

Spring Semester, 2010

Russian 1307 Chekhov

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100 Years Since Chekhov's Death: How is he received today?

Russian 1307: ЧЕХОВ

[CAS Literature & Foreign Cultures Requirement] [Lectures and Readings in English]

Requirements:

Class participation -- 35%

[including 3 Oral reports]

Papers [3x 5-7pp; grads, see below] -- 35%

3 Hour Exams -- 30%

Time: Tues/Thurs 4-5:15

Place: 313 C/L

Office hours: Wed 3:15-5:15, 1417 C/L

Instructor: Jane G. Harris

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Required Texts: (1) *Anton Chekhov: Stories* trans. Pevear and Volokhonsky [PV],

(2) *Viking Portable Chekhov*, trans Garnett/Yarmolinsky [GY], (3) Norton ed. *Anton Chekhov's Plays* [Plays], (4) **Xeroxes/Scans [X]**: stories and letters.

(5) **Recommended:** David Remnick, *New Yorker* article on translations, Nov.7, 2005 [X]
Books available in the Pitt Bookstore. Also, check Hillman Library, Amazon, etc.

Russian Texts: available on the internet: try Russian website [see handout]

NOTE: Some readings are longer than others! Make sure you allow enough time!

For **Russian majors:** If you are interested in reading some or all of the readings in Russian, please discuss this with me! **Grad students:** You should read at least half the stories and plays in Russian.

Discuss our class structure and a potential collective project: An annotated bibliography, which, if good enough, we can publish as a class project.

I: REQUIRED READINGS:

Week Date

Readings

1. Th Jan 7 Introduction, Syllabus, Requirements: Readings, translations [**New Yorker article**]
Preparation of questions for each session, Oral reports, Papers, Exams
Introductory discussion of Chekhov
2. Tu Jan 12 Earliest fiction 1883-1885: "Death of a Clerk," "Small Fry," "Huntsman;"
and "Malefactor" [PV] compare w "The Culprit" [GY];
"Chameleon," "Sergeant Prishibeyev" [GY]
How to characterize "early Chekhov"? What to expect? Humor, Early themes
Some biographical background
Compare themes of law and justice with later perceptions of justice
Compare psychological themes, ie inferiority complexes; various human relationships
- Th Jan 14 1886: "Panikhida," "Easter Night" [PV], "Requiem" [X]
Early religious themes: background and foreground motifs, Christian values,
Tonality and coloration; use of language; writing. Narrator's position.
What aspects of Christianity does Chekhov represent? Reject?
What are his sources of values?
3. Tu Jan 19 1886: "Anyuta" [PV], ["Requiem "] "Agafya," "Chorus Girl,"
and "A Gentleman Friend," "The Little Joke" [X]
Attitudes toward/treatment of women. Narrator's stance? Is gender an issue?
[Compare w later views of wo: "Ariadne," "Fidget," "Peasant women," etc]

- Th Jan 21 1886: “Heartache,” “Vanka” [+PV] “Calamity,” “At the Mill”
 “Difficult people” [see week 5, below] [X], “Sleepy” [PV, 1888]
 Representation of children; peasants; human and family behavior.
 Narrator’s perspective; double-voiced narrative? “Master-slave” rels?
 Chekhov: “Man will become better, when you show him what he is like.”??
4. Tu Jan 26 1887: “An Encounter,” “The Letter,” “The Siren” [GY], “Daydreams” [GY]
 Contemplating “encounters,” chance, and communication & fantasy
 The role of “fantasy”/memory/imagination in peoples’ lives. Art and imagination;
 Psychology and imagination/fantasy.
- Th Jan 28 1888: “Name-Day Party,” “Attack of Nerves” [GY], letters 1888 [GY/PV]
 [also consider “Sleepy” as 1888 story]
 Character development. Depiction of young professionals;
 sense of self and responses to pain, to “the other”
 Tension between social codes of behavior & individual human needs:
 social and biological forces. Chekhov’s medical mode of perception:
 does it differ from, complement his artistic mode of perception?
5. Tu/Th Feb 2/4 No class. Work on papers and readings. And VIEW the Muratova film
Chekhovskie motivy [Chekhov’s Motifs] (2002) V-7232 in G-20, Hillman.
 Consider: a different, contemporary perspective on Chekhov motifs!
 NB: Film is based on “Difficult people” [Tiashelye liudi], a short story
 [see Jan 21 readings], and/but is combined w an early play, “Tatiana Repina”.
 See also, Review article by Jose Alaniz [2004] in KinoKultura.
 AND: VIEW Shakhnazarov’s new film based on *Palata No. 6* [Ward #6] (2009); it
 should also be in Hillman [VIEW for discussion Feb 16, Tuesday]
 Consider issues of ‘translation’: Eng vs Russ, and ‘genre translation’: what
 is gained, what lost? And interpretations: 21st c vs 19th?
6. Tu Feb 9 1889 “A Boring Story” [PV, 50 pp]; “The Bet” [X]
 Confrontations: suicide vs. death in life; natural vs spiritual death
 Character development: Youth and age. Confession; the dramatic situation
I: FIRST PAPERS DUE
- Th Feb 11 **FIRST HOUR EXAM: 1880s: Stories: early and middle period**
7. Tu Feb 16 1890: Letters re Sakhalin [X]; “Gusev” [GY], “In Exile” 1892, [PV] Transition;
 and 1892: “Ward #6” [PV] & Shakhnazarov film version.....
 Autobiographical reminiscences; journey across Siberia. Exile and life.
 What is happiness? What is living? Social issues. Space and time.
 Recurring imagery and symbols. Malevolence of life; cultural suffocation;
 provincialism. Case histories. Madness? Differing viewpoints, counterpoint.
 And Discussion of issues raised in film versions, see Week 5, above. What works,
 or does not work? Why? Dramatization, updating, characterization, use

of setting/scenery, additional motifs [religious, spiritual?]

- Th Feb 18 1891: “Peasant women,” 1892 “The Fidget” [PV], 1895 “Ariadne” [X], 1895 “Anna on the Neck” [PV], 1897 “In the Cart” [GY], 1898 “Darling” [PV] Portraits of Women. Sympathy, empathy, criticism? Compare w earlier stories: Does the Portrait Gallery change? How? What aspects change, develop, recur? Is gender itself an issue?
8. Tu Feb 23 1894: “Rothchild’s Fiddle,” “Student” [PV]
Sources of inner change: death, music, religious feeling, love, art
What connects the coffin maker, student, and “artist”?
What different artistic visions do we find here and later?
- Th Feb 25 1896: “My Life” [X] Novella [NB: 86 pages; allow time!]
The forces of provincial life, moral confrontation, love, endurance
Sources of joy/happiness? Malevolence of life, provincialism?
Social consciousness, class and gender differences.
What are the different visions of life found in this story?
Father-son, father-daughter relationships? Who is the Other?
9. Tu Mar 2 1898: Trilogy: “Man in a Shell/in a Case,” “Gooseberries,” “About Love” [GY]
3 case studies of “shellness.” Compare trans of first two stories w [PV].
What early themes and treatments are reframed, revised, reinterpreted here?
What does the “shell” or “case” symbolize? Does it reoccur later?
- Th Mar 4: **SECOND HOUR EXAM. Stories: 1890s**
10. Tu Mar 9 / Th Mar 11 **No Classes: Spring Break**
11. Tu Mar 16: VIEW **Video** 1896-98 Drama: *The Seagull* Video [allow 2 days]
Chekhov’s “Indirect Action” Dramas How do they differ from the stories?
What is added? What absent? How do they change the nature of drama?
Contemplation of art and life; confusion of art/life; symbolism, impressionism, realism.
Passions/Professions: actors, writers, and family life.
READ: the entire play! Review Act One
You may want to view other dramatizations of this play as well—in Hillman G-20
- Th Mar 18 1896-98 Drama: *The Seagull* [Continued] Video [2nd day]
Discussion of play.
- II: SECOND PAPERS DUE**
12. Tu Mar 23: 1899 Drama *Uncle Vanya* [Possibly see Lev Dodin version in April?]
VIEW **Video** “Vanya on 42nd Street” Louis Malle version [2 days].
This performance is a “Rehearsal”—what is missing from a full performance,
if anything? What makes this a powerful performance?
Read entire play: Review Act One

Why is it called “Uncle Vanya”? Fr whose perspective is it told, if any?
 What is the role of the ensemble?
 What does the film’s ‘setting’ add to Chekhov’s drama?

Th Mar 25: *Uncle Vanya* [cont] Discussion of play
 How does this dramatic structure compare to “Seagull”?
 Basic motifs; basic structure. Use of monologues, natural language?
 How are characters individualized? How do they function as an ensemble?
 Themes: the power of beauty; ecology, waste, and ?

13. Tu Mar 30: 1898-1899 “A Medical Case,” “Lady with a Dog” [PV],
 1897 “The Peasants” [GY] “At Christmastime” [PV]
 Compare depiction of classes: social commentary; power of evil vs goodness
 Themes of love and beauty, nature, spiritual elements in Chekhov’s work
 Stories written at the same time as the dramas. Any similarities, differences?

Th Apr 1: No class. Read ahead and work on papers.

14. Tu Apr 6: 1901: Drama *Three Sisters* [2 days] Video BBC version.
 VIEW **Video**: Read entire play; Review at least Act One.

Th Apr 8: *Three Sisters* (continued) Discussion of play
 Chekhov’s female characters. Where is evil in Chekhov’s world? Power of evil
 vs goodness. Compare this to stories/previous plays.
 Ensemble acting: use of three sisters; use of military as a group, individuals
 Symbolism of Time, the Home, Work, etc. How does symbolism function here?

??WEEKEND: April 10-11: Possible class trip to BAM; see Lev Dodin’s Maly Drama Theatre
 of St Petersburg version of *Uncle Vanya*, and attend Dodin’s Artist talk
 [Apr 7-10 at 7:30; April 11 at 3 pm. Artist Talk April 10 at 5 pm.]
 (Consider if we wish to order tickets and go to New York....!)

15. Tu Apr 13: 1904 Drama *Cherry Orchard* [2 days] VIEW **Video**/DVD Cacoyanis version.
 What are the differences between drama as drama and Cacoyanis’ movie?
 How does the drama translate into movie?
 Dramatic characterizations: Chekhov’s heroines and heros?
 READ: entire play; review at least ACT ONE

Th Apr 15: **Video** *Cherry Orchard* [cont].
 Social changes. Juxtapositions. Values and representations of past vs. future.
 Rise of peasantry, new Russian values? Yearning for past, nostalgia, love,
 beauty, stasis? Sense of loss, regrets?
 Symbols and impressions? Compare the plays. Symbolism of beauty; how is it
 related to nostalgia, class consciousness. What is change? Is it for the good?
 Questions of action vs intention, chance vs choice, art vs life and social change?.

16. Tu Apr 20: Last Stories:1900 “In the Ravine” 1902-03 “The Bishop,” “The Fiancée”[PV]

Conclusions: hopes, possibilities? Death, memory, continuity? Good and evil?

Changes and continuities in Chekhov's writing, thematics, values, etc

III: THIRD PAPERS DUE

Th April 22: **THIRD HOUR EXAM: Dramas and Later stories**

REQUIREMENTS:

II: ORAL REPORTS:

3 oral reports are required during the term.

Select a topic from each segment of the course, which interests you, and prepare a 10-15 minute presentation of the work for the class. In addition, please prepare questions for discussion.

Please discuss your presentation with me before you present, or you can provide an outline for me to look over.

III: EXAMS: 3 Hour Exams: Feb 11, March 4, April 22

IV: WRITING REQUIREMENTS:

Due: I: FEB 9 ; II: March 18 ; III: April 20

Three SHORT PAPERS of 5-7 pages

Short Papers: Pick a topic that interests you from each segment and write about it. The topic of the paper is your choice. Feel free to discuss your ideas with me beforehand.

You may wish to revise your oral reports for one or all of these papers. The option of revising your presentation, or a choosing a new topic is yours.

GRADUATE STUDENTS: a Longer TERM PAPER [15-20 pages] is also expected, dealing with a work/s and using critical texts. You should think about your paper as a potential Conference Presentation, and prepare it accordingly.

You may wish to refer to "Aspects of Narrative," for terms, some guidelines, & suggestions for topics:

ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE in the Short Story and the Novel

1. PLOT-- Time-sequence of Events, plus Causality -- versus STORY [time-sequence]

A. E.M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel* (New York, 1927), pp. 130-131 wrote:

We have defined a **story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence.**

A **plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.** "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again, "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with mystery in it, a form capable of high development. It suspends the time-sequence, it moves as far away from the story as its limitations will allow. Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say: "And then?" If it is in a plot we ask: "Why?" That is the fundamental difference between these two aspects of the novel. A plot cannot be told to a gaping audience of cavemen or to a tyrannical sultan or to their modern descendant the movie-public. They can only be kept awake by "And then--and then--" they can only supply curiosity. But a **plot demands intelligence and memory also.**

B. Aspects of PLOT:

Exposition: introduction of the elements of plot; introduction of characters who foreshadow plot.

Conflict--around which the plot turns. Is the conflict external, internal, or both?

Episodes of the plot-- What are the chief episodes that make up the plot? Is its development chronological only, or is the chronology rearranged somehow?

Climax--highest point of tension

Resolution: What is different between the plot's beginning and end? What changes occurred?

2. CHARACTER

What is a literary character? how does he/she differ from a historical figure?

Who is the main protagonist or hero/heroine of the work? Who or what is the antagonist?

Who are the minor characters? What are their major characteristics, qualities, functions?

Are the characters "flat" or "round"? Are they "dynamic" or "static"?

How does the author reveal character traits? Do the methods tell/describe or show/reveal?

How do characters in Drama differ from those in Short Stories?

3. SETTING

- a. What is the work's setting in time and space? How does it look? What is the context?
- b. How does the author establish setting? What details are revealed/described?
- c. How does the setting function in the work? Is it used to motivate/influence or reinforce plot, character, or theme? Is the environment significant to the mood of the story?

4. THEME

- a. Does the work have an obvious theme? Is it explicit or implicit?
- b. What statements or generalizations about human experience or human nature are expressed?
- c. Who expresses them? The narrator? The main character?
- d. Which elements of the work contribute most to formulating the theme?

5. POINT of VIEW What determines the point of view? Language, tone? Is it didactic? ironic?

- a. What is the point of view in the work? Is it consistent or does it shift in some way?
- b. Where does the **Narrator** stand in relation to the work? Where does the reader stand?
- c. What sources of information are available to the reader? What sources are concealed?
- d. If the work is narrated by a character, is that narrator reliable? Does his/her personality, character or intellect affect the ability to interpret events or other characters correctly?
- e. Is the story told in First person or Third person **Narration**? Is the Narrator a "participant"?
- f. In Drama: what takes the place of the Narrator? How is point of view represented?

6. STYLE, TONE, and SYMBOLISM

Is the author's diction concrete or abstract? What aspects of language usage did you notice?

Does he use irony? If so, how?

What symbols are used? How are they used?

What kinds of metaphors, similes, synecdoches, and other devices does the author use? Why?
To what effect?

In Drama: how else can symbols be represented?

What kind of sound symbolism may be introduced? What kind of visual imagery may be used?

Video days: Order Video/DVD player for Room 149 C/L 1-2:15

??? Tu Mar 4/18, T/Th Mar 25 + 27, T/Th April 8 + 10

[Videos: V-3190 Kheifitz Lady w a dog 1960 86 minutes not use]

4 videos/DVDs V-7232 Muratova Chekhov's Motifs 2002 2 hours How is Chekhov being viewed today?

1- What motifs are selected? How representative of Chekhov's work are they?

2- Seagull DVD [moi]

3- V- Vanya on 42nd Street

4- 2002 ?? Cherry Orchard?? Cacoyanis 2003 video/DVD [moi]

No video of 3 Sisters

**NB: Good criticism: Mathewson in "Ward Six and other stories of A C" : (1) Nameday;
(2) Boring story—old prof—death in life; (3) Ward Six" (4) My Life;
(5) In the Ravine**