Contents

Editor's Note *by Cathy Popkin* vi
Introduction *by Robin Feuer Miller* ix

Essays on Anton P. Chekhov. Close Readings *by Robert Louis Jackson*
On Chekhov's Art 3
Chekhov's *Seagull*: The Empty Well, the Dry Lake, and the Cold Cave 14
"If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem": 27
An Essay on Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle"
Dostoevsky in Chekhov's Garden of Eden: "Because of Little Apples" 44
"The Betrothed": Chekhov's Last Testament 64
Chekhov and Proust: A Posing of the Problem 78
"The Steppe": Space and the Journey. A Metaphor for All Times 90
"The Enemies": A Story at War with Itself? 102
Chekhov's "The Student" 114
The Ethics of Vision: 122
The Punishment of the Tramp Prokhorov in *The Island of Sakhalin*
Dantesque and Dostoevskian Elements in Chekhov's "In Exile" 129
Biblical and Literary Allusions in Chekhov's "Gusev" 142
Russian Man at the Rendezvous: 151
The Narrator of Chekhov's "A Little Joke"
"Small Fry": A Nice Little Easter Story 159
Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle": 173
"By the Rivers of Babylon" in Eastern Orthodox Liturgy
Three Deaths: A Boy, A Goose, and an Infant 180
A Fragment from the Aggregate: 195
Sinai and Sakhalin in Chekhov's Letters to Suvorin
"Grief": Once Again about the Ending of the Story 200
Dogs: Text and Subtext in "Lady with a Pet Dog" 213
Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" and Gurov's Oreanda Meditations 221
in Chekhov's "Lady with a Pet Dog"

Afterword *by Cathy Popkin* 227
Appendix: Robert Louis Jackson on "Po delam sluzhby" 236
["On Official Business"] (unfinished)
Index 254

Editor's Note

All scholarship on Chekhov's work must address two technical difficulties, one in the mechanics of quotation and the other in the identification of sources.

The first entails distinguishing typographically between editorial omissions and Chekhov's own liberal use of suspension points—three dots at the end of sentences, clauses, phrases, and even between words to indicate pauses, to capture an incomplete thought or the trailing off of speech, or to create silences amidst the sounds. Given their functionality, Chekhov's suspension points are included in all quoted passages, indicated by three closely spaced dots...

In order to distinguish Chekhov's punctuation from Robert Jackson's ellipses, the essays use three dots enclosed in square brackets to indicate where anything has been omitted from a quoted passage […].

The second practice adopted here is prompted by the organization of the Academy of Sciences edition of Chekhov's work: A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh* [Complete works and letters in 30 volumes] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1974–1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Chekhov's work are to this edition. Because the edition's thirty volumes are divided into two separate numerical sequences (Works [*Sochineniia*], vols. 1–18, and Letters [*Pis'ma*], vols. 1–12), the conventional abbreviation for a Russian author's complete works [*PSS*] is expanded here to *PssS* for Works [***S**ochineniia*] and *PssP* for Letters [***P**is'ma*], followed by the relevant volume and page number.

Analogously, references to the works of Ivan Turgenev are to the following edition: I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh* (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1960–1968). Because the edition's twenty-eight volumes are numbered as two independent sequences—Works [*Sochineniia*], vols. 1–15, and Letters [*Pis'ma*], vols. 1–13—references to this edition, too, specify *PssS* for Works [***S**ochineniia*] and *PssP* for Letters [***P**is'ma*], followed by the relevant volume and page number.

The collected works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy cited here number their volumes in one continuous sequence: F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie*

sochinenii v tridtsati [30] *tomakh* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1972–1990); and L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v devianosta* [90] *tomakh* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1928–1958). References to these editions thus appear as Dostoevskii, *PSS* and Tolstoi, *PSS*, respectively, followed by the relevant volume and page number.

Please note as well that, while in the text of the essays Russian names are given in their familiar Anglicized forms (Fyodor [rather than *Fedor*], Yakov [rather than *Iakov*], Gorky [rather than *Gor'kii*], Tolstoy [rather than *Tolstoi*]), all bibliographic references and transliterated passages are rendered in accordance with the modified Library of Congress system of transliteration.

Finally, my sincere thanks to Ekaterina Yanduganova of Academic Studies Press for her editorial acuity and her unfailing support—as well as for devising the graphic means to express all of the above distinctions.

cp

"Red Sofa"
(Portrait of Robert Louis Jackson at age 18)
by Ella F. Jackson, 1941.
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Introduction

Robert Louis Jackson's death at the age of ninety-eight in May 2022 came as a shock to his family, his colleagues, and friends. His vibrant physical presence seemed permanent, whether in the classroom or at his hospitable kitchen tables in Truro, Massachusetts, or Guilford, Connecticut. Now he joins the writers and characters about whom he has written and who will, no doubt, welcome him to their circle. He emanated in old age the kind of joyousness, sparkle, curiosity, and clarity that we associate with the final days of the Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Among Jackson's books are three collections of his essays; they offer us, because each volume contains work carefully selected by Jackson at the time of compilation, three snapshots of his critical thinking over some thirty years—a time when both the world and the modes of critical engagement have been undergoing significant change. The present volume, *Essays on Anton P. Chekhov: Close Readings,* is the third, and it was preceded by *Close Encounters: Essays on Russian Literature* (Academic Studies Press, 2013) and *Dialogues with Dostoevsky: The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford University Press, 1993). The title of each of these collections reflects Jackson's steady preoccupation with the reader's activity in time: he is reading, he is having close encounters, he is engaging in dialogue and asking questions.

Among the various striking aspects of Jackson's writing is its fluidity, its openness to change, to listening to others, to engaging in close communications—all without the straitjacket of ideology or even theories about such engagement. His critical work is the thing itself. Jackson puts authors—Chekhov, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gorky, Goethe, and others—into dialogue with each other and does not hesitate to insert himself into the conversation as well. Thus, his work is perennially alive, undogmatic, and subject to change or rethinking, provisional. As with Chekhov and Dostoevsky, for Jackson the process, the act, outweighs the significance of any static meaning or result. The present volume reflects the value of revisiting important works over time, acknowledging, accommodating, and reflecting upon one's own changing understanding of them.

As I read *Essays on Anton P. Chekhov*, it seemed that an appropriate subtitle for it would have been *An Essay in the Old Criticism*, but of course that

was already used over sixty years ago by George Steiner in 1959—a reminder of how quickly the new becomes old and perhaps the old is new again. And, curiously, in the 1993 collection of his essays, some thirty years ago, Jackson had the same impulse, telling his readers in his "Introduction" that he "should have been glad to subtitle [his] book 'Essays in the Old Criticism' if Steiner had not, some thirty-five years earlier, already "preempted that subtitle."

Jackson's perennial themes, moreover, are "the intractable problems that preoccupy both literature and criticism." The present volume represents those themes and problems with compelling originality and humanity. A preoccupation with the overarching themes of Fate, Freedom, Responsibility, Beauty, Ugliness, Parting, and Death suffuses all three volumes, but *Essays on Anton P. Chekhov* adds to that collection of themes a practice of frequent illuminating excursions into the Russian language and the way in which Chekhov and other Russian writers have used particular words. These analyses are of significant value both to readers of Russian and to those who know nothing about the language.

Criticism abounds with theories of reading. In the opening sentence of the book, Jackson contributes, with almost off-hand modesty, a theory of his own, derived of all places from an old grammar textbook whose author he no longer remembers: "Wisdom and platitude sometimes coincide. 'Read slowly and deeply, looking forwards and backwards'—I once read in an old grammar. I have always read cautiously and, in learning Russian, developed a habit of examining words closely." Jackson's book offers up not a paradigm of a hermeneutic journey from part to whole, nor a chronological one (whether at the level of the sentence, the work at hand, the oeuvre, or the epoch as a whole) that traces the writer's development and evolution as an artist to some endpoint. Instead, Jackson reads Chekhov slowly, deeply, while looking and reading forwards and backwards. There is no part that stands for the whole; there is no destination, but there are piercing moments of insight, moments of significant, if temporary or fragile, arrival. With the exception of the opening piece ("On Chekhov's Art"), Jackson ordered the essays for the volume chronologically, yet it is fascinating to see that, taken as a whole, they reflect the backwards and forwards motion of Jackson's thinking about Chekhov and about his description of the act of reading generally. Neither Jackson nor his editors shied away from seeming repetitions or returns to certain stories or themes. The result is an exquisite structure that mirrors a process of reading over time. To revise Stein's bleak entropic command in Conrad's *Lord Jim* into a life-affirming one: "In the artistic element immerse."

Such a motion-filled paradigm for the act of reading corresponds more closely to how readers remember literary works that are meaningful to them: one's repeated returns to certain works blend with one's encounters with new ones and with life itself. The overall movements, unceasingly backwards and forwards on both the macro-level of accumulated reading and living and the micro-level of the most resonant parts of a single work, coalesce into a flowing, yet patterned and kaleidoscopic swirl that constitutes each reader's individual imaginary and, perhaps in addition, a way to describe memory. Jackson found his blueprint for reading, whether over a lifetime or within a single text, in an old grammar book.

Throughout his book Jackson is consistently attuned to "the song [that] echoes throughout Russian literature," a song that is by turns tragic, searing, mournful, redemptive. But there is no sentimentality here, especially in regard to Chekhov with whom Jackson seems to agree. In his chapter on *The Seagull* Jackson suggests that Chekhov was agnostic about whether any insight into the meaning of life was attainable, but that nevertheless one needed to strive, to act. Jackson writes, "We are not *a priori* destined for anything […]. Nor is the universe *a priori* a meaningful one. Man creates meaning, he gives embodiment to his 'history,' his destiny." One of the many oxymorons in this book is that one can trace the lines of a song that is somehow redemptive, yet it is man, not any God, who creates meaning in this world, a world where there is no fate, only necessity.

Following Chekhov's lead in "The Betrothed," Jackson also develops a comprehensive notion of "the periodicity or lunar character of all experience and striving." One way to account for Chekhov's frequent use of the word "seemed" is to acknowledge, as Jackson hypothesizes, that "there is no forever or finality in the life process or experience, as Chekhov views it." He asserts that Chekhov insists that "all real change, whether personal or social, ultimately involves a return to, consciousness of, and suffering with, the past, with history" and that he recognizes that "the end will not be at once, never will be on earth except in the form of an endlessly receding object of ceaseless, vital striving." Such is the periodicity that Jackson discovers in Chekhov.

The middle chapters of Jackson's book take on a darker coloration, starting with "'The Enemies': A Story at War with Itself," where Jackson points out that the principle of symmetry that seems to govern this story is actually disturbing and leads to difficult questions, to an interrogation about problems of social class, to the frustrating effort to find bases for ethical and moral judgement. He argues that Chekhov's instinct and intent are, "to some

extent," at "cross-purposes with one another." Jackson ultimately reads the story as one that offers the reader Chekhov's own poetics of suffering, represented through a visual tableau of sorrow, an intimate Pietà that emerges in the image of the mother kneeling by the bed of her dead little boy. The narrator tells us: "That repellent horror that people think of when they speak of death was absent from the bedroom." Instead, present in the "somber stillness" is the "subtle, almost elusive beauty of human sorrow." The story reaches far beyond the social, ethical, and moral questions it seems to pose and renders, through its visual imagery, something even more fundamental and mysterious.

Yet despite this potential "almost elusive beauty of human sorrow," the stark fact of death itself, as Chekhov repeatedly described it, "arouses something more than horror. […] And when I die, I'll find out what it's all about. It's terrible to become nothing." In Dostoevsky's world at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha and the boys find some inexplicable comfort, some life-giving salve in the homely reality of the pancakes eaten after Ilyusha's funeral. Not so for Chekhov, whose remark to Suvorin is redolent of Tolstoy in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*: "They carry you off to the cemetery, come back home and start drinking tea and saying hypocritical things. It's revolting to think of this." Jackson cites a passage from Chekhov's notebook, "Looking out the window at a dead person who is being carried off: 'You've died, they're taking you to the cemetery, but I'm going out for breakfast.'"

Yet nevertheless, reading backwards to Jackson's analysis of "Gusev," there, at the end, Gusev's dead body, as it falls to pieces while being devoured by fish, returns to its origins in a turbulent ocean that is linked to the sky. "Looking at this magnificent, enchanting sky, the ocean frowns at first, but it, too, takes on tender, joyous, passionate colors for which it is hard to find a name in the language of man." In this passage Jackson identifies the same ceaseless, relentless movement, the same darkness, but also the kind of "mythopoetic history" that is discoverable even in the dark recesses of works like "Enemies," "The Steppe," "In the Ravine," or *The Island of Sakhalin*.

Jackson's reading of the very short story "Grief" encapsulates many of the important insights developed in this unusual, scholarly yet meditative book. "My son has died" becomes the refrain, the song of this story, and the question underlying it, embedded at the outset in its epigraph, is to whom can I tell my grief? This question leaps out at us now as the kind of contemporary inquiry that engages us because it is about narration and even vaguely therapeutic in nature. "Grief," however, is also a reenactment of Joseph's lament

of long ago, one that would have been well known, as Jackson points out, to Chekhov's contemporary readers from their familiarity with the terse, beautiful, and haunting spiritual folk poem "The Lament of the Beauteous Joseph" (included in full in an Appendix to the essay both in Russian and in English translation as an extra gift to modern readers). "Grief" closes with what Jackson identifies as yet another visual Pietà: we see Iona finally able to relate his intimate tale of suffering, told at last to his little horse on a snowy urban night, and the horse's gentle response, so like a blessing, goes beyond the lament of Joseph to connect the destitute cabby and his mare indirectly to Biblical visions of the birth and the death of Jesus. This ending with its humble image of a visual "poetics of grief" is transcendent but also unresolved.

In *Essays on Anton P. Chekhov* Jackson engages to some extent with more contemporary critics, but his most authentic, intense encounter is with Chekhov and the chorus of writers whose work permeated Jackson's long life. They are the ones who most often joined him around his kitchen table. There is, of course, no resolution, no final moment, no moment of glorious polyphony and crescendo. The music, the song, simply continues. The kind of immersion we critics and scholars of literature experience in our work is, most often, solitary despite its often extreme intensity, experienced through acts of reading and writing "backwards and forwards." This solitude, despite classroom teaching, public presentations, writing groups, conference panels, and so on, nevertheless largely prevails. Despite efforts to the contrary, we cannot experience the collaborative thrills, the workbench epiphanies of research scientists at their lab benches. Nor do we routinely enter into that immensely private world of another's written work while it is in process. That space and time are usually sacrosanct—the "other" does not invade that zone of turbulent, creative privacy even when the subject matter at hand is precisely that: the question of how "the other" is encountered and absorbed by the writing-reading self.

It is thus of particular interest and value when an unfinished work by a scholar in our field appears posthumously and has been lovingly edited and, more than that, literally entered into by a close colleague who becomes both an "other" and a new self lurking within the work as well. I call to your minds several other posthumous books of different scholarly genres by Robert L. Belknap, Kathryn B. Feuer, Joseph Frank, Robert Maguire, and Deborah Martinsen. Their posthumous books, all regarded as major works now in our small field, derive a vital measure of their enduring significance from the colleagues who took on the task of completing these manuscripts, all of

which were unfinished in different ways. One may even recall Alyosha, and his complex role as listener, scribe, and eventual editor of Zosima's Exhortations. Robert Louis Jackson's *Essays on Anton P. Chekhov: Close Readings* would not have existed without the collaborative presence of Lia Friedman and Cathy Popkin within its pages. Friedman painstakingly transformed fifty years of publications into clean, consistent copy; Popkin brought the manuscript to completion and served as Jackson's interlocutor throughout. We should thank them for bringing this book to fruition and for demonstrating so markedly, so generously, that our writing need not always be solitary.

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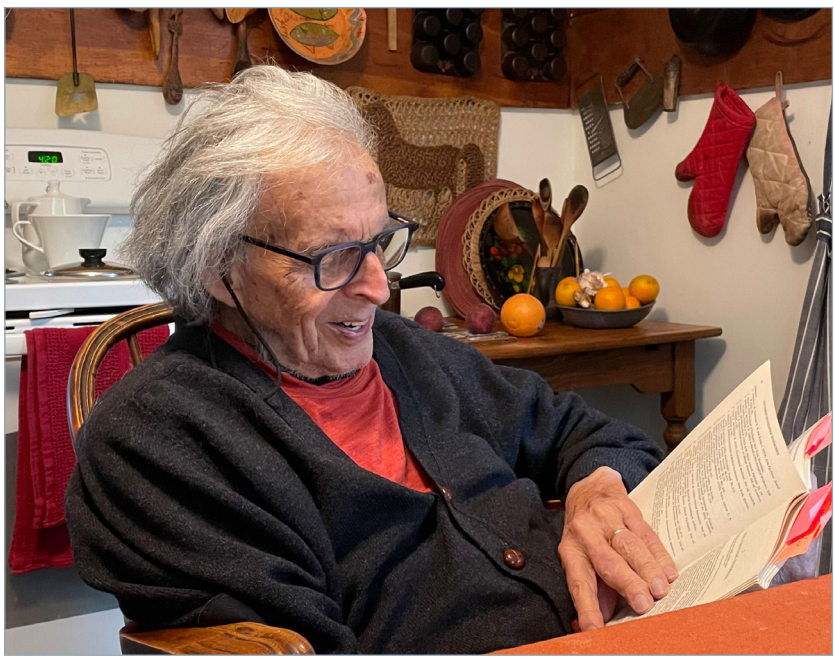

Robert Louis Jackson.
Photograph by Kathy Ellen Jackson, July 2021.
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Essays on Anton P. Chekhov

Close Readings

On Chekhov's Art[1]

Wisdom and platitude sometimes coincide. "Read slowly and deeply, looking forwards and backwards"—I once read in an old grammar. I have always read cautiously and, in learning Russian, developed a habit of examining words closely.

The study of Pushkin and Turgenev contributed especially to my reading of Chekhov's texts. Pushkin, like Chekhov, uses everyday speech in his prose and drama. The simple, colloquial dialogue in his plays, for example, in *The Stone Guest* (*Kamennyi gost'*), conveys complex and subtle thought.[2] E. A. Baratynsky, after reading in 1840 some of Pushkin's unpublished work and commenting on the "amazing beauty" of his verse, adds with surprise: "Can you imagine what marks all the last plays? Power and depth!"[3] How had Baratynsky, a poet and connoisseur of art, earlier missed the profundity of Pushkin's plays? (With the exception of *The Stone Guest*, Pushkin's dramas had been published.) Did the apparent simplicity of Pushkin's dialogue, of his language and style, veil the complexity of the work? Did Baratynsky not recognize, to borrow the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Goethe; or, The Writer" in *Representative Men,* "that the highest simplicity of structure is produced, not by few elements, but by the highest complexity"?

Some critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries viewed Turgenev as a great "stylist" of the Russian language and a faithful chronicler of social-cultural history in mid-century Russia, but considered his writing to be without much real depth. To some of these same critics Dostoevsky had a great deal to say, but said it badly. Yet Turgenev was a powerful thinker, as Dostoevsky was also a great stylist. What blocked the path of these critics to a deeper exploration of Turgenev's artistic thought? At the turn of the nineteenth century the Russian critic A. A. Andreevsky wrote of the "secret

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1 From *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon*, ed. Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2007), 17–25.

2 See my essay "Moral-Philosophical Subtext in *The Stone Guest*," in *Alexander Pushkin's Little Tragedies: The Poetics of Brevity,* ed. Svetlana Evdokimova (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 191–208.

3 See Geir Kjetsaa's selection of Baratynsky's letters in his study, *Evgenii Baratynskii: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Oslo, Bergen, and Tromso: Universitetsforlaget, 1973), 623.

wealth of [Turgenev's] devilishly light and musical prose, one resembling the verse of Pushkin whose profound inner content only a few people were able to disclose, and then at a very late date."[4]

Criticism, too, was slow in exploring the rich subtext of Chekhov's works and the means that he used to give expression to his artistic thought. Only in the past few decades has Chekhov scholarship begun to validate Sergei Bulgakov's prescient observation of one hundred years ago that after Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, writers who took as their chief theme "the basic questions of human life and spirit," Chekhov is "*the* writer of greatest philosophical significance."[5] Criticism acknowledged Chekhov's genius, but who would have placed Chekhov side by side with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as a writer of the greatest *philosophical* significance?

Chekhov did not write any critical essays that called attention to his social or philosophical ideas or to his artistic method, nor was it his general practice to stage philosophical debates in his works, though there are some notable exceptions, such as "Ward No. 6." Many of Chekhov's early critics, seeking in his stories the tendentious, the ideological, the judgmental, and finding none of these, charged him with "indifference." Some of these critics had an agenda. Others failed to grasp the nature of Chekhov's art. In this connection, Chekhov's paradoxical *poetics of seeing* is of especial interest. On the general theme of nature's impact on people, Chekhov wrote to Aleksei Suvorin, May 4, 1889:

> Nature is a very good tranquilizer. It reconciles, i.e., it makes a person indifferent [*ravnodushnym*]. And in this world one must be indifferent. Only indifferent people are capable of looking at things clearly, of being just [*byt' spravedlivymi*], and working. Of course, this applies only to intelligent and honorable people; as for egoists and empty people, you'll find plenty of indifference there. (*PssP* 3:203)[6]

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4 See A. A. Andreevskii, "Turgenev: Ego individual'nost' i poeziia," in his *Literaturnye ocherki* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. E. Kolpinskago, 1902); quoted in *Sobranie kriticheskikh materialov dlia izucheniia proizvedenii I. S. Turgeneva,* ed. V. Zelenskii (Moscow: [s.n.], 1910), 124.

5 S. N. Bulgakov, *Chekhov kak myslitel'* (Kiev, 1904; repr., Kiev: Izdanie knizhnago magazina S. I. Ivanova i Ko., 1910), 8.

6 See Chekhov's letter of May 8, 1889, to his brother Alexander for a variant discussion on this theme of indifference (*PssP* 3:210).

Indifference—we might substitute the words "detachment" or "equanimity"—enables a person to *see things clearly, truthfully, or justly*, and to *work* effectively. Chekhov's indifferent observer is a person of intelligence and ethical culture. One brings something to what one sees. What is striking here about Chekhov's approach to seeing or looking is the identification of *seeing* with *truth,* an ancient collaboration, to be sure, but one that goes to the heart of his poetics.

In Chekhov's conception of the artistic process, and of seeing in general, *point of view*, *how* one looks at reality, that is, one's vantage point of observation, telescopes with *point of view* as *outlook.* Here outlook on reality or the world is not a matter of answers, solutions, or judgments; rather it finds expression in and through depiction and narration ("question and intention" are immanent in the work of art), that is, through the artist's disposition of his materials, and through his imagery (the artist's specialty, according to Chekhov, is the creation of "images" [*PssP* 3:45]).

"I saw *everything*; hence the question now is not *what* I saw, but *how* I saw it" (Chekhov's italics), Chekhov wrote to Suvorin on the occasion of his departure from the island of Sakhalin, September 11, 1890 (*PssP* 4:133). Chekhov's remark succinctly gives expression to his poetics of seeing and to his effort to impose on his writing—even a work as morally and socially volatile as that of his work in progress, *The Island of Sakhalin. Notes of a Traveler* (1893–1895)—a maximally artistic approach, that is, one of strict depiction and narration. Here, in this remarkable multigeneric work, Chekhov's art of speaking in images combines in a unique way with rigorous scientific, scholarly, and journalistic objectivity—the kind that allows artistically focused materials to speak for themselves.

Chekhov's poetics of seeing, of course, was not new in Russian literature. In a striking formulation, the young Leo Tolstoy insisted on the priority of artistic truth in literature. In contrast to Chekhov, however, he took as his point of departure an ethical-religious injunction: "The word of the Gospel, '*do not judge,*' is profoundly true in art: narrate, depict, but do not judge" (*Evangel'skoe slovo:* ne sudi *gluboko verno v iskusstve: rasskazyvai, izobrazhai, no ne sudi*), he wrote in his notebook April 10, 1857 (Tolstoy's italics).[7]

Tolstoy's dictum was not an idle one. It would later find dramatic expression in *Anna Karenina* and, in the first instance, in the novel's gospel-

7 See L. N. Tolstoi, *O literature: Stat'i. Pis'ma. Dnevniki,* ed. F. A. Ivanova (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1955), 41.

oriented epigraph: "Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay."[8] This injunction to the reader encoded Tolstoy's guiding poetic principle in his novel. At issue was not *the fact* of Anna's guilt, but *how* the author was going to present and relate that fact in a way that expressed his overarching point of view. The Russian critic N. N. Strakhov keenly discerned the "how" of the matter when he observed in a letter to Tolstoy of July 23, 1874: "You grasp everything from a very lofty point of view" (*Vse vziato u Vas s ochen' vysokoi tochki zreniia*). Strakhov again noted in a letter of January 1, 1875: "You do not idealize or belittle [passion]. You are *the only just* person [*Vy* edinyi spravedlivyi *chelovek*], so that your Anna Karenina will arouse endless pity, but it will be clear to everyone that she is guilty" (Strakhov's italics).[9]

In his discussion of *Anna Karenina* in the July-August 1877 issue of *Diary of a Writer,* Dostoevsky recognized that Tolstoy's approach to Anna was not that of a prosecutor or judge, but of a *novelist* who viewed Anna's tragedy from a higher ethical-religious literary perspective. In Dostoevsky's analysis, Tolstoy presents Anna's drama in the great tradition of Greek and European tragedy. He perceives a conflation of Aristotelian and Christian concepts of tragedy in *Anna Karenina*.[10] The "human judge," he writes in illustration of Tolstoy's idea, should approach the drama of Anna with an awareness of a Law that is higher than human law and judgment. Referring to the "somber and terrible" denouement of Anna's drama, and focusing directly on the significance of the novel's epigraph, Dostoevsky wrote:

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8 See my discussion of this epigraph in my article "On the Ambivalent Beginning of *Anna Karenina*," in *Semantic Analysis of Literary Texts: To Honour Jan van der Eng on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Eric de Haard et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1990), 345–352. For a discussion of Tolstoy's development of the tragic dimensions of Anna, see my essay "Chance and Design in *Anna Karenina*," in *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History,* ed. Peter Demetz et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 315–329.

9 See L. N. Tolstoi—N. N. Strakhov, *Polnoe sobranie perepiski*, 2 vols., ed. A. A. Donskov et al. (Ottawa and Moscow: Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa and State L. N. Tolstoy Museum, 2003), 1:171, 190. Strakhov emphasized in Tolstoy's approach to Anna's drama what Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay on Goethe had posited as an artistic ideal: the attainment of "the just perspective, the seeing of the whole." Emerson, "Goethe; or, The Writer," in *Representative Men* [1850], ed. Pamela Schirmeister (New York: Marsilio Publishers Corp., 1995), 193.

10 For Dostoevsky's approach to this aspect of *Anna Karenina*, see F. M. Dostoevskii, *PSS* 25:199–202.

> The human judge himself ought to know that he is not the final judge; that he himself is a sinner; that the measure and scales in his hands will be an absurdity *if* he, holding measure and scales, does not himself submit to the law of the yet unsolved mystery and turn to the only solution—to Mercy and Love... In [Tolstoy's] picture [of Anna's moral and psychological fall] there is such a profound lesson for the human judge, for the one who holds the measure and the scales, that he will naturally exclaim in fear and perplexity, "No, Vengeance is not always mine, and it is not always for me to repay."[11]

What marks Tolstoy's depiction and narration of Anna's tragic fall is the organic unity of the esthetic and ethical: the *picture is the lesson,* and the *lesson is the picture***.** The tragedy of Anna arouses feelings of fear and mercy, humility and love, and finally, "perplexity" (*nedoumenie*), that is, an awareness that the total truth of human conduct is inaccessible. Just this eminently *novelistic* picture-lesson (epitomized for Dostoevsky in the scene of reconciliation around the sick-bed of Anna) constitutes the highest moral-spiritual perspective in *Anna Karenina.*

Throughout his life Tolstoy strained against the limits of his poetic principle—depict, narrate, but do not judge. Chekhov, for his part, strictly holds to this principle. The ethical impulse is immanent in the way he sees and focuses reality. In this sense, one may say that Chekhov, like Tolstoy, *sees truthfully, justly*, and never in a spirit of moralistic triumphalism, never in judgment. Broad social or ideological "answers" or solutions are inimical to the spirit and practice of his art; this is true even as his work lifts the reader to the highest realms of moral, social, and philosophical awareness. In his important letter of October 27, 1888, to Suvorin, Chekhov warns his friend against confusing

> two concepts: the *solution of a problem* and the *correct posing of a question.* Only the second is obligatory for the artist. Not a single question is resolved in *Anna Karenina* or [*Eugene*] *Onegin,* but they completely satisfy one, for the very reason that all questions are correctly posed in them. The court is obligated correctly to pose questions, while it is up to the jurors, each juror to his own taste, to decide them. (Chekhov's italics [*PssP* 3:46])

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11 *PSS* 25:202.

In his remarkable correspondence, a monument to his life, thought, and epistolary art, Chekhov speaks his mind on a wide range of issues and questions concerning life, society, moral culture, history, literature, criticism, science, psychology, religion, philosophy, and so forth. We recognize the man and the artist. The full depth, breadth, and clarity of his insight and vision, however, are to be found in his belles-lettres and drama. Yet precisely in this imaginative realm the Chekhov we know from his correspondence is not immediately or directly apparent. The outwardly simple, tranquil, and everyday Chekhov text initially yields much less than the often garrulous and hyperactive texts of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Yet the apparent simplicity of Chekhov's text masks an art of astounding complexity and truth.

"Let everything on the stage be just as complex and at the same time just as simple as in life," Chekhov is reported to have said. "People dine, merely dine, but at that moment their happiness is being made or their life is being smashed."[12] Like Maeterlinck, Chekhov sought out the dramas of life not in melodramatic or super-dramatic actions, conflicts, or events, but in everyday life and actions.

In this connection, Chekhov's relation to Turgenev deserves mention. As we know, he often spoke critically and tartly of Turgenev, as writers often do of those who have strongly influenced them. Chekhov was particularly enamored of Turgenev in his apprentice years, though Tolstoy certainly displaced Turgenev as a literary mentor. Yet Chekhov surely found much in Turgenev's prose and drama that anticipated his own poetics. "Remember that however subtle and complex the inner structure of some tissues in the human body, the skin, for example, nonetheless its appearance is comprehensible and homogeneous," Turgenev wrote to the young Konstantin N. Leontiev, October 3, 1860. "A poet must be a psychologist, but a secret one. He must know and feel the roots of phenomena, but represent only the phenomena themselves in their flowering and fading."[13]

Further, in a letter to Countess I. E. Lambert, October 14, 1859, Turgenev advanced a way of looking at life that brings us to the threshold of Chekhov's tragi-comic drama:

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12 "Vospominaniia D. Gorodetskogo," *Birzhevye vedomosti* 364 (1904).

13 See Ivan Turgenev, *PssP* 4:135. Turgenev's letter to Leontiev was first published in the journal *Russkaia mysl'* 12 (1886): 83–85.