the writer in Act II, it's almost as if he's performing a diagnosis in the way a doctor would.

Illness was a part of Chekhov's life in another personal way. In the mid-1880s, not long after he graduated from University, Chekhov contracted a case of tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a disease that attacks the lungs; some of the symptoms include heavy coughing and the coughing up of blood. While only in his 20s, Chekhov already had the first warning signs of the disease that would one day

kill him. Maybe it was for this reason that even though he was a doctor, he refused to admit that anything was really wrong with him. By the time of his death, his accomplishments numbered more than stories: In the early 1890s he took a trip to Sakhalin, an island in remote Siberia, to study and interview members of the outcast colony there. He spent a long time completing medical surveys of the island's inhabitants, interviewing as many as 160 people a day. When he returned home he published his findings. Throughout the last decades of his life he also worked as a doctor out in the country, providing his services regardless of class. His drive and resolve in this respect was seen clearly during Russia's cholera epidemic in 1892 and 1893, when he ran a free medical clinic on his personal estate. He held true to the values in his work and often defended them. In both his actions and writing, he always praised the virtues of the country doctor.



*The scholarly doctor/writer in his later years. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

# Novelist, Playwright, Short Story Composer: One Author

BY ELIZABETH MORK

Anton Chekhov the scholar was also Anton Chekhov the doctor, but perhaps he is best known as Anton Chekhov the writer. Simply put, he was a prolific writer. During his lifetime, Chekhov penned around a dozen plays, several novels and some 200 short stories. His works, often autobiographical in nature, reflect the different career paths and people that made up his life.

His early comedic pieces are a product of his first job scripting low-brow humor for a local newspaper. (Can you imagine grabbing a work by Chekhov that resembles the Sunday comics?) His initial plays also retain this comedic flair.

Surprisingly, Chekhov was not known as a playwright for much of his lifetime. Many of his works for the theater were either outright rejected, or else they were major flops on stage. Chekhov even momentarily swore that *The Seagull* would be his last theater endeavor; he wrote *Uncle Vanya* a year later.

Regardless of the form, Chekhov's creations are rich with literary allusions. His works reference popular literature, pertinent social issues of the day and various pieces done by Shakespeare. This technique of concealing information within the text, known as "Aesopic language," is essentially a way to avoid blatant censorship but retain relevance for a literate public.

Avid readers of Chekhov also would note elements of his short stories appearing in his plays, thus enriching the

action happening upon stage through these connections. For example, *The Seagull*, written in 1896, has nearly verbatim quotes from his story *Ariadna*, written in 1885. *Ariadna* chronicles the life of a young actress whose adventures include fostering a disenchanting love affair with an older man. In a moment of repose, the story's narrator, a man in love with *Ariadna*, describes the following scene among himself, *Ariadna* and *Ariadna's* older love interest:

*When Ariadna and I were fishing, Lubkov would lie on the sand close by and make fun of me, or lecture me on the conduct of life.*

*"I wonder, my dear sir, how you can live without a love affair," he would say. "You are young, handsome, interesting — in fact, you're a man not to be sniffed at, yet you live like a monk. Och! I can't stand these fellows who are old at 28! I'm nearly 10 years older than you are, and yet which of us is the younger? Ariadna Grigoryevna, which?"*

*"You, of course," Ariadna answered him.*

This scene reappears in *The Seagull* among Masha, Doctor Dorn and Arkadina. While lounging next to an un-played game of croquet, Arkadina instructs Masha to stand beside her before calling on Dorn to name the younger looking of the two. Dorn selects the older Arkadina with a simple "You, of course."



*New Times (Новое время) Magazine, for which Chekhov often wrote. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

The gender reversal aids in highlighting the similarities between the two scenes. In both cases, the person with the more vivacious life is chosen as appearing the most youthful. However, it is difficult to deduce if Dorn and Ariadna are honest in their answers, for each wants to stay in favor with Arkadina and Lubkov, respectively.

Below is a chronological list of Chekhov's major literary works:

**Plays:**

- *That Worthless Fellow Platonov* (c. 1881)
- *On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco* (1886, 1902)
- *Swansong* (1887)
- *Ivanov* (1887)
- *The Boor or The Bear* (1888)
- *A Marriage Proposal* (c. 1888-1889)
- *A Reluctant Tragic Hero* (1889)
- *The Wedding* (1889)
- *The Wood Demon* (1889)
- *The Festivities* (1891)
- *The Seagull* (1896)
- *Uncle Vanya* (1899-1900)
- *Three Sisters* (1901)
- *The Cherry Orchard* (1904)

**Novels:**

- *The Shooting Party* (1884)
- *The Steppe* (1888)
- *The Duel* (1891)
- *The Story of an Unknown Man* (1893)
- *Three Years* (1895)
- *My Life* (1896)

**Short Stories:**

- "The Death of a Government Clerk" (1883)
- "A Chameleon" (1884)
- "Oysters" (1884)
- "A Living Chronology" (1885)
- "Small Fry" (1885)
- "The Huntsman" (1885)
- "A Malefactor" (1885)
- "Sergeant Prishibeyev" (1885)
- "Misery" (1886)
- "The Requiem" (1886)
- "Vanka" (1886)
- "The Siren" (1887)
- "Kashtanka" (1887)



Chekhov the writer. Image courtesy of New York Public Library

- "The Bet" (1889)
- "A Dreary Story" (1889)
- "The Grasshopper" (1892)
- "In Exile" (1892)
- "Ward No. 6" (1892)
- "The Black Monk" (1894)
- "The Student" (1894)
- "The Teacher of Literature" (1894)
- "Anna on the Neck" (1895)
- "Whitebrow" (1895)
- "Ariadna" (1895)
- "An Artist's Story [The House with the Mezzanine]" (1896)
- "Peasants" (1897)
- "The Little Trilogy" (1898)
- "The Lady with the Dog" (1899)
- "At Christmas Time" (1900)
- "In the Ravine" (1900)
- "The Bishop" (1902)
- "Betrothed" (1903)

*'To whom shall I tell my grief?'*

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The twilight of evening. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs, shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the sledge-driver, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular snowdrift fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off. . . . His little mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is probably lost in thought. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the familiar gray landscapes, and cast into this slough, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing uproar and hurrying people, is bound to think.

It is a long time since Iona and his nag have budged. They came out of the yard before dinnertime and not a single fare yet. But now the shades of evening are falling on the town. The pale light of the street lamps changes to a vivid color, and the bustle of the street grows noisier.

"Sledge to Vyborgskaya!" Iona hears. "Sledge!"

Iona starts, and through his snow-plastered eyelashes sees an officer in a military overcoat with a hood over his head.

"To Vyborgskaya," repeats the officer. "Are you asleep? To Vyborgskaya!"

In token of assent Iona gives a tug at the reins which sends cakes of snow flying from the horse's back and shoulders. The officer gets into the sledge. The sledge-driver clicks to the horse, cranes his neck like a swan, rises in his seat, and more from habit than necessity brandishes his whip. The mare cranes her neck, too, crooks her stick-like legs, and hesitatingly sets off...

"Where are you shoving, you devil?" Iona immediately hears shouts from the dark mass shifting to and fro before him. "Where the devil are you going? Keep to the r-right!"

"You don't know how to drive! Keep to the right," says the officer angrily.

A coachman driving a carriage swears at him; a pedestrian crossing the road and brushing the horse's nose with his shoulder looks at him angrily and shakes the snow off his sleeve. Iona fidgets on the box as though he were sitting on thorns, jerks his elbows, and turns his eyes about like one possessed as though he did not know where he was or why he was there.

"What rascals they all are!" says the officer jocosely.

"They are simply doing their best to run up against you or fall under the horse's feet. They must be doing it on purpose."

Iona looks at his fare and moves his lips... Apparently he means to say something, but nothing comes but a sniff.

"What?" inquires the officer.

Iona gives a wry smile, and straining his throat, brings

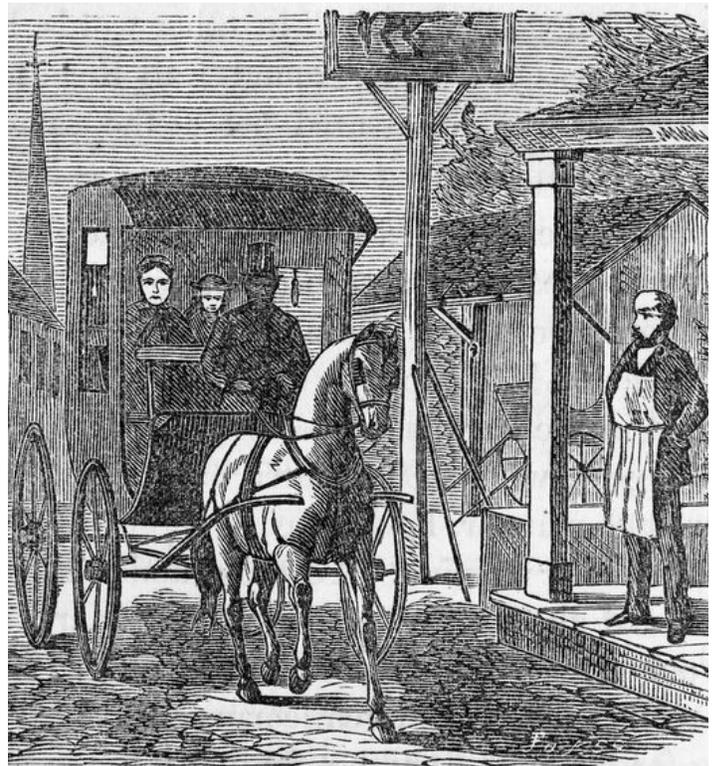


Image courtesy of New York Public Library

out huskily: "My son... er... my son died this week, sir."

"H'm! What did he die of?"

Iona turns his whole body round to his fare, and says: "Who can tell! It must have been from fever... He lay three days in the hospital and then he died... God's will."

"Turn round, you devil!" comes out of the darkness. "Have you gone cracked, you old dog? Look where you are going!"

"Drive on! drive on!..." says the officer. "We shan't get there till to-morrow going on like this. Hurry up!"

The sledge-driver cranes his neck again, rises in his seat, and with heavy grace swings his whip. Several times he looks round at the officer, but the latter keeps his eyes shut and is apparently disinclined to listen. Putting his fare down at Vyborgskaya, Iona stops by a restaurant, and again sits huddled up on the box... Again the wet snow paints him and his horse white. One hour passes, and then another...

Three young men, two tall and thin, one short and hunchbacked, come up, railing at each other and loudly stamping on the pavement with their goloshes.

"Cabby, to the Police Bridge!" the hunchback cries in a cracked voice. "The three of us... twenty kopecks!"

Iona tugs at the reins and clicks to his horse. Twenty kopecks is not a fair price, but he has no thoughts for that. Whether it is a rouble or whether it is five kopecks does not matter to him now so long as he has a fare... The three young men, shoving each other and using bad language, go up to the sledge, and all three try to sit down at once. The question remains to be settled: Which are to sit down and which one is to stand? After a long altercation, ill-temper, and abuse, they come to the conclusion that the hunchback must stand because he is the shortest.

"Well, drive on," says the hunchback in his cracked voice, settling himself and breathing down Iona's neck. "Cut along! What a cap you've got, my friend! You wouldn't find a worse one in all Petersburg..."

"He-he!... he-he!..." laughs Iona. "It's nothing to boast of!"



*Image courtesy of New York Public Library*

"Well, then, nothing to boast of, drive on! Are you going to drive like this all the way? Eh? Shall I give you one in the neck?"

"My head aches," says one of the tall ones. "At the Dukmasovs' yesterday Vaska and I drank four bottles of brandy between us."

"I can't make out why you talk such stuff," says the other tall one angrily. "You lie like a brute."

"Strike me dead, it's the truth!..."

"It's about as true as that a louse coughs."

"He-he!" grins Iona. "Me-er-ry gentlemen!"

"Tfoo! the devil take you!" cries the hunchback indignantly. "Will you get on, you old plague, or won't you? Is that the way to drive? Give her one with the whip. Hang it all, give it her well."

Iona feels behind his back the jolting person and quivering voice of the hunchback. He hears abuse addressed to him, he sees people, and the feeling of loneliness begins little by little to be less heavy on his heart. The hunchback swears at him, till he chokes over some elaborately whimsical string of epithets and is overpowered by his cough. His tall companions begin

talking of a certain Nadyezhda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them. Waiting till there is a brief pause, he looks round once more and says:

“This week... er... my... er. . . son died!”

“We shall all die, . . .” says the hunchback with a sigh, wiping his lips after coughing. “Come, drive on! drive on! My friends, I simply cannot stand crawling like this! When will he get us there?”

“Well, you give him a little encouragement . . . one in the neck!”

“Do you hear, you old plague? I’ll make you smart. If one stands on ceremony with fellows like you one may as well walk. Do you hear, you old dragon? Or don’t you care a hang what we say?”

And Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck.

“He-he! ...,“ he laughs. “Merry gentlemen... God give you health!”

“Cabman, are you married?” asks one of the tall ones.

“I? He he! Me-er-ry gentlemen. The only wife for me now is the damp earth... He-ho-ho!... The grave that is!... Here my son’s dead and I am alive... It’s a strange thing, death has come in at the wrong door... Instead of coming for me it went for my son... ”

And Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at that point the hunchback gives a faint sigh and announces that, thank God! they have arrived at last. After taking his twenty kopecks, Iona gazes for a long while after the revelers, who disappear into a dark entry. Again he is alone and again there is silence for him... The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona’s eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery... His

misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona’s heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight. . . . Iona sees a house-porter with a parcel and makes up his mind to address him.

“What time will it be, friend?” he asks.

“Going on for ten... Why have you stopped here? Drive on!”

Iona drives a few paces away, bends himself double, and gives himself up to his misery. He feels it is no good to appeal to people. But before five minutes have passed he draws himself up, shakes his head as though he feels a sharp pain, and tugs at the reins... He can bear it no longer.

“Back to the yard!” he thinks. “To the yard!”

And his little mare, as though she knew his thoughts, falls to trotting. An hour and a half later Iona is sitting by a big dirty stove. On the stove, on the floor, and on the benches are people snoring. The air is full of smells and stuffiness. Iona looks at the sleeping figures, scratches himself, and regrets that he has come home so early...



Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

"I have not earned enough to pay for the oats, even," he thinks. "That's why I am so miserable. A man who knows how to do his work,... who has had enough to eat, and whose horse has had enough to eat, is always at ease..."

In one of the corners a young cabman gets up, clears his throat sleepily, and makes for the water-bucket.

"Want a drink?" Iona asks him.

"Seems so."

"May it do you good. . . . But my son is dead, mate. . . . Do you hear? This week in the hospita... It's a queer business..."

Iona looks to see the effect produced by his words, but he sees nothing. The young man has covered his head over and is already asleep. The old man sighs and scratches himself... Just as the young man had been thirsty for water, he thirsts for speech. His son will soon have been dead a week, and he has not really talked to anybody yet... He wants to talk of it properly, with deliberation... He wants to tell how his son was taken ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died... He wants to describe the funeral, and how he went to the hospital to get his son's clothes. He still has his daughter Anisya in the country... And he wants to talk about her too... Yes, he has plenty to talk about now. His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament... It would be even better to talk to women. Though they are silly creatures, they blubber at the first word.

"Let's go out and have a look at the mare," Iona thinks. "There is always time for sleep... .You'll have sleep enough, no fear... ."

He puts on his coat and goes into the stables where his mare is standing. He thinks about oats, about hay, about the weather... He cannot think about his son when he is alone... To talk about him with someone is possible, but to think of him and picture him is insufferable anguish... .

"Are you munching?" Iona asks his mare, seeing her shining eyes. "There, munch away, munch away... . Since

we have not earned enough for oats, we will eat hay... . Yes... I have grown too old to drive... .My son ought to be driving, not I... .He was a real cabman... .He ought to have lived..."

Iona is silent for a while, and then he goes on:

"That's how it is, old girl... Kuzma Ionitch is gone... .He said good-by to me... . He went and died for no reason... . Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt... And all at once that same little colt went and died... You'd be sorry, wouldn't you?... ."

The little mare munches, listens, and breathes on her master's hands. Iona is carried away and tells her all about it.

## -THE END-

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**Activity:** Adaptation is a challenging skill to master. It's your turn to adapt Chekhov's short story 'Misery' into a short play of your own. Beyond adapting the form from short story to a play, this is a chance for you to practice adaptation across cultures. Set 'Misery' in current day Chicago. Feel free to change the names, professions, and dialog of the piece. Remember: Adaptation is not creating an entirely new work, but rather reworking the original into a new form so that themes and ideas are accessible to a modern audience.

Break into small groups. Create an idea. Pull out what you think would be relevant for a performance. After you create the script, put on a show!

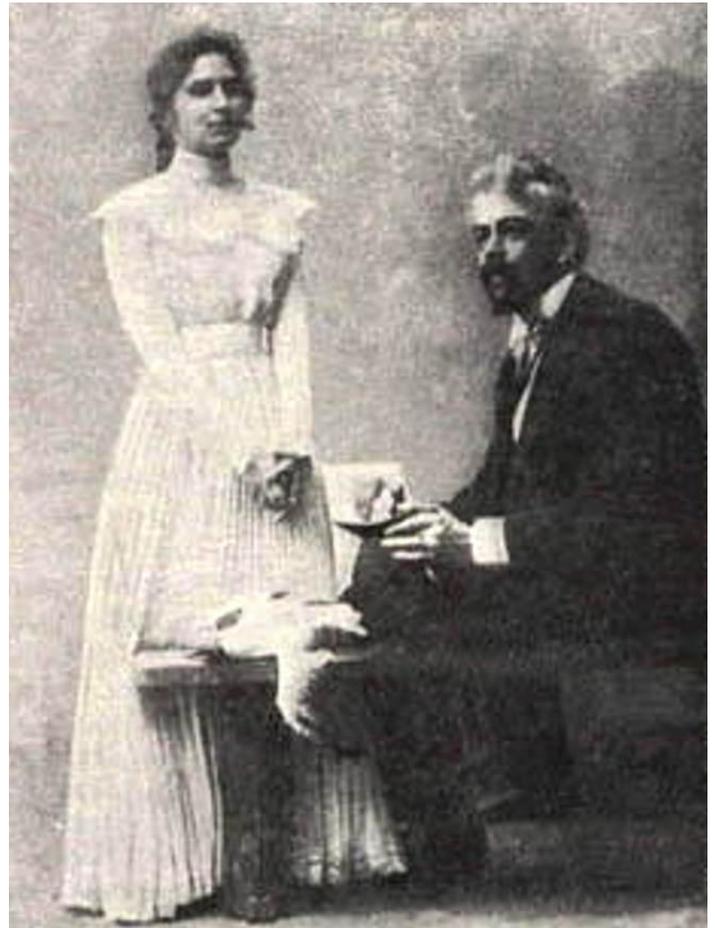
# Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre

BY WILLIAM LANDON

Anton Chekhov began writing for the theater while he lived in Moscow, a center of culture and arts. During this time he worked with some of the greatest Russian theater practitioners. One such artist he often collaborated with was Konstantin Stanislavsky, head of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT). The theater had opened just years before in 1896 as a rejection of the old, stale Russian styles of acting. The artists at MAT were artistic revolutionaries, and as Stanislavsky wrote: "Like all revolutionaries, we broke the old and exaggerated the new."

Stanislavsky was an actor and director who is best known for creating an original acting system based on interior emotions as the source of all acting and conveying emotion through action. At the time, most actors relied on stock gestures and expressions that did not hold up to Stanislavsky's search for truth in theater. Most American actors use a variation of Stanislavsky's system today. But American Method acting, which involves total psychological immersion in a character, is only a variation on the Stanislavsky technique – a system made to change based on the needs of different cultures. Director Robert Falls has revisited the original techniques to use in his production. Stanislavsky was a great and accomplished artist, and perhaps he and Chekhov rarely saw eye to eye because of their statuses as highly gifted artists and peers.

Chekhov and Stanislavsky argued often over Chekhov's plays, mainly about interpretation. There were many questions for debate: Why did Chekhov show his characters in the way he did? What was he trying to say about them by not choosing sides and not condemning anyone? What did he mean when he referred to his tragic plays as comedies? Stanislavsky developed multiple answers to these questions. More often than not, these were different from Chekhov's answers, despite the fact that the two men believed actors should express an internal level of emotion while performing. With *The Cherry Orchard* in particular, Stanislavsky's direction focused on parts of the play's action as the major pivotal points, while Chekhov had his own ideas on the main events. To other theater artists in Moscow at the time, Chekhov's way of writing and his ideas about plays were very strange. Even great actors and directors didn't always know what to think of his work, and this confusion often



*Konstantin Stanislavsky as Trigorin in The Seagull at MAT. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

translated to the audience.

## **And The Seagull!**

Despite vehement disagreements between Chekhov and Stanislavsky, MAT was a primary force in making *The Seagull* a success. The play's first production was at Alexandrine Theatre in St. Petersburg. Many thought it was a disaster. This could have been attributed to the play's more realistic style, which was unheard of at the time, but also to the hostile circumstances of the opening night performance. The audience had been promised a double bill featuring a popular comedic actress of the time. After realizing their favorite actress had no part in the play, audience members were enraged. Rioting and some truly awful publicity ensued. This event violently shook Chekhov's faith in his work; he swore that he

would never again write for the stage.

But in 1898 Stanislavsky and MAT co-founder Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko contacted Chekhov. They were extremely interested in Chekhov's new play, *The Seagull*. In fact, Danchenko personally pushed for the show's addition to MAT's season. Stanislavsky and Danchenko jointly directed the cast for 26-plus rehearsals, more than twice the rehearsal sessions common in that time. The second opening of *The Seagull* was a great success. Chekhov continued his partnership with Stanislavsky until his death – a partnership that included the premieres of the playwright's most famous plays.

### **What it All Meant**

Chekhov's work with MAT is remembered for the complex relationships, great productions and how it changed the world of theatre. He was a playwright who had developed a radical new way of writing for the theater – his

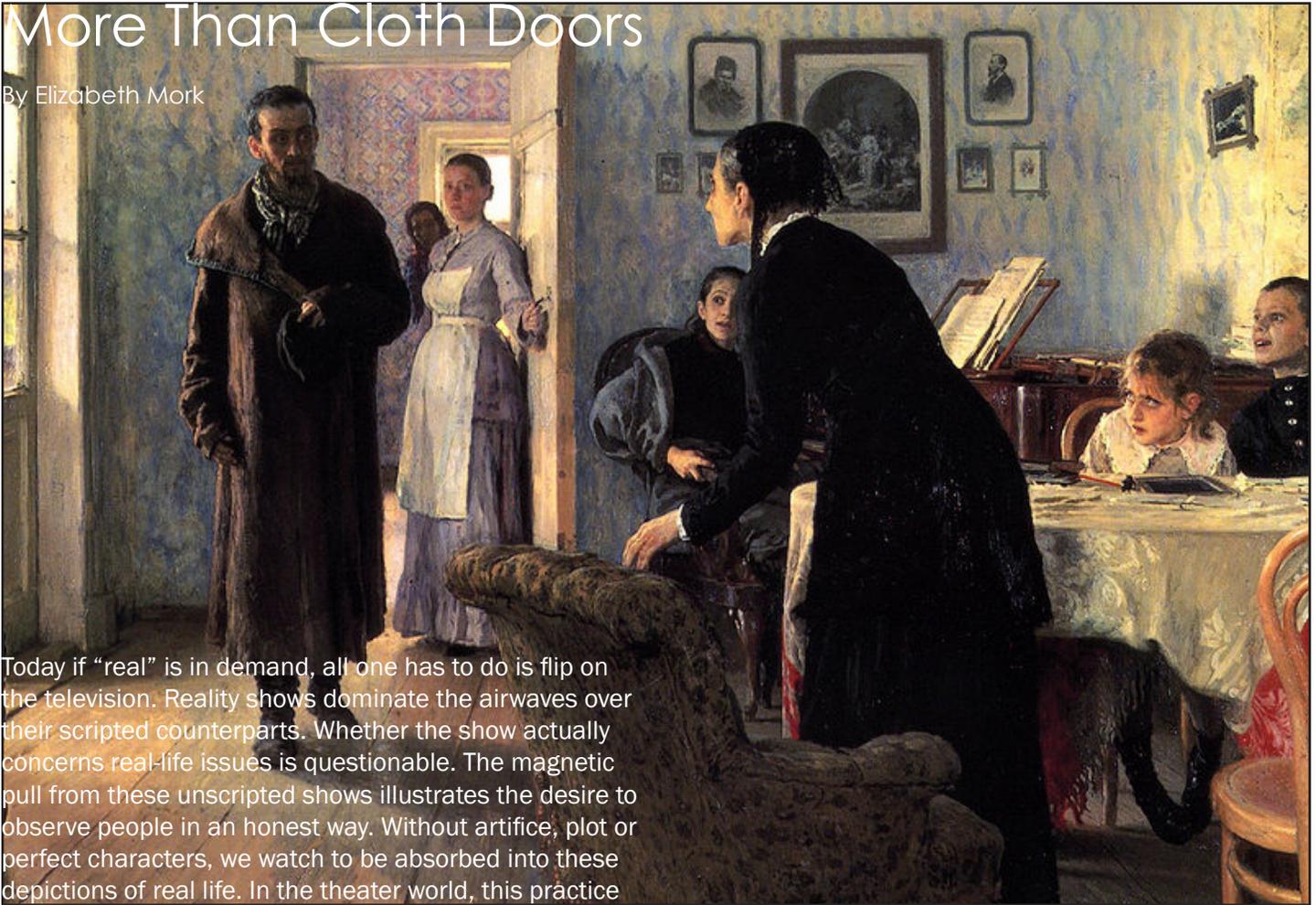
characters talked about life through seemingly superficial conversation. Something as simple as characters eating and bantering was a philosophical iceberg; all of the truth and meaning in the act lay below the surface for the actor to bring up. This had never quite been done in theater before, and as a result new methods in directing and acting need to be created. Stanislavsky developed many of his core thoughts about acting from working on Chekhov's plays. The work actually helped generate Stanislavsky's doctrine that drama happens inside the character and should be played from thought and emotion, not from arbitrary gesturing. Production of Chekhov's plays marked the first step in the maturing of MAT's work. This artistic partnership helped to introduce the theater world to realism, the Stanislavsky technique and other conventions that have made directing, design, acting and playwrighting what we know today.



*Chekhov reading The Seagull to the Moscow Art Theatre company. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

# More Than Cloth Doors

By Elizabeth Mork



Today if “real” is in demand, all one has to do is flip on the television. Reality shows dominate the airwaves over their scripted counterparts. Whether the show actually concerns real-life issues is questionable. The magnetic pull from these unscripted shows illustrates the desire to observe people in an honest way. Without artifice, plot or perfect characters, we watch to be absorbed into these depictions of real life. In the theater world, this practice is known as Realism. Realism is the representation of real life, complete with complex nuances and trivialities, set upon the stage.

A new movement swept the theatrical landscape during the 19th century, transforming every conventional element from sets to acting style to play content. Proponents of Realism, such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and Anton Chekhov, were of the belief that the set should reflect real-life environments. These settings should become a place where actors discover how to behave as if their characters were actual people, and the script exposes human issues in a natural way.

Just as every episode of *I Love Lucy*, *Friends* or *Scrubs* maintains a set cast with a simple plot structure, theater before Realism was set in firm conventions and boundaries. For example, certain actors were cast

*Russian realism in art: the painting Ilya Repin's Unexpected Return. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

repeatedly in the same roles, creating predictable stereotypes lacking the thrill of character discovery. Likewise, the scripts were often highly formulaic, with a strong divide between the definitions of a comedy and a tragedy. Further separating the audience from the production was that the subjects of the play were aristocracy, nobles and supernatural heroes. Creators of Realism were striving to represent the life of common people whose situations were a relatable blend of sorrow and joy.

These radical changes came out of what many now consider old-fashioned practices. Unless the director is trying to portray a certain style, modern sets often depict the actual attributes of an environment. For example, if

a scene takes place in a sky-rise business office, the set will most likely contain a real desk, computer and rolling chair. Furthermore, the interior of the building might include paintings on the walls, as well as windows that depict life outside.

During the 1830s, the set of an office would be made of canvas walls with little to no detail in terms of props or lighting. Acting styles were similarly as false as the sets by modern standards. Emotions were conveyed through specific voices and hand gestures, which the actor would assume as though they were putting on a piece of clothing. For example, if an actor had a certain frown and spoke in a melancholy voice, the audience would quickly understand that he or she was this particular type of unhappy. This practice often appears in sitcoms. In the television show *Scrubs*, the audience knows that J.D. is day dreaming when he tilts his head and stares dreamily into space.

The content of the plays made it easy to adopt this predictable acting technique. Stories on stage were meant to be entertaining and separate from situations that occur in daily life. For instance, watching someone eat a piece of bread, or passive aggressively avoid speaking on a certain topic simply did not exist. Furthermore, the characters of conventional theater were very different from the average person. Stories were often of royalty, and full of ideal people lacking real-world problems. Realism sought to portray imperfect people likely to fail due to their human flaws.

Realism shook the theater from these dusty chains of convention and set the art free to expand into a new form. Other mediums moved away from common conventions to likewise depict real life. Literature of the time period was often romantic and detailed life as an ideal. With the introduction of Realism, stories became critiques of society rather than praise of lofty lifestyles. Art had a subject change as well. Realism brought forth the “everyday” in the artistic movement. The focus was upon average people completing average tasks in their



*The Seagull.* Photo courtesy of New York Public Library

daily lives. Farmers in their fields, a girl at a writing desk and a cook preparing a duck were all subjects to utilize.

Today, similar portrayals of real life are a remote click away. Partly because of writers' strikes and budget cuts, the 1990s saw a dramatic rise in the creation of reality television shows. MTV's *The Real World* — seven strangers living in one house — hit a nerve in modern society. The years since then have given birth to a wide variety of reality spinoffs. What explains the popularity of shows such as *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*, *Deadliest Catch* and *Jersey Shore*?

# The International Spread of Realism

BY ELIZABETH MORK

Prior to *The Seagull's* game of lotto – a Russian equivalent to the game bingo – the everyday was finding its way onto the stage. Russia's movement toward realistic interpretations of life within the theater was in response to a growing trend that began first in Norway and then in Sweden. Anton Chekhov's experiments of bringing the everyday into the theater was being pioneered by two "Fathers of Realism."

Henrik Ibsen, the famed Norwegian playwright, left audiences with mouths agape at his portraits of society. His character-driven stories fit within the framework of a well-made play. Ibsen illustrates the telling trivialities of life through a mathematical structure of time, character development and plot. His use of props and set design often function as signifying marks for a character's behavior. Ibsen also utilizes objects on stage to define his characters. In order for the audience to find these stage conventions relevant, Ibsen had to bring life, in all its banalities and habits, into the theater. We watch his characters decorate Christmas trees, dust the mantel and crotchet shawls in dimly lit living rooms. His child characters are often melancholy instead of cheerful. Likewise, Ibsen portrays children with disabilities that allude to flaws in the adult characters. In *Little Eyolf*, for example, the child Eyolf suffers from physical disabilities that occurred because of an accident he had as an infant while his parents were not in the room. Similar to the use of everyday objects on stage, the appearance of sickly and unhappy children aids in creating a holistic reality. In seemingly basic rituals and set design, Ibsen was capable of conveying complex levels of unspoken tension, detail and history.

Sweden also was experimenting with Realism. August Strindberg, an eccentric Swedish playwright, took Ibsen's work in Realism still further. Strindberg was adept at crafting works that were "a slice of life" on stage. He rebelled against traditional stage conventions such as false set pieces, rooms fabricated out of canvas backdrops and unrealistic footlights. Strindberg demanded that his work be done with the use of real material. If a door is to slam shut, the actor should actually slam a real door. Strindberg's belief was only then will the audience have the true experience of seeing, hearing and viewing the proper action of the play.

Similarly to Ibsen, Strindberg was fond of using common props to add greater depth of meaning to his characters and his stories.

Chekhov was brought up in the theater when these two Realism practitioners were hitting their respective strides. Prior to Masha's habitual use of snuff and vodka, Strindberg's Julie had her wine and Ibsen's Nora had her bonbons. Both the use and absence of these items tell far more than any spoken dialogue. These conventions build into Chekhov's use of reality. For instance, how the character does the action and speaks of the action, along with the other characters' perceptions about the action, all combine to add layers of meaning to a simple habit, such as Masha taking snuff.

Realism is still present in most modern forms of entertainment. Recall a favorite television show or movie character. What habits take place during an average day in the character's life? Does the action illustrate specific personality traits of the character?



August Strindberg. Image courtesy of New York Public Library.

# Symbolism in *The Seagull*

BY WILLIAM LONDON

In English class you've probably learned about some of the techniques writers use to paint a picture of the scene and really help readers "see" the story unfold. Authors of novels and short stories use literary devices to help the reader develop a better picture of what's going on in the story, give a sense of the theme and even hide special messages in the passages. Playwrights have an advantage. They still write the story, but the play is then produced by a director, actors, designers and sometimes a much bigger team of theatre artists. When the play is put up on stage the audience can actually "see" the story in a concrete physical representation. The text of the play is only part of the work, more like a blueprint than a finished product. Through these other artists it is able to truly come alive. While this makes the process of a play quite a bit different than that of a novel, playwrights still use literary devices too.

One of the major devices Chekhov uses in *The Seagull* is symbolism. Perhaps you've become familiar with this concept in that same English class. The term "symbolism" refers the use of an idea, person or object to represent a different and usually abstract idea, person, or object that with which the first is not naturally associated. Specific symbols may have meaning in themselves, but based on context and purpose they can have other hidden meanings as well. In literature, an idea, place, person or object is shown repeatedly in similar contexts to establish it as a particular symbol. Think of all the things symbolism could allow one to say without actually saying it. One could determine that symbolism is highly effective, as it's used very often in various media such as music, movies and television. Sometimes the use of symbolism is even necessary for a writer or director to convey a main idea. Imagine how different Batman would be without his fearsome bat insignia, or Star Wars without the religious allegory of The Force. In these cases and others, a certain symbol can determine parts of a character's whole identity. The same is true of many characters in *The Seagull*, especially in regards to its fine feathered title martyr.

Chekhov uses this technique to tell the audience something important without spelling it out. He allows his audiences to find the deeper meaning behind his characters' speech and action. The main symbols in *The Seagull* that reappear consistently are the lake and the seagull. The young playwright Konstantin also uses

symbolism and imagery in his climactic play-within-a-play in Act I. Let's take a look at how Chekhov uses each of these symbols to charge the script with deeper meaning:

## The Seagull

Chekhov introduces this symbol early, in Act I, when Nina compares herself to a seagull. At first, her comparison may seem to be nothing more than a strange comment. Then Konstantin has a breakdown and makes his entrance at the end of Act II, carrying a seagull he has just shot and killed. Trigorin, in an eagerly curious manner, offers to write a story for Nina about a girl who is scarred by being presented with a dead seagull. The bird is destroyed by a man, as Trigorin says, out of sheer boredom. He then takes her away with him. In the speech and actions of both Trigorin and Konstantin, the seagull is rendered an object for their intellectual, emotional and artistic needs. Nina is also that object, and it threatens her sanity.

Nina is absent from the play's action following the bird's death and her departure with the writer. When we finally see her again toward the end of the play she is constantly referring to herself as the seagull, this time more insistently and in an even more abstract manner. She is referring to the seagull as it is relevant to both Konstantin and Trigorin. The seagull represents not only Nina, but also hope. The dead seagull is hope that has been destroyed – Konstantin, in shooting it, presents it as a symbol that he wants to convey to her without spelling out the pain she has caused – he states this to her as part of his act of defiance. This seagull also represents Nina in the sense that it is a premonition of her fate. She is tied to a sort of destruction, just like the bird. After her relationship with Trigorin ends and her ideas of the reality of a theatrical life realized, she is left with nothing but to return to the lake and an attempt at her former life. In the way a seagull obeys its instincts, she eventually returns to the water:

## The Lake

The lake is ever present in the background of the play, beyond what we see onstage. Even though we never see the lake, we know it's there because Chekhov's characters keep referring to it. Many of the characters spend some important time down by the lake during the



Bolshevik by Boris Kustodiev, a visual representation of the Russian Revolution. What does this symbolize about the revolution, or Kustodiev's opinion of it? Image courtesy of the Russian Avant-garde Gallery.

course of the play, and Nina and Konstantin also recall time they spent there while they were “in love”. The lake, to each of the members of the family, symbolizes the past and memory. The characters remember the lake as they connect it with fond events, to a time they felt safe, without their present worries. Due to the questionable reliability of many of these family members, we remain unsure whether these things really happened the way it is stated or if these events have been warped by inconsistent memory – in this sense, the lake also becomes a symbol of fantasy. We see some evidence of this when, after Konstantin’s play, singing is heard from across the lake. Arkadina and others connect these songs to their childhood and connect specific events to those memories. It is a place that the characters – particularly the older ones and Nina upon her return at the play’s end – return to often. It’s also a symbol of nature, which is one of the more immediately noticeable interpretations. Many of the characters – Trigorin especially, because he always goes to the lake to fish – use it as a way of getting back to nature. The lake is used as a backdrop for Konstantin’s play as well, establishing an idea of the lake that Trigorin echoes at one point: “enchanted”. This isn’t the only symbol, however, in:

### The Play-Within-A-Play

Writers are portrayed as both intense competitors and wielders of mysterious powers. Konstantin and Trigorin are rivals in writing and love (at least that’s how Konstantin sees it), and the style in which they write informs who they are as characters. Konstantin’s play is full of symbolism and imagery, and it shows a lot of what he

believes in: his beliefs on theatre, himself, the world, and even other people – just before his play is performed we also learn some of his relationship with his mother. Her disapproval of his work probably pushed him to write a lot of what we see in the play - its structure and content are radically different from what Arkadina seems to think of as “theatre”.

The play within a play is also a manifestation of his desire to create new forms of theatre. Its wild attempts at the abstract are symbolic of his grasps at innovative writing. It is written to illustrate Konstantin’s desires, rather than simply explaining them, Chekhov gives us a concrete example. In an attempt to achieve this new, elusive form, Konstantin places the setting of his play thousands of years in the future. Within Konstantin’s play, we could say that the lake represents the origins of life. It’s the only thing left. During the play, Chekhov gives us some great imagery through his use of descriptions. He uses the imagery of the absence of animals, plants, and the total emptiness of the world, as well as the demon with its horrific breath. The demon, in this context, symbolizes what Konstantin is fighting against - the old theatre and the old world view. He describes this demon as “the personification of matter,” or the old and stale form of life, in opposition to his nameless, bodiless heroine. His heroine is the “Universal Soul” that rises above the decay of the material world, signifying a new direction. These images reflect Konstantin’s views on the world of art and life. They serve as both a concentrated illustration of his ideas and overactive symbolism, as well as a parody of them.

# Russian Name Game

BY TERESA RENDE

When I first began reading Russian literature, I found myself becoming extremely frustrated. I'd be a chapter or two into a novel and a new name would appear. Person A might be speaking to Person B, but suddenly, they are calling them by a name I've never heard. Is there a Person C of which I am not aware? Has Person B applied for a legal name change without telling me? Was I skimming when I should have been paying closer attention? I'd go back, re-read multiple paragraphs and pages, but find no clues.

As a college student, I enrolled in a class taught by Sasha Newell. When I started the class I was handed a syllabus by a man; I wondered where Mrs. Newell was, but upon looking at the paper, I saw my teacher's listed email address: Alexander Newell. Perhaps there was a misprint in my course packet, and our teacher isn't Sasha Newell, but this gentleman Alexander. Moments later, Alexander stood by the board and said, "Hello, I'm Sasha Newell..."

I was perplexed, but as I came to know Sasha I finally got up the guts to ask, "Why do we call you Sasha if your name is Alexander?" The fact of the matter is, Sasha is a Russian man, and in Russian culture, specific accepted nicknames are commonly associated with proper names. This is something you will see frequently in *The Seagull*. Below is a list of some common Russian names and the associated nicknames, including some of those that appear in *The Seagull*.

**Aleksandr:** Sasha, Shurik, Sanya, Alik  
**Aleksei:** Alyosha, Lyosha, Lyokha, Aleshen'ka  
**Irina:** Ira, Irinushka, Irochka, Irusha  
**Ivan:** Vanya, Ivanushka  
**Konstantin:** Kostya, Kostyen'ka, Kostochka  
**Larisa:** Lara, Larochka, Larisochka  
**Mikhail:** Misha, Mishen'ka  
**Mariya:** Masha, Manya, Mashen'ka  
**Margarita:** Rita, Ritulya, Ritochka  
**Nataliya:** Talya, Natasha, Nata, Natashen'ka  
**Pavel:** Pavlusha, Pasha  
**Pyotr:** Petrusha, Petya  
**Tatiana:** Tanya, Tanechka, Tatochka, Tanyusha  
**Vladimir:** Volodya, Vova, Vovochka  
**Yakov:** Yasha, Yashen'ka



*Portrait of a Russian family at Ellis Island in the early 1900s. How would these lads and ladies be called in the family? Image courtesy of New York Public Library.*

As you may tell, there is a bit of a system here. It is sometimes hard to see due to translation, but often Russian nicknames use the short version of a person's name, and then insert a group of letters prior to the final letter. The most common letters used are -en'k, -echk, -ochk, -ushk, and -yush. Some nicknames can come off as impolite, and this is denoted by using the short-name with "-ka" added to the end. Boys are often called the impolite nickname by their friends. For example, 'Vladimir' would often be called "Vovka", by other young male friends, but might be called "Vovochka," by his mother or sister.

As you read *The Seagull*, notice who uses these nicknames and who remains more formal. What do you think this says of those characters' relationships and interactions? Do you see any patterns, or interesting inconsistencies?

# Medical Advances in 19th Century Russia

BY WILLIAM LANDON

*When Chekhov died at the beginning of the 20th century, some of the most important technological advancements in Western medicine had begun to develop. These especially had a huge impact in Russia. The span of Chekhov's career as a doctor saw changes in the medical industry that could have influenced his writing as well as his life outside his role as writer for the stage and novels- he instilled his work with his knowledge of objective observation and interest in case studies. Here are some of those medical advancements, many of which are still used today:*

## **X-ray technology**

The medical world in many ways followed a similar path to theatre at the end of the 19th century: the focus shifted from the external of the body to the internal, and medicine became more concerned with the body's hidden problems. The X-ray photograph was originally developed in 1895, during toward the end of Chekhov's life, by Professor Rontgen at a university in Germany. This technology was concerned with finding the cause of hidden pathologies, or injuries and illnesses within the body. The discovery happened almost by accident, as Rontgen was investigating the properties of gasses charged by high-voltage electrical currents. He discovered that the inside of the human body could be photographed with different levels of transparency. This advancement helped develop practices in psychology.

## **Psychology**

Up to the late 1800s in Europe and Russia, mental disorders were greatly misunderstood. Perspectives changed when doctors and scientists from across the continent came to the decision that some diseases were sicknesses of the mind. Charcot articulated it in this manner: diseases such as "hysteria" left no trace on the body such as tuberculosis or other physical diseases would, psychologists decided they must be mental disorders. Janet, influenced by Charcot's ideas, introduced the concept that exceptionally strong ideas could become permanently implanted, and these ideas caused psychological disorders. Some, like Freud, took this idea further and theorized that mental disorders were produced by psychological rather than physical trauma to the body. By the 1890s, many psychologists were of the belief that the unconscious mind held a deep, often negative, inexpressible reality that only made itself clear to human thought in an indirect "symbolic disguise" that had to be analyzed.

## **Medical Clinics**

Throughout Chekhov's lifetime, free medical centers were set up in provincial areas of Russia. Many of these were developed in response to the cholera epidemic of the early 1890s, but the practice began in 1864 when over 500 were opened across the country. Government-elected local doctors, called Zemsky, were paid somewhat poorly but formed the basis of intelligentsia medical ideals. Chekhov, who focused often on the morals of the Zemsky, not only wrote about them but opened a completely free medical center during the cholera epidemic. This was a move away from privatized medicine and toward collectivist medicine.

## **Antibiotics**

We know from references in Chekhov's plays just how much modern medicine was used during his lifetime; aspirin and morphine were used, and are still used today as painkillers. Antibiotics in the modern sense were not invented until the late 1920s, shortly after Chekhov's death. Still, toward the end of his lifetime it had already been determined that many diseases were caused by germs and bacteria acting inside the body. In the 1890s, two German doctors developed a medication that could be considered a first prototype antibiotic. It didn't always work, but it helped pave the way for Sir Alexander Fleming's discovery of Penicillin.

## **Surgery**

Mid - 19th century Russia saw the implementation of "painless" surgery. This medical concept spread with the help of universities. University of Moscow's medical department, of which Chekhov was a graduate, provided a link between the medical science of the university level and the rural Zemstvo social medicine. Moscow University, at the behest of the Department of Education, first undertook its study of the use of a chemical called "ether" for anesthetic in 1847. One of the people who helped spread the research and experimentation was Doctor Pirogov, a man often called the father of modern Russian surgery. He lived through the early part of Chekhov's life. He and his contemporaries had pioneered Russia's use of chemical anesthetics by the time Chekhov became a doctor.

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*Images from left to right: Doctor and surgeon Pirogov; Terapevt Mudrov hospital train car. Images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

# The Economic Landscape Surrounding Anton Chekhov

BY TERESA RENDE

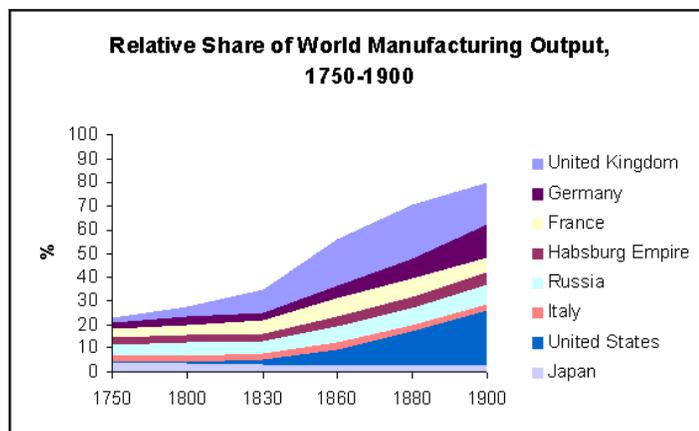
## Introduction: The Emergence of Industrialization

Anton Chekhov was born in 1860 during a time of great change for his homeland, Russia, and indeed the entire world. From the mid-1800s through 1860, society was entering an increasingly global economy. Improvements in transportation and communication resulted in more countries being able to sell their agricultural goods and raw materials at an international level. The industrial era was evolving quickly, and many countries sought to benefit immensely from it while others fell behind because of their inability to participate. Emerging philosophies of free trade and “international peace,” (influenced primarily by the prosperity that followed international trade,) only added to the economic situation that aided a number of western nations.

This is not to say that international peace served as the standard. There was, in fact, the same fancy for conquest as European nations in the past had exhibited. The focus of conquest, however, had changed dramatically. Differing from the many Napoleonic battles of the late 1700s and early 1800s, conquest battles of

mid- to late 1800s were characterized by the overthrow of many less developed nations. Interstate battles still existed, as evidenced by the Franco-Austrian War of 1859, the German Wars of Unification in 1860, the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Crimean War (1853-1856), in which Russia was deeply rooted. These battles were shorter and more internally isolated than were conquest and territorial battles of prior decades.

Changes in international banking and the concept of “credit” gave advantages to certain nations during this period. The new practice of amassing resources in a short time and winning any given conflict quickly, moved the focus away from long-term military mobilization. Simply being a “wealthy nation” was not enough to ensure success. Instead, a country had to have a well-balanced economy with healthy credit, international trade and, most importantly, a national stake in industrialization. This put some countries, such as Britain, in a great position over other nations, while leaving the near-bankrupt Russia at a disadvantage during such conflicts as the Crimean War.



A graph illustrating World Manufacturing Output from 1750-1900. Notice how, though Russia's output rises, it does not increase relative to other industrial super powers. While Russia's bar is consistent, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States all experience exponential growth - both in comparison to their own production history and other countries'. Data from Paul Bairoch. Graph courtesy of TwoOneTwo at Wikimedia Commons.

## The Ascension of the Crimean War

The events preceding Chekhov's birth greatly influenced the country he entered as an infant. In 1814, during the Napoleonic War, Russia entered Paris backed by 800,000 Cossacks (a notoriously strong and brutal example of the Russian military forces) to help defeat Napoleon I. From this, Russia gained a reputation for military dominance. At that point even the nations entering allegiance with Russia were said to be in fear of it. From 1815-1860 Russia experienced a growth in population and a boost in the production of iron and textiles. Imports of the steam engine arrived and a Russian railway system even emerged. The issue, however, was that Russia's advances were insignificant compared to the rest of the western world. In the time that Russia doubled its iron production, Britain increased its iron production thirtyfold! In 1850, when Russia was up to 500 miles of railways, the United States



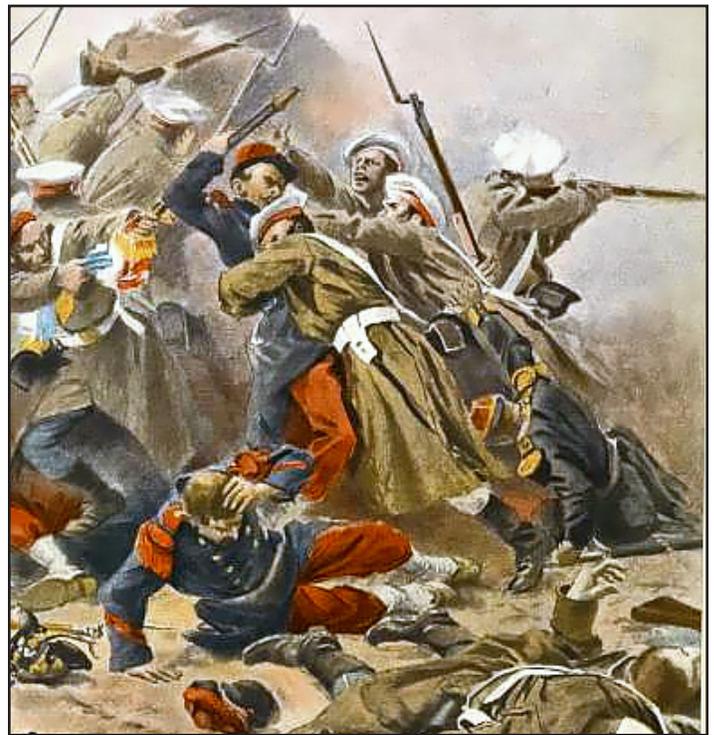
A late 1800s railway car used to transport live stock. This particular livestock car hails from Chicago's own Pullman Palace Car Company. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

already had 8,500 miles laid. Entrepreneurs from other countries increasingly came to Russia for raw materials, while Russia's own industrial expanse fell further and further behind. Russia's international prowess continued to heavily rely on its military strength in numbers, as opposed to technological advances.

From 1853-1856 the Crimean War (also referred to as the "Russian War," or the "Eastern War,") was fought, pitting Russia against the French Empire, Ottoman Empire, British Empire, Kingdom of Sardinia (which unified with Italy in 1861) and the Duchy of Nassau (later annexed by the Kingdom of Prussia). The Crimean War was a conflict over the "Holy Land," comprised of modern day Israel, Palestinian territories and parts of Jordan and Lebanon. France reclaimed this perpetually-in-dispute area in 1851, prompting Russia's intervention. Russia began a series of movements along the Ottoman Empire-protected territories of the Danube River, inching ever closer to European lands. Britain and France declared war upon Russia to protect the Ottoman Empire. Russia eventually withdrew from the Danube territories, but it would not comply with the conditions France and Britain named regarding its safeguarding of the Danube areas, as well as its role as a Christian Orthodox protector of the "Holy Land." And so the Crimean conflict continued.

The Crimean War brought to the forefront Russia's failure in areas outside sheer soldier quantity. Despite Russia's military masses, numerous inter-state conflicts preceding and occurring during the war spread even Russia's sizable army too thin. Furthermore, Russia's trailing score in the industrialization game meant that its troops were no longer as well armed as those in other countries. The Russians fought Crimean War battles with muskets that shot up to 200 yards, while the Allied troops used rifles that shot up to 1,000 yards! Ranking officers often were untrained or uneducated, resulting in poor leadership. Finally, the country avoided calling in emergency, short-service reserve troops, because this would mean using serfs, and it was argued that men serving in battle should no longer be serfs when they returned. Russia, unwilling to give up serfdom at the time, quickly lost its soldiers and footing in the Crimean War.

As the war continued, Russia found its supplies running short. British blockades prevented the flow of new inventory to the frontlines. Even more crippling were the blockades which stopped Russia's export flow, causing



Painting of a Russo-French skirmish during Crimean War. Image Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

its national revenue to plummet. The only way to fund the war was to borrow. To compensate for the heavy deficit, Russia printed paper money, prompting a serious state of inflation. Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich put it best in saying "... we are both weaker and poorer than the first-class powers, and furthermore poorer not only in material but also in mental resources, especially in matters of administration."

Peace negotiations finally began in 1856. The new czar, Alexander II (who took his position in 1855), was more liberal than those who preceded him, and as such, he was able to stir a new era of Russian reform. Alexander II put greater emphasis on railway building and industrial development, including investment in more coal, iron and steel production. His most notable goal, though, was the official abolishment of serfdom, which was signed and published on March 3rd, 1861. More than 23 million people were freed, and in 1866, serfs working on imperial (or state-owned) property also received their freedom. The details were far from perfect, but Alexander's II movement toward a more modern Russia was apparent.

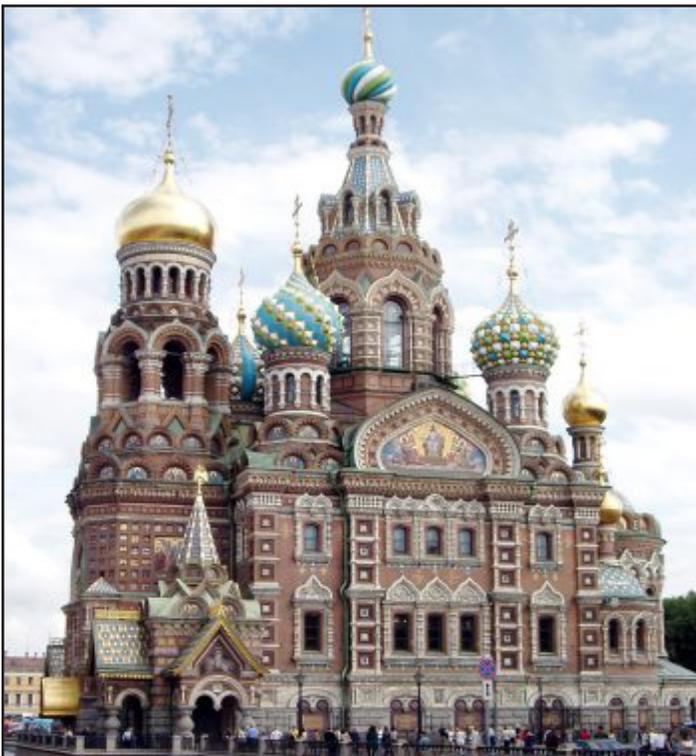
## The Return of Russian Oppression

As Russia's reform progressed, another country experienced similar changes. The United States shared a number of similarities with Russia in this time period: geographical size, population growth, expanding frontiers and a variety of natural resources yet to be fully allocated. Where Alexander II abolished serfdom, United States President Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery. However, Russians did not enjoy the same standard of living as Americans did. As such, the period following the abolishment of serfdom was one of great crisis for Russia, both economically and ideologically.

Despite Alexander II's reign as a relatively liberal czar, many people did not agree with his leadership. Alexander II suffered numerous assassination attempts before a bomb eventually took his life in spring 1881. Following his death, the liberal reform movement Alexander II set in place turned around in a number of ways. His successor, Alexander III, immediately destroyed plans for an elected parliament that had been finished by him but not yet released. Anti-Jewish pogroms (a form of religious riot) broke out across Russia. Some claimed Russian Jews were to blame for the czar's death; other scholars cite the economic issues among poor peasants who owed money to land-owning Russian Jews as the fodder for anti-Jewish pogroms. Anti-Jewish legislation, known as the May Laws, was enacted, restricting where Russian Jews could live and travel, how they could buy or collect revenue on property and when they could practice business. Police brutality increased as individual rights were taken away, causing Russia to quickly fall backward from the progress Alexander II attempted to enact.

Alexander III's reign was short, but his motion to steer Russia away from liberal western tendencies remained. Taking his position in 1894, Alexander III's successor, his son Nicholas II, sealed Russia's short-term fate. At only 26, Nicholas II took reign holding strong to his father's conservative tendencies. Peasantry and local assemblies (known as "zemstvos") visited Nicholas II at the Winter Palace, at that time the home for Russian czars. Nicholas II made clear his view of Russia's future and the role average people could play in government by proclaiming:

"... it has come to my knowledge that during the last



*The Church of the Savior on Blood, where Alexander II was assassinated. Image courtesy of David Crawshaw, 2004.*

months there have been heard in some assemblies of the zemstvos the voices of those who have indulged in a senseless dream that the zemstvos be called upon to participate in the government of the country. I want everyone to know that I will devote all my strength to maintain, for the good of the whole nation, the principle of absolute autocracy, as firmly and as strongly as did my late lamented father.”

Advancing Russia’s industrial, economic and military status proved difficult for Nicholas II. Russia’s population started growing rapidly after 1890, and the areas with the greatest population increases were generally villages, on the outskirts of mainstream Russia. Many families were still privy to the “communal” ownership of land, and the redistribution of land following the abolishment of serfdom meant the larger a family grew, the more land its members would be given. This encouraged families to have more sons, since making farms more efficient would not necessarily yield individual gain. All the while, the state needed to pay the immense debt left from the Crimean War, while also allocating capital to invest in industrial and military enterprises. To do so, the monarchy expected families to produce more agricultural goods for export (thus increasing state revenue), to pay extremely high taxes (to further support industrialization) and to consume less per family (allowing more to be exported) to pay off the remaining debt and still have enough to finance industrialization and the military. The result was a worn, hungry and poor peasantry and working force.

Unrest became palpable in 1903, as revolutionary meetings began. By 1904, The Moscow City Duma (a collection of homeowners, taxpayers and merchants with certain advisory and governing rights) passed a resolution calling for an elected legislature, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. Nicholas II made some attempts to meet the demands of this group’s resolution, but he was still attached to autocracy. December 1904 saw the strike of a major railway plant in St. Petersburg, with coinciding sympathetic strikes across the city. On January 22nd, 1905, a group of 300,000 unarmed protesters descended upon the Winter Palace to deliver a petition to the czar outlining their needs. The protesters were met by the fire of the Imperial Guard, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries. The massacre was referred to as “Blood Sunday,” a name that would, sadly, be used again later to describe a massacre in Ireland’s political history.



*The Tsar’s soldiers shooting at demonstrators at the Winter Palace. Image Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

After Bloody Sunday, anger from the public grew, causing additional strikes. Nicholas II agreed to allow more municipal representation in government and created “The State Duma of the Russian Empire.” The limitations on power granted in this document, however, were infuriating, and the public only grew angrier. Fearing more strikes and hoping to prevent another massacre, Nicholas II begrudgingly signed the October Manifesto in fall 1905; the manifesto supported civil rights, political parties, wider suffrage and an elected legislative body. Though many were satisfied, more radical parties called for an armed overthrow of the government. Terrorism and strikes, quelled by police and military intervention, continued into 1906. All of this only led to increased imprisonment and execution of the laboring class, as well as the extended unrest of the citizenry.

Chekhov, who was born in 1860 and passed away in 1904, lived through an extremely tumultuous time in Russian history. The ground had only begun to rumble, though. After Chekhov’s death, unrest continued not just through 1906, but through 1917, when the czarist autocracy was completely overthrown and the communist Soviet Union was formed.

# A Study of Self

BY ELIZABETH MORK



Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

What happens to objects beneath a magnifying glass? Details come to the surface. Fine lines, texture and divots form upon things that otherwise appear smooth to the bare eye. Another world comes forth that was always present, but out of focus. Authors of Russian literature, particularly Anton Chekhov, portray characters under such a glass. These character-centric tales drive forward on inner turmoil, daydreams and secret joy rather than by popular standard plot devices of the 19th century. In contrast to English novelists of the same time period, such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy — who wrote masterpieces with subtly intriguing events, foreshadowing and outside influences propelling the narratives forward — Russian writers more often than not place their character's inner life at center.

Authors such as Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy compose in fascinating detail how life, in all its intricacies, impacts a single person. Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot* chronicles the

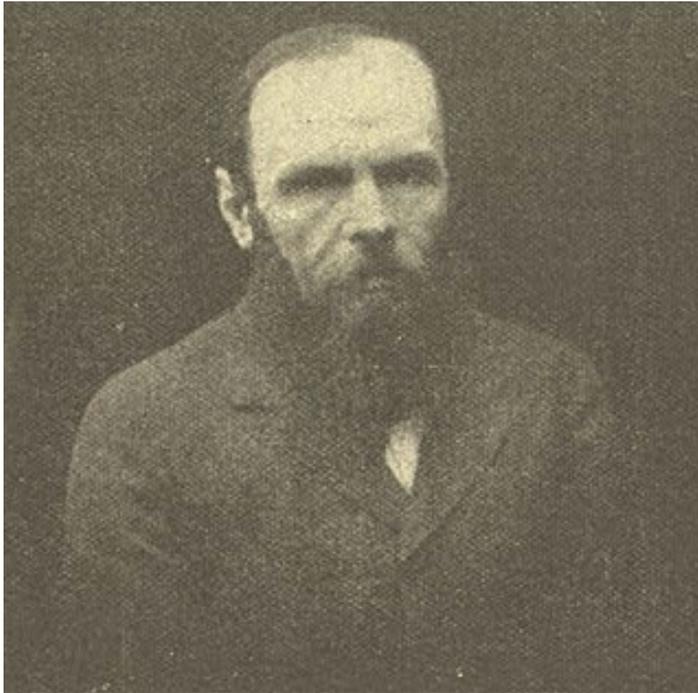
misadventures of the naïve and profoundly honest Prince Myshkin. Although the story is an account of Myshkin's life, Dostoyevsky never allows the incidents Myshkin encounters to propel the story onward. Instead, the reader finds an enriching account of how Myshkin perceives these events, and subsequently applies these thoughts to his next course of action. His perceptions of life, his interactions with other characters and his journey out of the sanitarium, all document the changing mindset of the character. Never does a malady occur, such as robbery or illness, but Myshkin must ponder the situation in how it changes him and his outlook regarding the rest of life.

Chekhov likewise was a master at composing stories around the character's perceptions of life. In his short story "The Kiss", Chekhov introduces a gaggle of army officers recently invited to spend the evening with a wealthy couple. He details how this party is being held more out of social obligation rather than genuine affection for the troops. After exquisitely describing the cold night, Chekhov moves the action into a dining room. Ryabovitch, an officer of little note, becomes the focus of the tale. Chekhov introduces him in the following way: "The most ill at ease of them all was Ryabovitch — a little officer in spectacles, with sloping shoulders, and whiskers like a lynx's. While some of his comrades assumed a serious expression, while others wore forced smiles, his face, his lynx-like whiskers, and spectacles seemed to say: 'I am the shyest, most modest, and most undistinguished officer in the whole brigade!' "

Shy, modest and otherwise bland, Ryabovitch steals the show after his lackluster entrance. After getting lost in the corridors of the large home, Ryabovitch tries a door and finds himself in a dark room. The sound of footsteps break the silence, before the arms of a woman are around his neck and a kiss is left upon his lips. A scream follows once the woman realizes her mistake, and Ryabovitch is left alone again. Because of this surprise moment,

his perceptions of life alter. He suddenly jokes, suddenly daydreams of the woman and is suddenly a charmingly charismatic house guest.

Chekhov details the changes in him lasting even as the troop members regain their duties, informing the audience: “Ryabovitch looked indifferently before and behind, at the backs of heads and at faces; at any other time he would have been half asleep, but now he was entirely absorbed in his



Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Image courtesy of New York Public Library

new agreeable thoughts. At first when the brigade was setting off on the march he tried to persuade himself that the incident of the kiss could only be interesting as a mysterious little adventure, that it was in reality trivial, and to think of it seriously, to say the least of it, was stupid; but now he bade farewell to logic and gave himself up to dreams.”

Ryabovitch’s infatuations last for roughly a year, until his brigade once again draws close to the house where the kiss took place. Once he is certain that there will be no follow-up invitation to the house, his thoughts turn dark. Chekhov details his

disillusionment: “And the whole world, the whole of life, seemed to Ryabovitch an unintelligible, aimless jest. . . . And turning his eyes from the water and looking at the sky, he remembered again how fate in the person of an unknown woman had by chance caressed him, he remembered his summer dreams and fancies, and his life struck him as extraordinarily meager, poverty-stricken, and colorless.” The demise of his joy comes not from the lady refusing him, but rather by Ryabovitch deciding that the event itself had no greater meaning beyond the moment, and that it will never happen again. Chekhov deftly weaves the entire story of *The Kiss* through Ryabovitch’s inner love, joy and sorrow.

These works were a main form of entertainment during their time. Books still play a major role in the entertainment industry today. Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* series documents the life of Bella Swan, an average girl whose move to Forks High School in Washington introduces her to a supernatural world of counter-culture vampires and volatile werewolves. Much of the series is told from Bella’s perspective, and while the driving action is at times circumstance based, the story would lose its allure without Bella’s extensive pondering on love, the future and family. Her encounter with Edward Cullen propels her visions of life into a new sphere away from a normal teenage existence.

The popularity of the *Twilight* books has brought Bella, Edward and Jacob to the silver screen in multiple blockbuster hits. Through the medium of film, Meyer’s introspective plot devices are able to function in a new form. Voiceovers allow the audience to learn Bella’s unspoken thoughts and decisions. She may at times act impulsively because of outside circumstances, such as rushing off to Italy or searching for her mother in a dance studio, but central to the series is how she reasons out the circumstances of her changing life.

# Skin Deep

BY ELIZABETH MORK

**Question:** What affects everyone regardless of gender, race, economic background, or culture?

**Answer:** Age.

There may be nothing as universal as the distinctly human awareness of aging. The eye catches wrinkles, sun spots, and gray hair a step before the rational mind even decides to label something as 'old.' Yet, despite this natural and all encompassing human experience, displays of the aging process are all but absent in mainstream media. If we do see portrayals of elderly people, they are often stereotypes of know-it-all old women or doddering grandfathers. Furthermore, it appears that turning a blind eye to aging enhances the focus on retaining youth no matter the cost. Is this healthy appreciation of youth and beauty slipping into an obsession with remaining young? Trends in the entertainment industry graphically illustrate in magazines, reality shows, and movies the extremes an individual will go to retain youth. Plastic surgery, Botox, and face lifts are no longer the domain of wealthy celebrities over fifty. Increasingly younger and younger stars are going under the surgeon's knife to shave five years off of 23 in hopes of appearing 18.

Although surgical measures are the current cure to the passage of time, examples of a preoccupation with aging appear throughout the centuries and in different cultures. Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* illustrates that even in 19th century Russia those in the entertainment industry were hesitant to relinquish youth. While Sorin laments wasting his youth in the military, Dorn recalls better days as a young doctor, and Tirgorin fixates on experiencing Nina's young vitality, they each pale in intensity to Arkadina's obsession with remaining young. Her constant proclamations that she appears decades younger than her actual age informs the audience of her phobia of growing old. In modern day, Arkadina might find her equivalent in other forty something actors such as Jennifer Aniston or Demi Moore.

Even though the word is out that Hollywood casting director's are seeking un-enhanced talent, examples of youth choosing to have plastic surgery remains the norm. Young talent such as Ashley Simpson and Heidi Montag are examples of twenty-something celebrities undergoing cosmetic surgery. Due to the prevalence



*Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

of these procedures as well as a cultural phobia of aging, are there examples of actors without age erasing operations? Young performers, or those curious about performing, could look to Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, or Judi Dench for examples of strong actors with successful and Oscar winning careers.

We may also ask what the greater impacts on society are when there is a pervasive discontent of appearing to grow old. Are we losing an important portrayal of the human experience as the number of surgeries remains high? By artificially eliminating signs of age, are we creating unnatural standards for ourselves as well as for future generations? Growing up in an ageist society places pressure upon young men and women to remain youthful. Developing individual standards of beauty and power may be helpful in altering trends of age correcting medical procedures. It is an important decision to make whether respect and opportunity come from a perfectly smooth forehead, or by the work an individual creates.

# Hero Worship: The Good and the Ugly

BY WILLIAM LONDON

We all have heroes of one kind or another. Some are political activists, scientists, artists, writers, historical icons or prophets. We admire their contributions to the world and their firm beliefs. Some are people in our personal lives, such as a relative, sibling or parent. We admire their contributions to our lives and the lives of others around us. And then some are celebrities who inspire us from the screen or stage; we may “love” them because they are famous, perhaps what we aspire to be. Some are several of these things in one. Well, this famous person – Brad Pitt, Brian Urlacher, Quentin Tarantino, Katy Perry, Beyonce, whomever – what if you had the chance to meet that person? What if you did meet, and you had a conversation with that person about your likes, your dislikes, what you believe in, and so on. What if you left with them? What consequences could you face? Imagine how Nina must feel when Trigorin, one of the most highly admired writers in Russia enters the estate with Arkadina, one of the most celebrated actresses. Here are two of the biggest stars of literary and theatrical worlds in the same house. It would be akin to one of your favorite Hollywood directors or one of your favorite musicians showing up for dinner.

Because Nina places so much value in the lives of Arkadina and Trigorin, she becomes obsessed with their

celebrity status and her own unrealistic expectations. In their first conversation in Act II, Trigorin confesses to Nina that everything is nothing more than an opportunity for a story, and even asks her the ironic rhetorical: “You’ve heard of an obsession?” She is, indeed, obsessed. It is clear from her responses to Trigorin in this scene, as well as her interactions with Arkadina, that Nina is obsessed with the idea of fame. Trigorin is jaded, meaning cynical toward his experiences with fame, and doesn’t recognize his own fame or her aspirations. When he sees Nina’s fixation on him, he decides that she can be useful. He gets what he needs from her in the form of praise or some excellent story topics, and then leaves her behind. On one hand this could be artistic selfishness, but on a more basic level he does not share her passions or views on fame.

Hero worship has been called a “basic and indestructible tendency of human nature”, and it was part of human culture in Russia in the 19th century as it is now. Nina, like so many of us, simply obeys human instinct to attach herself to a person of high status and celebrity. When the admiration of a celebrity figure reaches the point of worship, though, it becomes an obsession. In other words, love of that celebrity can control the day to day activities of a person’s life. This can be extremely dangerous. To worship a hero can mean that hero becomes an idol, or that we spend too much time devoted to that hero. Whether we actually realize it, the media allows our heroes today to evolve and stake a major place in our lives.

We all follow at least one famous person – okay let’s be honest, probably a lot of famous people – on social media. Various social media allows us to peek into every aspect of the lives of the famous, whether it’s Lindsay Lohan or Dave Chapelle. We develop an idea of who they are as people, which may or may not differ from how they are portrayed in television, radio, and elsewhere on the web. Sometimes obsession with this hero’s talents can drive us to develop serious goals or hobbies, like learning to shred the guitar or take acting classes. The experience becomes personal, and this hero becomes a model. The matter of the worshiper’s “maturity” doesn’t actually factor into this identification, either. Many young people today who watch reality TV, MTV, or Russell Brand films base their sexuality and approach to relationships on what they see represented through these programs.



*Joan of Arc, historical icon seen by some as hero and others as mentally ill. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*



Jay-Z and Kanye West, being worshipped. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Allowing what we see on TV to shape how we act might not even be a conscious decision – it is often the biggest external influence on our perceptions. Hero worship is also, in a sense, where we get many of our ideas of masculinity or femininity. It is fairly normal for a teen or young adult to obtain his or her social information from a major musician or film star. Celebrities who become heroes are often at the forefront of social trends, and the way they act or what they state they believe becomes a model for others. For many this influence reaches a level of familiarity that borders on a personal relationship. Nina, when finding out she must perform in front of Trigorin, becomes fixated on his presence. She has probably heard quite a bit about him in the news, and is at least as familiar with his writing as you are with the songs of your favorite musician.

Some social scientists have theorized that celebrity worship, or the obsession over a celebrity's lifestyle and choices, can stem from latent pathological problems. For instance, a person may already be likely to develop some sort of abnormal fixation or obsession, or have an addictive personality. Admiring a celebrity figure to a point of worship can bring out these issues sooner, and allow them to grow in intensity. It is important to keep in mind that this is only a possible explanation and not true for every case, but it could explain why some people today can become so obsessed with celebrities that they behave as if a real personal relationship exists - even if they have never had contact with that celebrity.

So how does this really connect to what Chekhov was trying to say? Hero worship, and the myths of celebrity,

are cross-cultural as well as timeless. As insane as some fans today may seem, people have always fixated on one human celebrity or another. Hero or celebrity worship has been present in every culture and time period; from the ancient Viking warriors to human manifestations of Hindu gods. As an instinct that relates an actor in turn-of-the-century Russia to our modern-day American gurus of cool, celebrity is something we want to be close to. Arkadina's celebrity affects the way all those around her view her: it spurs on Konstantin's frustrated anger and Dr. Dorn's admiration (both of Arkadina as an artist and a sexual symbol). While both Arkadina and Trigorin are worshipped in different ways but are both objects of desire, they are also subject to the myths of celebrity and the problem of celebrity obsession.

*The Seagull* is not a tired, stuffy museum piece, in any sense. Read the script or reviews of Regina Taylor's *Drowning Crow*, a 2002 adaptation of *The Seagull* that began its run here at the Goodman. It remains close to *the Seagull* in content and structure, but shows as it follows the lives of a modern African-American family that these ideas are cross-cultural. Different adaptations set in different time periods also show that *The Seagull's* themes are timeless. Robert Falls' new production of *The Seagull* also achieves a timeless quality as it isn't set in a clearly defined time period, and brings the issues of obsession brilliantly to the front of the production. At the heart of the matter, Chekhov knew that the problems of his time were not limited to his time. The themes of celebrity worship, desperation and the struggles of art and fame speak to Americans today in a media-soaked context.

# Goodman History Part 2: The Search for a New Home

BY WILLA J. TAYLOR



By the time Robert Falls began his tenure as artistic director in 1986, the Goodman Theater space in the Art Institute had become outmoded. Because of various building restrictions, architect Howard Van Doren Shaw had been forced to design a theater that was uncommonly wide and deep, with a generous but rather low proscenium opening that was ideal for presentational plays by Brecht or Shakespeare but less workable for more intimate comedies and dramas. The theater had also been built without a fly tower which severely limited the ways in which scenery could be changed. The wide aisles of the Mainstage auditorium allowed for plenty of audience comfort but tended to increase the physical and psychological separation between audience and onstage action. And there were the acoustic problems that had plagued the theater from the beginning. It became increasingly clear that if the staff and board wanted to make a long-term commitment to a facility, it would need to be at another site.

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*Above: Harris and Selwyn theatres during construction. Image courtesy of Goodman Theatre.*

Location scouting began with several possible locations – the Blackstone Theater (now the Merle Reskin Theater at DePaul U), the Fine Arts Building, The Shubert Theater (now the Bank of America Theater), Navy Pier or the Civic Theater in the Chicago Opera House. But the board and staff members kept retuning to a different, more centrally located site: the old Harris and Selwyn Theatres, located on Dearborn between Randolph and Lake Streets, in the heart of what had once been the busiest entertainment district in the country outside of New York City's Broadway.

The Sam H. Harris Theatre and its next door near-twin Selwyn Theatre were opened in 1922 by New York producers Sam H. Harris and the brothers Archie and Edgar Selwyn respectively. The Harris and Selwyn were two of Chicago's prime legitimate touring houses where some of the major stars of the time – Mae West, Helen Hayes, Charles Laughton, and Ethyl Barrymore - appeared on stage.

In 1956, both theaters were purchased by the showman

Michael Todd. He had just started a joint venture with the American Optical Company to develop the large film format systems we enjoy at the movies today - wide, curved screens with multi-channel sound. Todd demolished the stage in the in the Selwyn to accommodate the screen and both theaters became cinema palaces hosting “roadshow” movies, films that opened for limited engagements in a few cities before a nationwide release. Unlike modern-day limited releases, roadshow films were shown to audiences who had to reserve their seats as they did with live theater productions. The films were usually longer versions than in general release, cost more and screened less often, and featured an intermission. The classic films “Gone with the Wind” and Disney’s “Fantasia” are two examples. Todd also used the theaters as an unofficial laboratory, experimenting with many different aspects of Todd-AO. Smell-O-Vision, a system that released odors into the theater so that the viewer could “smell” what was happening in the movie, was developed there. And the Smell-O-Vision machine was still in the basement when the building was demolished! The theaters were successful movie houses for many years until the overall decline of the Chicago theatre district and the rise of neighborhood cinema complexes. The Harris remained dark for many years, falling into a horrific state of disrepair. The Selwyn – now the Mike



Announcement at a presentation for the new Goodman Theatre space. Photo courtesy of Goodman Theatre.

Todd Cinestage – became an adult movie theater that ran for more than 10 years before it too shuttered its doors.

In the early 1980s, the Chicago Theatre on State Street, the city’s most famous surviving movie palace, reopened. Harold Washington, now the Mayor of Chicago, set up the Department of Cultural Affairs as an integral city agency, and helped revive interest in the moribund Loop theater district. The City of Chicago, in the process of re-vitalizing the North Loop, urged the Goodman to consider the site of the two old commercial theaters on North Dearborn. In the early 1990s the Goodman committed to building on the new site and fundraising efforts began. A major gift was received from Albert Ivar Goodman, a distant cousin of Kenneth Sawyer Goodman, and from his mother, Edie Appleton, which ensured that the theater would keep the Goodman name and allowed construction to begin. The new Goodman Theatre opened in December, 2000 with August Wilson’s play, *King Hedley II*.



Scene from King Hedley II. Photo courtesy of Goodman Theatre.

# Theatre Etiquette

With Artistic Director Robert Falls

## **What should I wear?**

Definitely dress nicely but comfortably; try business casual. No tank tops, ripped jeans, etc. Baseball caps or hats must be moved once you enter the theatre. The Goodman is air-conditioned so be sure to bring an extra sweater or dress warmly.

## **What should I bring?**

Only what you really need. Electronic devices such as **PSP, Nintendo DS, smart phones, and laser pointers** are not permitted during the show. If it makes noise or is distracting, please refrain from having it out in the theatre. A purse, bag, or backpack is fine. School supplies are not necessary. Remember that you are here to sit back, watch and enjoy, so don't bring anything you don't need.

(Please remember):

**No smoking, and  
no eating or drinking**

while inside the theatre.



Love filming? Love Etiquette? Check out our theatre etiquette film competition at: <http://education.goodmantheatre.org>  
(Win awesome prizes for your class!)

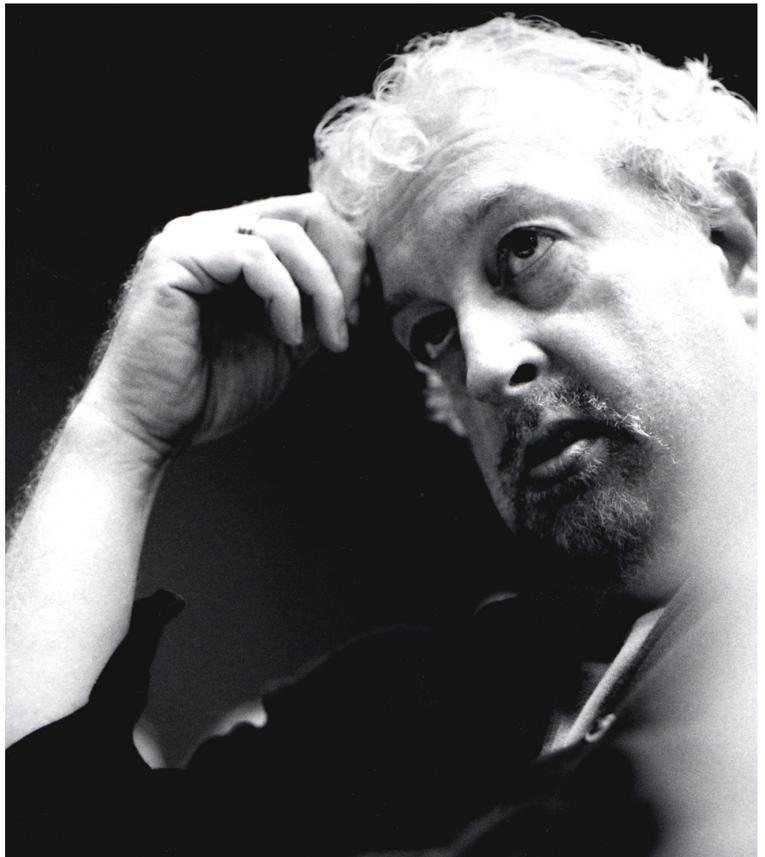
## **What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?**

Only if it is an **emergency**. Otherwise, it's very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until intermission.

Have respect for other audience members.

This means **no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking.**

(For your safety and others'!)



**How should I respond to what's going on on the stage?**

Honestly but appropriately. If you find something funny, then laugh—but don't laugh for five minutes straight or laugh so hard that you need to leave the theatre. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most important, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feedback but might be extremely offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe **respect** to the actors for having given it a try.

**What to do before the show:**

When your class arrives, your teacher will let the Education staff know how many people are in your group. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance.

**If you are late**, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission.

Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program.

Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

**What to do during Intermission:**

Most plays have a **15 minute** intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, walk, use the restroom, get water and discuss the play with your friends.

We do ask that if you are sitting on the main floor that you remain downstairs and if you are sitting in the mezzanine that you remain upstairs. There are restrooms on both floors. When intermission is over, the lights in the

lobby will **flash several times**; that is your cue to get back to your seat because the performance is about to begin!

**What to do after the show:**

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the **cast** will come out on stage and **answer your questions**. Feel free to ask anything that's on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.

*And remember the Golden Rule of Theatre-going:*

**Theatre artists are paid professionals.**

When you enter a theatre, you are entering their work space. Respect their work as you would have them respect **yours**.

Enjoy the Show!



# Writing Your Response Letter

After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it's time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with *Candide* whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer, the playwright or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Send us your letter within one month of seeing the show, and we'll forward it on to that artist!

## Important information to include:



- Your name, age and school
- Your mailing address (where a response may be sent)

Send your letters to:  
**Education and Community Engagement  
Goodman Theatre  
170 North Dearborn Street  
Chicago, IL 60601**  
Or email us at:  
**education@goodmantheatre.org**

## Here is a great student letter we received in response to *Animal Crackers* last season:

Dear Cast and Crew,

I would have to say that every single one of you have done a superb job in this play. All the effort you have put forth into this play has resulted in a memorable experience for all of us. I thought it was clever that the actors, actresses and the orchestra interacted with the audience. From viewing the original film of *Animal Crackers*, I think the cast played in the play and the original cast of *Animal Crackers* very similar! This play might have been the first encounter of the Marx brothers for many teenagers and children and I believe that the crew and cast of *Animal Crackers* proved that early comedy can also be entertaining and memorable!

The director's vision of the play was a rather conscious one. Exposing the Marx brothers to the vast majority of people who never knew about them and bringing back nostalgic memories to the older audience was a great idea. This play was actually my first play and a first trip to Goodman Theatre. I myself, as a young adult, finally realized that plays are enjoyable and gratifying. The play had all the elements of emotion and slapstick comedy which made it a great one. The technical aspects as well as the props were amazingly set to follow each scene. My favorite scene had to be the scene where Harpo and Rivelli tried to clear up the misunderstanding of "The Flash." I thought the script was very flowing and comfortable. Was there any improv involved? I did not find any negative aspects of this play. I have found the play and the ambiance of Goodman Theatre very positive. I give *Animal Crackers* two thumbs up.

Sincerely,  
A CPS student

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<http://www.facebook.com/goodmaned>  
Or Twitter:  
<http://twitter.com/GoodmanEd>  
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We love hearing your thoughts, so don't be afraid to drop us a line, comment, tag us in a note, @reply, or retweet us. Also check out our online educational resources for more information regarding the play you've seen, or anything else you'd like to know about how our programs (and theatre!) work.

Keep checking in for updates!