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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Sharon Marie Carnicke (Ph.D. in Russian and Theatre Arts, Columbia University) is Professor of Theatre and Slavic Studies and Associate Dean of the School of Dramatic Arts at the University of Southern California. She has worked professionally as an actor, director, dancer, and translator. She is one of the foremost scholars on Stanislavsky's System and author of the ground-breaking *Stanislavsky in Focus* (now in its second edition). She has spoken and taught master classes on Stanislavsky both nationally and internationally in Australia, Italy, France, Finland, Norway, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere. Her many publications also include *The Theatrical Instinct* (a study on the avant-garde director Nikolai Evreinov) and *Reframing Screen Performance* (co-authored with Cynthia Baron). Her widely-produced translations of Anton Chekhov's plays (including her Kennedy Center award-winning translation of *The Seagull*) are published as *Chekhov: 4 Plays and 3 Jokes*, which was a finalist for the 2010 National Translation Award (the American Literary Translators Association).

TO THE READER

Writing this book was a pleasure. It affords me the opportunity to share the Chekhov whom I have gotten to know by acting in, directing, and, most especially, by translating his plays. Translation forced me to confront each word and phrase so closely that I felt as if I were acting all the roles in my head. The individualized patterns of speech, the musical repetitions of phrases and images, and the tantalizing ambiguities within the dialogue became clues to the subtle ways in which Chekhov's characters think, behave, and interact with each other. As I translated, I also had to deconstruct and then rebuild the structures and rich patterns of details that make up each play. This process made Chekhov's careful craft and his rich dramatic imagination equally clear. I also realized that many of my theatrical insights into Chekhov's work would not have been possible without the wider knowledge I had also gained as a Russian scholar. In his dramaturgy, Chekhov not only reflects, but also cleverly plays with the cultural and artistic contexts which surrounded him during his lifetime.

I offer my book to actors and directors who stage Chekhov, to students of theater and Russian literature, and to anyone who seeks a greater appreciation of his unique sensibility. I blend a theater practitioner's approach to Chekhov's plays with a scholarly study of him as a Russian writer. I hope that reading this book will prove as pleasurable as did its writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to many people who helped with this book. My colleague Professor Thomas Seifrid (University of Southern California) suggested that I write it; and the team at Academic Studies Press made it a reality. Mary Joan Negro (Associate Professor of Theatre Practice, University of Southern California) read and commented upon the complete book in draft form. R. Andrew White (Associate Professor, Valparaiso University) shared with me his enthusiasm for and experience with directing and teaching Chekhov. Discussions with Milton Justice (The Stella Adler Studio, Hollywood) about directing and teaching Chekhov and with Dr. William Gunn (University of Southern California) about melodrama spurred my ideas along the way.

My undergraduate students significantly shaped my thinking about how best to present Chekhov's complexity simply, especially the members of three of my seminars at the University of Southern California: "Checking out Chekhov" in fall 2008 and 2009 and "The Performing Arts" in spring 2012. My colleague, Richard Fliegel (University of Southern California), had suggested the witty title of the 2008 and 2009 seminars, which I have also borrowed as the title for this book.

Special thanks also go to a number of other individuals. Patricia Padilla serendipitously gave me a gift that kept me out of the library—a complete set of Anton Chekhov's works in Russian; she then carefully read my typescript. Nicola Carreon scanned photos, typed, and formatted footnotes. Chesed Escobedo helped proofread and finalize the typescript. Andrei Malikov and Rose Leisner (alumni of the University of Southern California) were invaluable in helping me clarify my prose, copyediting, checking transliterations, and formatting the text and illustrations.

Partial funding to assist in the book's preparation was generously provided by the University of Southern California's Undergraduate Research Grant and by Dean Madeline Puzo of the USC School of Dramatic Arts.

My thanks would be incomplete without mentioning at least some of the directors and actors who worked with me on Chekhov's plays over the course of my career. Among these are: Gene Nye of Lion Theatre Company (New York) for giving me my first opportunity to translate Chekhov for his production of *Three Sisters*; John David Lutz (Univer-

sity of Evansville) whose beautiful production of *The Seagull* won me a translation award from the American College Theatre Festival at the Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.); the late John Blankenchip (University of Southern California) who supported my work with Chekhov for many years; Kate Burton, who directed my translation of *The Cherry Orchard* for the University of Southern California's MFA program in acting while I was completing this book; and most especially the several émigré directors who honored me by choosing to use my translations of plays which they knew in the original Russian—Lev Vainstein, Albert Makhtsier (Theatre in Action in New York), Eugene Lazarev (formerly of the Moscow Art Theatre), and Edward Rozinsky (Miami, Florida). The actors include Louisa Abernathy and Setrak Bronzian who taught me the power of physical humor when I directed them in the A/ACT production of Chekhov's short plays (Los Angeles).

PERMISSIONS

I am deeply grateful to those who have generously granted permissions for this book. Brian Rak and Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. have permitted me to quote passages from my translations and introduction in *Chekhov: 4 Plays and 3 Jokes* (2009); Dr. Mark Konecny and Professor John Bowlt have permitted me to reproduce Soviet postcards of the Moscow Art Theatre productions of *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard* from the collection of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture (IMRC, University of Southern California). Reproductions of Soviet postcards of *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and Chekhov's life and works, as well as the photograph of *The Proposal*, are from my personal collection. See below for specific attributions.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Cover Photograph: A portrait in oils of A. P. Chekhov by his brother N. P. Chekhov, 1883. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
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 14. Cartoon Illustration by V. I. Porfiriev for Chekhov's *On the Moon (Na lune)* as published in *Fragments (Oskolki)*, 1885. A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh* [The Complete Works and Letters in Thirty Volumes], Vol. 3 (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 457.

TRANSLITERATIONS OF RUSSIAN WORDS, NAMES, AND TITLES OF WORKS

Within the text of my book I use the same informal transliteration system that is used in my published translations of Chekhov's plays (see *Annotated Bibliography*) in order to assist English-speaking readers with Russian pronunciation ("Stanislavsky," "Sergeyevich," "Maria," "Semyon," etc.). However, I use the formal Library of Congress system within the footnotes and bibliography in order that Russian readers can better access my sources ("Stanislavskii," "Sergeevich," "Mariia," "Semen," etc.). This means that two systems of transliteration coexist within my book. Thus, readers will often find names in the text spelled differently than in the footnotes and bibliography. For example, "Stanislavsky" and "Balukhaty" appear in the text, but "Stanislavskii" and "Balukhatyi" are used in formal citations.

I also use the Library of Congress System throughout my book to give Russian titles for literary and dramatic works. The transliterated titles can be found either in footnotes or in parentheses after the English translations. The only Russian titles that do not appear in my text are those of Chekhov's four major plays; the large number of references to them would make the inclusion of their Russian titles clumsy and redundant. Therefore, for reference I give them here: *The Seagull* (*Chaika*); *Uncle Vanya* (*Diadia Vania*); *Three Sisters* (*Tri sestry*); and *The Cherry Orchard* (*Vishnevyyi sad*).

When I quote from English-language sources I maintain whatever transliteration systems were used within those sources. For clarity, I mark any non-standard transliterations with "[sic]" (for example, "Nemirovitch-Dantchenko [sic]" instead of "Nemirovich-Danchenko").

ELLIPSES AND DATES

Chekhov uses “...” frequently in his plays to suggest many different kinds of dramatic interruptions in a character’s speech. I always retain these ellipses in my translations of his texts. As a scholar I also use ellipses to show where I have made an abridgement in a quotation. Therefore, to make my interventions clear, I enclose my ellipses in brackets ([...]). I also use brackets to enclose any words that I have added to quotations to make them flow grammatically within my text.

All biographical dates are given according to the Julian calendar, which was used in Russia during Chekhov’s life; dates are therefore twelve days earlier than in the Gregorian calendar, used elsewhere.

THE USAGE OF RUSSIAN NAMES

In my translations of Chekhov’s works and other Russian language sources, I use Russian names as they appear in the original texts. However, Russian names can be puzzling for English speakers and so I provide here some helpful information. Formal address in Russian consists of the first name and patronymic (a name derived from one’s father’s first name), for example “Anton Pavlovich” (Anton Son-of-Pavel) or “Maria Pavlovna” (Maria Daughter-of-Pavel). When used together, the name and patronymic serve as “Mr.,” “Miss,” and “Mrs.,” signifying the speaker’s respect. For example, in *Three Sisters*, the Doctor is most often respectfully called “Ivan Romanych” (Ivan Son-of-Roman). When the sisters call Vershinin “Alexander Ignatyevich” (Alexander Son-of-Ignatius), they greet him formally as a guest in their house and pay respect to his military rank. Similarly, Stanislavsky respectfully refers to Chekhov as Anton Pavlovich in his memoirs.

While scholars mostly use surnames, rarely do Russians use them in conversation; these serve primarily to identify family connections (as in cast lists), to refer to famous personages (such as authors or actors), or to introduce strangers. In *The Seagull*, “Trepnev” appears in Konstantin Gavrilovich’s passport. The fictional writer “Trigorin” registers as famous as the actual novelist “Turgenev,” because people refer to both by their last names. In *Three Sisters*, Vershinin and Andrey introduce

themselves to each other with their last names because they are strangers to each other.

First names are used by one's intimate friends and family. Russian is particularly rich in nicknames, which are formed by adding diminutive endings to the first name. These diminutives can be piled onto the name almost endlessly and signify warmth, emotional closeness, and sympathy between people. A first degree diminutive is common in the family circle ("Masha" for "Maria," "Olya" for "Olga," "Andryusha" for "Andrey," etc.). Second and third degree diminutives (two or three endings) show greater and greater warmth ("Mashenka" for "Maria," "Olechka" for "Olga," etc.). Diminutives are also commonly used with children ("Bobik" and "Sofochka" in *Three Sisters*) and with servants ("Yasha" and "Dunyasha" in *The Cherry Orchard*).

Introduction

A Taste Like Olives

“Chekhov, like olives, is an acquired taste.” So said my first Russian literature teacher in one of Columbia University’s most popular undergraduate courses.¹ I have never forgotten his words, despite the fact that they were uttered long before I thought about translating Chekhov’s plays or writing this book. Over the years, I have acquired more than a taste for Chekhov. I find him and his works endlessly fascinating. But this was not always so. At first, he seemed a bit boring. Next to Tolstoy’s epics and Dostoyevsky’s psychologically tormented characters, Chekhov seemed to be little more than a writer who was good at describing the undramatic events of ordinary life. His most iconic director, Konstantin Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre, initially shared this rather neutral view. “The plays of Chekhov do not reveal at first their poetic significance. Reading them one says to oneself: ‘It’s good, but... nothing special, nothing amazing.’”²

Only later did I realize that I had been attending to the surface texture of Chekhov’s works and missing the underlying comic irony, the sharp-sighted wisdom, and the artistic complexity within them. It was as if I were looking at the surface of a placid lake, completely unaware of the teeming life that lies hidden in the water’s depths. Stanislavsky, too, came to understand the full impact of Chekhov’s plays only after the kind of intensive reading that directing and acting entails. Such close reading reveals what his characters think but do not speak (their subtexts); how they push and pull at each other through subtle interpersonal dynamics (or inner actions); and how he communicates his themes through the rich patterns of details that he weaves from the seemingly trivial events of daily life. With these innovations Chekhov set into motion an entirely

¹ Richard A. Gregg, *Russian Literature in Translation*, Columbia University, 1968-9.

² K. S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works], Vol. 1 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 289.

new way of thinking about drama and acting. As Stanislavsky recalled his long history with Chekhov, he realized that, “I do not remember a single performance in which I did not discover some new feeling in my soul, and new depths and subtleties in the works.”³

In short, in order to acquire a taste for Chekhov one needs to read him closely, thoughtfully, and even creatively. One needs to observe absolutely everything that he puts down on the page and figure out how each little thing relates to the whole. Reading him is like putting a puzzle together, bit by bit, until the complete picture emerges.

Chekhov is indeed a puzzle precisely because the surface simplicity of his works can be so easily mistaken for the whole picture. Those who take the words on the page at face value remain indifferent or become actively hostile to his works. Those who search for what’s hidden within his words admire him and sometimes even idolize him. Such extremes of opinion have always characterized and continue to characterize Chekhov’s reception as a dramatist. For every person who sees only the surface, there is another who has plumbed the depths. I remember visiting the drama section of a large bookstore in Los Angeles some time ago; as I browsed, I overheard two young people exclaiming happily whenever they found a play that might provide them with good material for their acting class. “Here’s Chekhov. I love him,” said one. “Oh no,” said the other, “I hate Chekhov!” While putting the book back on the shelf, the first student added, “My friend took a class and they spent the whole term just on Chekhov.” “What a nightmare!” the other responded; “I would have dropped that class immediately.” These two students represent the extremes of opinion that have haunted Chekhov since his first experiments in drama.

At one extreme, Chekhov seems boring and his plots depressing. When he published “The Peasants” in 1897—a story that is now generally considered to be among his most important—the Russian state censor forbade Chekhov’s conclusion because it seemed “too gloomy” for public consumption.⁴ When Stanislavsky brought productions of

³ Ibid., 290.

⁴ “Muzhiki” (1897) in A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridsati tomakh* [The Complete Works and Letters in Thirty Volumes], Vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 281-313; the censor is cited in Lee J. Williams, *Anton Chekhov, The Iconoclast* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1989), 70.

Ivanov, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* to the United States during the Moscow Art Theatre tours of 1923 and 1924,⁵ the *New York Times*' theater critic was appalled by Chekhov's dark plots:

The fact is patent, however incredible, however abhorrent, the Slavic temperament feeds upon self-depreciation, upon pessimism, and grows by what it feeds on. The plays of Chekhov, the very cornerstone upon which this admirable, this exemplary Moscow Art Theatre was builded, leave English-speaking peoples cold, and perhaps inclined to resentment.⁶

Recently, at the first technical rehearsal for a new production of my translation of *The Cherry Orchard*, I overheard one of the stage crew turn to another and say: "It's nice enough, but way too depressing. But then that's Chekhov!"⁷

At the other extreme, once one plumbs the depths, Chekhov seems to capture what is most universal in human experience. After viewing Michael Cacoyannis' 2002 filmed version of *The Cherry Orchard*, the *Los Angeles Times*' reviewer observed that, "we are left as always with Chekhov's effortless humanity, the sheer psychological acuity he brought to the loves, hopes and inchoate longings of his characters."⁸

⁵ Over the course of 52 weeks the Moscow Art Theatre gave 380 performances in the United States, half of which were Chekhov's plays. Prior to these tours American audiences had seen only three professional Chekhov productions. In 1908, Vera Kommissarzhevskaya toured in a Russian language *Uncle Vanya*. In 1915 and 1916 the Washington Square Players in New York City produced *The Bear* and *The Seagull*. For more information on the Moscow Art Theatre tours see Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2009), Chapter 2; and Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's Production of *The Cherry Orchard* in the US," in J. Douglas Clayton, ed., *Chekhov Then and Now: The Reception of Chekhov in World Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 19-30.

⁶ John Corbin, review of *Three Sisters*, *New York Times*, 31 January 1923, in Victor Emeljanow, ed., *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 241.

⁷ Dir. Kate Burton, MFA Repertory Company, University of Southern California, School of Theatre, 2012.

⁸ Kenneth Turan, "Translating a Masterpiece," *Los Angeles Times: Calendar Live*, 5 April 2002, <http://www.calendarlive.com/movies/Reviews>, accessed 29 April 2009.

One of my undergraduate students would audibly gasp whenever a scene or character struck a surprisingly familiar chord; another more soberly called Chekhov “an author capable of transcending cultures and centuries.”⁹

Nowhere does the high opinion of Chekhov’s worth as a dramatic writer register as loudly as it does among theater professionals, including writers, directors, and actors. Many English language playwrights not only admire, but emulate him. Writers as various as Irwin Shaw, William Inge, Paddy Chayefsky, Lillian Helman, and Arthur Miller cite Chekhov as their model. His influence is so extensive in the United States, that playwright Robert Anderson once quipped, “American playwrights have gone around, trying to be the American Chekhov.”¹⁰

Even more surprising, however, are playwrights who translate, or more precisely adapt his plays, whether or not they can read him in the original Russian. The list reads like a who’s-who of modern and contemporary drama. A few among the American playwrights are: Clifford Odets, who prepared a 1939 version of *Three Sisters* for the Group Theatre; Tennessee Williams, with his adaptation of *The Seagull* (entitled *The Notebook of Trigorin*); Jean Claude Van Itallie, who created versions of all the major plays by working through French translations; Lanford Wilson, who took a Berlitz course in Russian in order to translate *Three Sisters* in 1984 for director Mark Lamos at the Circle Repertory Company; and David Mamet, who fashioned his version of *The Cherry Orchard* in 1985 for the New Theatre at Chicago’s Goodman Theatre by working from a literal translation made for him by a native Russian speaker. In 2012, two more contemporary playwrights took on Chekhov: Tracy Letts, who adapted *Three Sisters* for Chicago’s Steppenwolf Company, and Annie Baker, who created an *Uncle Vanya* for the Soho Rep in New York. Among the playwrights from Great Britain who have adapted Chekhov are David Hare, Edward Bond, Pam Gems and Tom Stoppard, who baldly admits, “I’ve always felt very envious of Chekhov.”¹¹

⁹ Jennifer Bashian and Kevin Burke, Freshman Seminar: Checking Out Chekhov, University of Southern California, Fall 2008.

¹⁰ Laurence Senelick, *The Chekhov Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 284.

¹¹ “Stagewrite Productions Archive,” *National Theatre Education*, <http://www.nt-online.org> (accessed 20 August 2002).

Such acts of linguistic hubris often mean that dramatists do not so much convey Chekhov into English as turn him into mirror images of themselves, with his actual innovations in drama getting lost in the process.¹²

In turn, directors and actors venerate Chekhov by staging him in productions that sometimes reflect his time and culture and sometimes transport his characters into other eras and places. The imaginative possibilities for making his plays relevant to contemporary audiences seem as endless as reconceptualizations of Shakespeare. In fact, Chekhov is the second most frequently produced dramatist in the world today after the British bard. Theaters worldwide embrace the Russian's handful of plays with the same fervency as they do Shakespeare's more prodigious oeuvre. Moreover, in much the same way that actors and directors often envision the pinnacle of their own theatrical careers in their work with Shakespeare, so too does success in Chekhov's plays become a measure of artistic maturity. For this reason, theatrical schools and academies throughout the world often ask their students to cut their teeth on both Chekhov and Shakespeare.

One of America's most insightful theater critics, Eric Bentley, asks: "Why is it that scarcely a year passes without a major Broadway or West End production of a Chekhov play?" After all, "the Anglo-American theater finds it possible to get along without the services of most of the best playwrights," among them "Aeschylus, Lope de Vega, Racine, Molière, Schiller, Strindberg." The answer partly lies in the various reasons that theaters choose to produce Chekhov: some see his plays as part of a lucrative "commodity theater"; some are "conscious rebels" who see him as an alternative voice "against the whole system"; and "others are simply genuine artists" who stage him because he represents the best in dramatic art. But, in the last analysis, Bentley observes, staging Chekhov is bound up with a sense of artistic integrity. "It is as if the theater remembers Chekhov when it remembers its conscience."¹³

¹² Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Translating Chekhov's Plays Without Russian, or, The Nasty Habit of Adaptation," in Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin, eds., *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2007), 89-100.

¹³ Eric Bentley, "Craftsmanship in *Uncle Vanya*," in Thomas A. Eekman, *Critical Essays on Anton Chekhov* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), 169-70.

While theater history seems as unimaginable without Chekhov as without Shakespeare, audiences, critics, playwrights, and theater practitioners alike often find themselves puzzled by Chekhov's dramatic writing. His plays seem all too foreign, his characters highly inscrutable, and their very names (let alone their stories) difficult to grasp. This puzzlement can turn the most enthusiastic productions "deadly," to borrow British director Peter Brook's phrase. In fact, what Brook has written about Shakespeare productions that present the bard as a hallowed monument of great theater applies all too easily to Chekhov as well:

We see his plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way—they look lively and colorful, there is music and everyone is dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best of classical theatre. Yet secretly, we find it excruciatingly boring [...]. To make matters worse there is always a deadly spectator, who for special reasons enjoys a lack of intensity and even a lack of entertainment, such as the scholar who emerges from routine performances of the classics smiling because nothing has distracted him from trying over and confirming his pet theories to himself, whilst reciting his favorite lines under his breath.¹⁴

Indeed, the proliferation of deadly productions that treat Chekhov's plays as untouchable, but equally unfathomable classics may well account for the fact that there are as many people today who wish to avoid him as there are those who seek him.

I believe that unanswered questions about Chekhov's plays often account for the misfiring of well-intentioned productions. Among questions that either go unanswered or insufficiently answered are the following: Was Chekhov a gloomy pessimist, reflecting upon boredom and despair? Or was he a hopeful optimist in face of the bitter realities that we all face in life—including the bitterest of all, death? Are his plays comic or tragic, ironic or sincere? Are his plays excellent examples of theatrical realism or something more poetic and symbolic, maybe even absurdist? Where can one find the action and conflict in plays where nothing much seems to happen? How can the often seemingly irrelevant dialogue and apparently static plots create dynamic and riveting performances?

¹⁴ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Avon Books, 1968), 10.

This book is a guide to reading Chekhov's plays deeply. I do not provide a comprehensive history of all the ways in which his plays have been interpreted by directors and scholars; instead, I examine how a Chekhov play is unique and let my readers make up their own minds. I write in hopes that theater artists will work on his plays from a fully informed perspective and that students and general audiences will bring greater appreciation to their future encounters with him.

My book will take you on a journey that begins in Chapter 1 with the biographical and cultural contexts that inspired Chekhov's art. Chapters 2 and 3 take a first look at his plays through the spectacles of his fiction. Famous for his short stories long before his plays, he initially transported his innovations in narrative technique into his plays, thus creating a paradigm shift in playwriting that maintains its authority into the twenty-first century. Chapters 4 and 5 take the next important look at his dramaturgy by tracing how his own theatergoing affected his innovations, both through his avid love of the comic French vaudeville and his loathing of nineteenth-century melodrama and histrionic acting. Finally, in Chapter 6, I explore how his plays travel from page to stage, serving as blueprints for productions. Along the way, I take on issues of Chekhov's artistic style, his non-standard use of genre, his sense of irony, his comedic sensibility, and his most abiding themes.

Nearly every chapter includes a case study on Chekhov's densely simple writing. Chapter 2 provides a close study of Chekhov's own favorite story, "The Student," in order to expose how he weaves apparently trivial details into rich tapestries of associations. Chapter 3 follows this case study with multiple examples of his devilishly clever use of details in his plays. Chapter 4 takes on his comic sensibility by comparing his "joke in one act," *The Proposal*, with Eugène Scribe's one-act vaudeville, *A Peculiar Position*. Chapter 4 traces precisely how Chekhov finds his unique voice as a playwright by experimenting with melodrama from his first full-length play to his last masterpiece. Moreover, by comparing Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* with *The Cherry Orchard*, one can clearly see how Chekhov's experiments resulted in his turning melodrama completely inside out. Finally, Chapter 6 explores how Stanislavsky made Chekhov's innovations visible to audiences in the iconic staging of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre.

In short, I invite you to acquire a taste for Chekhov!

Chapter One

Chekhov on His Own Terms

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904) created his enduring artistic legacy during a short and intense life of forty-four years. But who was he and how did his experience feed his literary and dramatic genius? These questions are far from easy to answer. He kept his distance from others. “I could not say that Anton Pavlovich was ever on very close terms with anyone. Was it even possible?” muses his great admirer, Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko¹—a playwright and theater director who took great pains to convince Chekhov to allow the newly founded Moscow Art Theatre to produce *The Seagull*. Chekhov also kept his distance from posterity. When Moscow State University requested an autobiography for his class reunion, he replied: “An autobiography? I have a disease: autobiographobia. To read any details about myself genuinely torments me, and to write them for publication is even worse” (to G. I. Rossolimo, 11 Oct. 1899).

In short, Chekhov was an utterly private man. He could seem as inscrutable to those who drank tea with him in his home as he seems to those of us today, who seek him by reading books, visiting his house museums, and working in his archives. Consider the words of writer Tatiana Lvovna Shchepkina-Kupernik, who was so close a friend to Chekhov that she often served as the romantic go-between for him and his mistress (the flamboyant and famous actress Lidia Borisovna Yavorskaya, on whom he modeled Arkadina in *The Seagull*).

In Moscow, [Anton Pavlovich...] went to see the same plays we saw, visited the same circles we visited, sat up all night listening to music; yet I could not free myself from the impression that he was “not with us,” that he was a spectator, and not one of the dramatis personae [of our lives].²

¹ Andrei Turkov, ed., *Anton Chekhov and His Times*, trans. Cynthia Carlile and Sharon McKee (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 64.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

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