Introduction

One hundred fifty years after his birth, Anton Chekhov's influence continues to expand around the world, reaching readers and audiences he could not have anticipated during his lifetime. Chekhov's fans know no limits of age or nationality. His audience includes, at one extreme, a group of New York public elementary-school students who performed his play *Uncle Vanya* in its entirety on an Upper West Side stage. At the other extreme, groups of retired people read his stories as part of continuing education classes, and his name figures prominently in the famed Great Books Reading and Discussion Program. Chekhov's plays have been transposed into settings as diverse as the West Indies, rural Australia, and Japan, and in the English-speaking world they yield only to those of Shakespeare in quantity and variety of productions. His writings have inspired countless films across the globe. His narrative prose anchors the curricula of writers' workshops, and no actor or theater professional will be taken seriously without a firm grounding in his plays. Chekhov's works continue to be translated into the many languages of the world. And yet, as the writer Ivan Bunin reports, the ever-modest Chekhov once said that he would be forgotten as early as seven years after his death.[1] He was wrong, of course:

Figure 1. "Influences," Sydney Harris, *The New Yorker*, 8 April 1985.
[© Sidney Harris/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com]

[1] "—Знаете, сколько лет еще будут читать меня? Семь.
—Почему семь? —спросил я.
—Ну, семь с половиной." *A. P. Chekhov v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov*, ed. V. E. Vatsuro et. al. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), 485–86.

Chekhov for the 21st Century. Carol Apollonio and Angela Brintlinger, eds. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2012, 1–10.

There is a reason for the writer's enduring popularity. Chekhov lived a life, and left a body of work, of real substance. His writing is accessible and meaningful to anyone who can read; at the same time, it contains depths as yet unexplored. These breadths and depths are the subject of this book, a collection of twenty-one seminal new studies by Russian and Western Chekhov scholars. In 2010 audiences across the world enjoyed productions and readings of Chekhov in conjunction with the sesquicentennial celebrations of his birth. This series of celebrations culminated in December 2010, when scholars and practitioners from various disciplines and countries came together in Columbus, Ohio, for the North American Chekhov Society conference "Chekhov on Stage and Page." The conference featured groundbreaking and original readings that put the author and his works in new contexts. Those scholars and more are represented in this volume.

Chekhov for the Twenty-First Century looks back, at an artist's life well lived, and forward, to new generations of readers. We have organized this collection into categories that illuminate Chekhov's work from many angles: Space, Time, Person, Word, and Transpositions. The categories begin with Chekhov's texts—their settings, plots, characters, and tropes—and expand outward into diverse contexts—geographical, historical, psychological, and literary. All the articles offer interpretations that bear both individual and universal significance.

Space is the subject of Part I. In his stage settings and in the landscapes and habitats depicted in his prose, Chekhov both reflects the unique cultural and natural space in which he himself dwelt and delineates boundaries within which his characters must live their lives. Through the alchemy of his art, the spatial drama becomes moral, political, and philosophical. Characters probe the habitats, the cages and shells that confine them, as they seek to understand the limits to their freedom. Cathy Popkin opens our collection with a lyrical and highly perceptive exploration of Chekhov's treatment of space. His landscape is both natural—the vast Russian steppe—and fraught with human significance—the space that must be traversed in the quest for meaning. This "vast field," or what Popkin calls "the spaces between the places," is also the psychological and ethical space within which Chekhov creates his art, describing it with a scientist's eye and a universal lyric spirit.

In "Chekhov's *The Duel*, or How to Colonize Responsibly," Edyta Bojanowska addresses a different kind of vast Chekhovian space, geographical, cultural, and political in nature, and in doing so reveals a Chekhov as yet unfamiliar to many readers. In describing such different locales as the penal colony of Sakhalin on Russia's Far Eastern border (*The Island of Sakhalin*) and the restless multicultural lands of the Caucasus to the south ("The Duel"), Chekhov demonstrates a concern with Empire. Bojanowska's juxtaposition of these two peripheral regions is bold and original, opening "space" for new conversations about many elements of Chekhov's work. She argues that for Chekhov "Sakhalin was a test of whether Russia was a European empire with

a cogent civilizing mission, able to colonize its vast territories." For their part, the characters in *The Duel*, ostensibly preoccupied with their own individual dramas, in fact embody powerful forces of history. Laevsky in the Caucasus is Russia in the Caucasus, with all attendant consequences.

In the third and last essay in this section, Vladimir Kataev explores two seemingly minor forms of artistic space that make frequent appearances in Chekhov's works: circuses and cemeteries. Here the focus is on symbolic space itself, not geography, not empty space of potentiality, but stage setting: not mere location, but locus of dramatic meaning. In keeping with Chekhov's understated poetics, the reader generally sees only these spaces' edges or fragments: young Egorushka passes by the cemetery on his way out onto *The Steppe*, and his thoughts turn, momentously but momentarily, to those who lie buried there. As for circuses, Chekhov saturates his last play "with the techniques of street theater, the carnival booth, and the circus," but without actually taking the characters to those places. For Kataev, what is important is the complex of ideas that come along with the two settings, "one connected with death" and one "a place of joy and fun." The circus and the cemetery offer an oxymoronic master trope for Chekhov's works as a whole, in which life and death, joy and sorrow, and indeed, comedy and tragedy, are inextricably intertwined.

Part II focuses on the question of time. Consummate explorer of the lost regretted past and the unrealized but longed-for future, the writer explores time in all its dimensions, from the historical period that formed him to the models of time that figure so prominently in his prose and drama. Plot and fate, too, draw upon the passage of time for their meaning; the past and future are accessed through memory and nostalgia, on the one hand, and hope on the other. Svetlana Evdokimova explores the philosophical underpinnings of Chekhov's treatment of time in *The Three Sisters*, situating it within the broad body of ideas associated with existentialism, and focusing particularly on Heidegger's ontology. There are two kinds of events, the ordinary kind of event that makes up a *fabula*, and something broader—the "event of being." Chekhov "created an original dramatic form based on the interplay of these two types of events": the drama of *Dasein*. Everything in the play, from its continual references to time to the characters' preoccupations with the problem of being, knowing, and understanding, contributes to this philosophical drama.

Where Evdokimova looks forward in time to twentieth-century philosophy, Anatoly Sobennikov looks backwards to classical antiquity, finding there the roots of Chekhov's dramatic treatment of fate. While they may talk about taking action and even act in certain circumstances, Chekhov's characters do not seem to be able to affect their futures. Free will does not enter into their worlds; their destinies have already been composed. Using the ancient Greek concept of *moira*, Sobennikov explores the ways in which fate unfolds for Chekhov's characters: nothing is predetermined, but any accidents hap-

pen offstage, outside of the narrative. As in classical Greek drama, characters cannot know their *moira*, and they try to see into the future, try to predict via omens and portents what that future might hold. While they resist the idea of blind fate, in the end they accept what fate offers them.

The course of a human life leads to many things, but always to death—the end of everyone's story. Igor Sukhikh offers a comprehensive examination of Chekhov's poetics of death in his "The Death of the Hero in Chekhov's World." Contrary to readers' impressions, death figures prominently in many of the writer's works. Patterns that characterize Chekhov's writing as a whole are fully operative here. Sukhikh shows an artistic antimony with two poles. In the first, "in some cases, the death of the hero is conventionally parodic; in others—grotesque; in still others—informationally neutral; but it is always part of a comedic subtext: it is *funny*." At the other extreme, though, "death can be terrifying, depicted not according to prescribed comic patterns, but in cruel, even harsh detail, often betraying a pathologist's expert knowledge of anatomy." Sukhikh shows that the "quintessentially Chekhovian stories are those where opposing poles of the antimony, the humorous and the frightening, come together within the framework of a single work." The pattern recalls Kataev's juxtaposition of circuses and cemeteries; this combination of incompatible extremes is characteristic of Chekhov's work as a whole.

Whereas Evdokimova focuses on the relationship between time and event, Sukhikh examines the patterns of characters' inevitable deaths, and Sobennikov looks back to classical tradition, Katsell looks forward, offering a conversation between two writers separated by time (though their lives overlapped by four years). Here too, meaning accumulates, playing out in an intergenerational dialogue between two masters of fictional form: Chekhov and Nabokov. Nabokov's life was, of course, full of drama, inseparable from his many forced journeys through space, including his exodus from his native land. Both writers died far from home in a transitional space—a hotel room in Western Europe (Chekhov in Badenweiler on 15 July 1904, Nabokov in the Montreux Palace Hotel in Montreux, Switzerland, on 2 July 1977). Katsell shows how both authors create plot tension and meaning by depicting anticipated but thwarted events, unresolved endings, and explorations of memory. Katsell finds both authors to be creating the modernist project, in which "we are indeed time found, time not completely lost, entities compounded of memory, space and time, moving toward a beckoning yet cryptic, perhaps metaphysical future." In the end what may unite the two writers more than anything else is their consummate devotion to the artist's mission and calling.

The writer's humanistic vision, and in particular his treatment of character, are the subject of Part III. Chekhov, who in his native land is revered as an exemplar of a life well lived, creates unforgettable characters whose human nature binds them, as it does us all, within unbreachable boundaries of time and space. In their struggles against these confinements, they enact their author's, and our own, ways of being in the world. In both play and story, the

protagonist's predicament reflects that of every human being, not excluding the author himself. The scholars represented here examine philosophical, moral, and psychological dramas in very disparate works, but they all focus on the person at their center, his perceptions and the challenges he faces. In spite of the differences in their subject, Michael Finke, Galina Rylkova, and Anna Muza all propose tantalizing, and until now underexplored, connections between these protagonists' dramas and that of Chekhov himself. Nina Wieda's application of the cultural and religious motif of kenoticism to a reading of literature anchors what would seem to be an abstract concept in a very realistic and tangible portrait of a hero's psychology and the problem of reconciling social ethics with marital happiness.

For Finke, the 1887 story "The Kiss" marks a turning point in Chekhov's maturation as a writer. Considering multiple layers of the text, the critic offers a comprehensive "metapoetic reading" of the story "where the 'meta-' aspect is not overt." The very structure of the narrative allows for a layering of author, narrator, and hero that directs the reader's attention to the creation of the work of art. Even as it conveys universal messages about aesthetics and the human condition, "The Kiss" tells a very personal story about its own creation and about its author's transition from comic writer to literary master. Finke's investigation of the scraps of autobiography that inevitably seep into this, and indeed any text, represents the state of the art for literary detective work.

With a scholar's deft mastery, Rylkova explores connections between very real people involved in the transformation of life into art, and back again. Her analysis reads the life and work of Vsevolod Meyerhold, famed Russian experimental theater director, through Meyerhold's early role in Chekhov's *The Seagull* as Konstantin Treplev, arguing that the role, and Meyerhold's interactions with and view of Chekhov himself, shaped the director's personal and professional development in unexpected ways. As Rylkova shows, in the drama, the actor occupies his place in the human continuum leading from author to hero. Chekhov continued to affect the erstwhile actor, until in his directorial experimentation Meyerhold rebelled against Chekhov's "Theater of Mood" as Treplev might have against his creator Chekhov.

Anna Muza also exposes a revolt, the revolt of the hero against dramatic conventions, against the classical ending of a comedy in a marriage, demonstrating that *The Cherry Orchard* played with those conventions and expectations. Muza situates the play's hero Lopakhin within his own time, but also within the broader dramatic tradition. He enacts both the tragic Hamlet plot that was so seminal in nineteenth-century Russian literature and the comic plot of the reluctant bridegroom. Lopakhin is Figaro AND Hamlet; he is also Chekhov. Not surprisingly, given the writer's own upwardly mobile path, *The Cherry Orchard* is, among other things, about class.

Finally, Nina Wieda examines a protagonist's moral and ethical place in the context of Russian kenoticism. In the story "The Wife," what would seem

to be a simple marital problem reflects a key preoccupation of Chekhov's time, one that the writer returns to repeatedly in works like "The House with a Mezzanine" and "My Life": the problem of great versus small deeds (what we might nowadays call social activism versus "little acts of kindness"). How can one offer individual charity without undermining broader projects of societal change? Can rationalism coincide with a genuine charitable spirit? Wieda draws a distinction between the narrator's acts of charity, whose artificiality violates the kenotic ideal of genuine charitable giving, and the spontaneous, self-abandoning way his wife and neighbor give generously, without rationality or care for their gifts' practical effectiveness. The real drama, then, is not political or economic, but personal: it is only by renouncing his need to calculate his charity that the husband gains his wife's love. In this, as always, and whatever the greater implications, Chekhov's art is always most concerned for the health of the individual human being.

Part IV, "Word," explores the textual structure of Chekhov's works. The writer's full import as a poet, a humanist, and a philosopher becomes clear to the careful reader of his word, in the verbal and sonic cadences of his writing as well as in the themes he addresses. Here three major scholars offer stimulating analyses of the structure of Chekhov's narrative. The poetic and musical character of the writer's prose has long been an unexamined critical truism. In an essay that is itself both poetic in nature and authoritatitive in its scholarly depth, Radislav Lapushin reveals the underlying textual mechanics and ethical underpinnings of Chekhov's lyricism. Chekhov is a poet, but as Lapushin reveals, the poetic nature of his works inheres not only in the writer's mastery of poetic devices "such as palpable sound orchestration or the unorthodox combination of colloquialisms and church Slavonicisms," but also in a deeper "poetics of reconciliation" that characterizes his artistic position as a whole. This stance, philosophical as well as artistic, is communicated through a blurring of the borders "between the observer and the object of his observation, between the poetic and mundane, universal and personal, animate and inanimate, human and non-human."

In his article on Chekhov's creative method, Andrei Stepanov draws upon the insights of generative poetics to probe the origins of the writer's art. Chekhov was reticent and evasive about the process of writing; as a result the scholar must demonstrate extraordinary resourcefulness. Stepanov identifies three key textual elements in the process: underlying speech genres; extended metaphors; and the individual detail. All of these elements are transformed in the creative process. Incompatible speech genres undergo a shift or displacement by which they gain new artistic meaning; conventional metaphors are revitalized when applied in unexpected contexts; and what would seem to be incidental details come to play important roles in Chekhov's poetics overall. To clarify the process Stepanov draws upon the concept of the "diagram," which is a "means of iconically reproducing a certain process using signs that have nothing in common with the elements of the process itself." Stepanov's

analysis reinforces what is an overall theme of our collection: the unique features of Chekhov's poetics serve what is really important in his art, a greater poetic unity with ethical import.

In her consideration of Chekhov's masterpiece *The Steppe*, Vera Zubarev argues that Chekhov was a systems thinker who believed strongly in the holistic essence of the scientific method and who demonstrated that belief in his story of the boy traveling across the steppe. This story is not so much about plot as about the position various elements and characters have taken up; it is the canvas as a whole that makes this story unique. She concludes that "Yegorushka's character is as much an 'excuse' for Chekhov to write about the steppe as the steppe is an 'excuse' to write about him."

Finally, Part V, "Transpositions," offers examples of the many forms of tribute that continue to keep Chekhov's works alive: translation, performance, archival activities, and parodical or respectful rewriting. Three authors examine the ways new generations have translated and retranslated Chekhov's works. Ronald Meyer describes and analyzes a number of new adaptations and translations of *The Cherry Orchard*, considering the key question of performability as a standard relevant to translators of drama. It is common practice for theater directors without knowledge of Russian to work with informants, or to use word-for-word literal translations to create a version of a play appropriate for their production goals. Meyer points out the value of this approach, avoiding the judgmental tone taken by some purists. In such production versions precision in conveying lexical meaning and textual nuance can play a secondary role to the needs of the stage. As Meyer's fascinating examples show, the tradeoff can yield vibrant live theater.

Treating drama translation as a form of cross-cultural transfer, Cynthia Marsh shows that translators are just part of the process of bringing a play into the receiving culture, a process which also involves producers, marketers, and various other artists and practitioners. As she delineates it, translation can adhere to one of three distinctive models. A "collision" strategy highlights cultural difference, in which the two cultures retain their authenticity. This approach demands much of audiences, and can often feature a "genuine cultural clash." A "hybridization" approach retains some elements of the source culture, but smooths the text's path into the host culture by various means, avoiding a sense of alienation or collision. The third strategy, "acculturation," tames the work by inscribing the host culture onto the text. Translation can of course follow a combination of these approaches. Marsh's essay offers a remarkably rich and thought-provoking approach to translation that views the text itself as part of something much greater.

Carol Apollonio's analysis of translation focuses on specific strategies translators of Chekhov's works use to handle grammatical features that differ between languages. Translation does its most important work in those places in a text where the grammar allowed the writer to say nothing, but where English demands that something be said. One issue particular to Chekhov is

the way he manipulates and blurs the boundaries between individual subjects, and in fact between different periods of time. In Russian, impersonal expressions allow emotions and perceptions to be conveyed without being anchored to any specific person, but English has no immediately obvious parallel construction. By comparing the ways different translators grapple with this problem in one story, his famous "The Lady with the Dog," the reader can gain a broader sense of possibility and nuance than by reading just one translation, or by reading the original text alone.

Uncle Vanya has captivated audiences across the world for over a century now. In her authoritative study of the play and its reception in Russia, Margarita Odesskaya works in the genre of "life in time," both placing the play in its own context and looking at its transformation across the landscape of Russian theatrical history. Given the utopian views expressed by Chekhov's "beautiful man," Dr. Astrov, it is natural that Soviet and post-Soviet interpretations of the play resonate with Marxist and proto-Marxist philosophy and derive meaning from the way directors stage those utopian concepts. In her analysis it emerges that "ideals which have turned into dogma demonstrate their own untenability in the context of Chekhov's essentially adogmatic plays."

In her contribution, richly illustrated from the collections of the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, curator Nena Couch explores costume designs, sets, and directors' approaches to Chekhov outside of Russia. Through the many productions of Chekhov in England and Canada on which costume designer Daphne Dare worked across her career, Couch is able to trace the development of the designer's technique and the ways in which she presented Chekhov to English-speaking audiences. Dare never designed any Chekhov play out of period, and believed that "at the start there is simply the text of the play, which has to be intimately known before any decisions can be made. I have no rules about designing except those laid down in the text." Documents related to the Chekhov productions by Otomar Krejca show how Chekhov was central to this Czech director's career both before and after his exile from Czechoslovakia. Images from his works remained in the memories of the Czech theater-going public, such as the final scene in his *Three Sisters* "of the sisters as birds trapped in a cage," or the hour-long applause after his 1972 *The Seagull*, the last production of his theater before it was closed by the government. Couch's description of a Slovak production of *Ivanov* in 1979 reminds us that Chekhov helped keep theater alive during the darkest years of the Soviet influence in Central Europe. Finally, other virtually unique items in the Lawrence and Lee collection include a 1923 limited edition of *The Russian Players in America: The Moscow Art Theatre, Balieff's Chauve Souris*, with its wonderful period photographs including Stanislavsky and Olga Knipper-Chekhova.

Chekhov remains vibrant not only on the stage, but as intertextual material for contemporary authors writing today. In her essay "'A Cigar in the Fresh Air': Chekhov's Yasha Lives!" Angela Brintlinger analyzes the ways in

which writer Galina Shcherbakova "modernizes" Chekhov in her collection of short stories *Yashka's Children*. In this case Chekhov functions as a background for stories of urban and provincial life from the twenty-first century, as Shcherbakova builds on Russians' intimate knowledge of the classic stories to comment bitterly on the rents in the social fabric of contemporary Russia.

Our last "transposition" brings Chekhov into an utterly new milieu, namely an elementary school classroom in New York City in the late 1970s. "Remixing Chekhov," written thirty years later by one of those students, engages surprising aspects of Chekhov and captures a specific moment in American education when students were challenged to think creatively, to explore eternal ideas, and to grapple with social landscapes and historical constructs that were perhaps beyond their understanding at the time. As Sasha Waters Freyer demonstrates in this essay—which is about, in part, the making of a documentary film called *Chekhov for Children*—Chekhov affected her and her classmates in ways they could not have anticipated, and the roles they played in 1979 continue to resonate in their lives today. As Cathy Popkin reminded us in the essay that opened this collection, children do not perceive a middle ground in spacial terms; what Freyer shows us is that across time, what was viewed up close takes on a broader significance. Elena, in the play *Uncle Vanya*, says: "Just be patient; in five or six years I too will be old."[2] These words, spoken by a ten-year-old in Freyer's documentary film, ring particularly true when we see that same child interviewed in middle age. A century will pass, another half century; everyone will get a little older, and Chekhov's works will continue to acquire new readers and new meanings.

Most of the articles in this volume were originally presented at the "Chekhov on Stage and Page" sesquicentennial conference at Ohio State University in December of 2010. Designed to be international and interdisciplinary, the conference featured a talk and workshop by theater director Alexandre Marine, a panel of creative writers discussing Chekhov's influence on their own work, Chekhov-infused readings by novelists Valerie Martin and Michelle Herman, and a film screening of *Chekhov for Children*. The conference was supported by a grant from the North American Chekhov Society as well as by units from all over Ohio State University, including a College of Arts and Humanities Grant for Research and Creative Activity as well as grants from the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, the Department of Slavic and East European Languages and Literatures, the George Kalbouss Russian Culture Fund, the Creative Writing Program, the Theatre Department, and the Program for Film Studies.

The editors of the current volume are deeply indebted to these sponsoring agencies, and even more so to the dozens of varied participants in the conference, who facilitated new conversations about Chekhov that have grown into *Chekhov for the 21st Century*. We would also like to express our

[2] "Погоди, имей терпение: через пять-шесть лет и я буду стара" (*Works* 13: 77).

gratitude to our generous and responsive contributors, who worked with us to present the current collection to our readers. We hope you enjoy it.

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Durham, NC and Yellow Springs, OH
December 2012