

Chapter 3. Failed Experiments: The Early Plays

Literature, like art, serves one constructive aim and function: to reproduce the world outside, though it is not of course to be a carbon copy; the creative intelligence must not only render the truth of reality but also interpret and evaluate it. (Charles I. Glicksberg)¹

... it has been thought possible to create a new drama by filling the old forms with the contents of the newer age; but ... we have not got the new form for the contents, and the new wine has burst the old bottles. (August Strindberg)²

Chekhov did not immediately find the dramatic form that would function as the perfect objective correlative of his vision of reality. He began his career as a playwright by adopting the conventions of earlier well-established dramatic genres. As with his short-story writing, Chekhov underwent a period of literary apprenticeship before he was able to free himself from the use of these outdated and inappropriate techniques. As Simon Karlinsky points out: 'It was in *The Seagull* that this liberation first occurred, the creative breakthrough which made Chekhov as much an innovator in the field of drama as he already was in the art of prose narrative.'³

As Karlinsky suggests, Chekhov developed new formal techniques appropriate to convey his vision in the two quite different genres of the short story and the drama. Chekhov's fame as a playwright today has partially obscured the fact that, for most of his literary career, he was better known as a prolific short-story writer.⁴ Chekhov applied many of the techniques he had developed for the short story to the writing of his later plays, and, in particular, he carried over into his later dramatic technique an avoidance of overt theatricality. As Joseph Wood Krutch correctly notes: 'The very soul of his method [in short story writing] had always been the avoidance of anything artificially 'dramatic' and he was wise enough not to alter it when he came to write drama.'⁵

In an attempt to emphasise the fact that Chekhov was a man of the theatre whose 'only reason for writing a play was the likelihood of its being performed on the stage',⁶ David Magarshack undervalues the importance of Chekhov's short-story techniques in the development of his dramatic techniques. He incorrectly suggests that Chekhov did not have to learn his craft as a dramatist:

Chekhov was not, as is generally supposed, a great short-story writer who took up drama seriously only during the last seven or eight years of his all too short life. He was a born dramatist whose first works of importance were three

full-length plays, two written in his late teens and the third in his early twenties.⁷

Magarshack is correct in his observation that many critics of Chekhov's day regarded him primarily as a writer of narrative fiction. Despite having written several highly successful vaudevilles and three full-length dramas, *Platonov*, *Ivanov*, and *The Wood Demon*, an early version of *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov had become so associated with the genre of the short story that, when *The Seagull* was first produced in 1896, he was still not thought of as being primarily a playwright. A disgruntled spectator at the first performance of *The Seagull* is reported to have muttered, 'Why doesn't he stick to short stories?'⁸

Magarshack is also right to emphasise Chekhov's early interest in the theatre. We know that when he was a schoolboy in Taganrog, he had gone to the theatre regularly and that he wrote the early plays that Magarshack refers to. However, it was not until he wrote *The Seagull* that Chekhov developed the dramatic techniques that could adequately express his vision, and this occurred *after* he had mastered the narrative techniques appropriate for his short stories and utilised several of them in his evolving dramatic form.

Chekhov's earliest theatrical efforts, which have not survived, were parodies of the theatrical fare that he had witnessed in Taganrog, and reflect his dissatisfaction with many of these offerings. According to Donald Rayfield, Chekhov saw a wide range of mainly European drama when he was a schoolboy and he 'reacted in his first letters and parodies against the spectacular histrionics of Hugo's drama or Italian opera'.⁹ Despite this early manifestation of his dislike of overt theatricality, Chekhov did not avoid this same fault in his first plays. His initial dramatic successes were 'vaudevilles', which employed precisely the kind of theatrical clichés and superficial characterisation that he supposedly despised. Chekhov was aware that his theatrical practice did not match his ideal of theatrical realism. Consequently, it is not surprising that he regarded his vaudevilles simply as lucrative potboilers with little artistic merit. Just as he was scornful of many of his early short stories, regarding them as superficial and derivative, for the same reasons, he regarded much of his early dramatic writing as worthless. Ronald Hingley succinctly outlines Chekhov's attitude to these comic one-acters:

As was his way, Chekhov disparaged his vaudevilles. He called *The Proposal* 'a wretched, vulgar, boring little skit ... a lousy little farce'; and referred to *A Tragic Role* as 'a stale farce which falls flat', being based on 'a stale hackneyed joke'. Still, he appreciated the boost to his income. He was 'living on my dole from *The Bear*', he wrote; it was his 'milch cow'. Any author of ten tolerable vaudevilles could regard his future as assured, he said, for they were as profitable as sixty acres of land. He planned to write a hundred such farces a year, 'vaudeville subjects gush out of me like oil from the Baku wells'.¹⁰

One vaudeville, whose title is variously translated as *Smoking Is Bad for You* or *On the Harmfulness of Tobacco*, is of particular interest because we have several different versions of the play which demonstrate Chekhov's growing control of the dramatic techniques he was to use in his last four tragi-comedies. Taking only two and a half hours to write, *Smoking Is Bad for You* originally appeared in print in 1886, but, as Hingley recounts: 'it underwent a series of six recensions spread over sixteen years, only attaining its final form in September 1902'.¹¹

The original version was regarded by Chekhov as a worthless piece of juvenilia, but his final revision pleased the author enough for him to write to A. F. Marks, the publisher of his *Complete Collected Works*, suggesting that the monologue be included in that edition:

Among works of mine transmitted to you is the farce *Smoking Is Bad for You*, which is one of the items that I asked you to exclude from my *Complete Collected Works* and never print ... Now I have written a completely new play with the same title, *Smoking Is Bad for You*, keeping only the surname of the *dramatis personae*, and I send it to you for inclusion in volume vii.¹²

Commenting on his original version of the play published in the *Petersburg Gazette* in 1886, Chekhov wrote: 'I have made a mess of this monologue ... My intentions were good, but the execution was execrable.'¹³ Clearly, his statement to his publisher that his final version was 'a completely new play' suggests that he felt that there was a radical difference between the various versions. Presumably he felt that both his intentions and his execution were satisfactory in the last version.

An overall description of the nature of this comic monologue and the principal changes that Chekhov undertook is given by Ernest Simmons in his biography of the writer:

The changes between the first and last version of this slight sketch admirably illustrate the transformation that had taken place in Chekhov's approach to the revelation of character on the stage. In the first version Nyukhin's monologue before the club audience on the harmfulness of tobacco, which his tyrant of a wife compels him to deliver for the purpose of advertising the girls' school she runs, is designed solely to amuse the audience by external comic effects which derive from the oddities, vagaries, and rambling speech of this pathetic old man who is lecturing on a subject which he knows nothing about. In the final version the emphasis has entirely changed. Most of the external comic effects have vanished. Here, Nyukhin's monologue amounts to a subtle psychological analysis of the inner man. He reveals himself, not as he appears in real life, which had been the emphasis in the first version, but as he really is – a man whose fine qualities have been distorted and wantonly destroyed over the years by an insensitive, selfish, and dominating wife.¹⁴

The significance of the changes has been noted by several critics. Magarshack has argued that:

It is, indeed, highly probable that Chekhov used this play ... for his experiments in the new method of writing dramatic dialogue which depends for its main effect on inner rather than outer action.¹⁵

In the final version, Magarshack argues, 'what matters is a character's inward reaction to the circumstances of his life and not the circumstances themselves'.¹⁶ Vera Gottlieb likewise recognises the radical nature of Chekhov's revisions. She argues that:

As a result of these ... alterations, the emphasis of the play shifts increasingly from the 'comic scene' of a man giving a lecture on a subject that he clearly knows nothing about, to a tragi-comic emphasis on the man himself ...¹⁷

Chekhov was justified in referring to his final version of *Smoking Is Bad for You* as a new play for, in the course of rewriting, he radically transformed the play's form from a farce to a tragi-comedy.

In the 1889 version, Nyukhin is a stereotypical character, the hen-pecked husband, who is presented as an object of fun, to be laughed at for his comic pratfalls. Even his asthma attack, which potentially could arouse audience sympathy, is treated in a manner that forces an audience to focus on the character's ludicrous behaviour rather than on his suffering:

NYUKHIN. ... Give me air! [*Balances with his arms and legs to stop himself falling over.*] Whew! Just a moment! Let me get my breath back! Just a moment. One minute. I shall stop this attack by sheer will-power. [*Beats his chest with his fist.*] That will do. Gosh! [*A minute's pause, during which NYUKHIN walks up and down the stage panting.*]¹⁸

This early version contains many physical jokes that remind one of the *lazzi* of commedia dell'arte. In the version written a year later, in 1890, much of the physicality is toned down or omitted. Nyukhin's medical complaint is changed from asthma to hiccups. While 'business' still plays an important part in the play, the onset of hiccups is less of a physical tour de force than the asthma attack:

NYUKHIN. ... Tobacco is, mainly, a plant. [*Hiccups.*] I've got hiccups. A most convenient thing to have too, I might add. It makes you hold your breath and wait a bit. [*A pause of one minute during which NYUKHIN stands motionless.*]¹⁹

Even the difference between the 1889 stage direction in which Nyukhin 'walks up and down' and the 1890 stage direction which states that the character 'stands motionless' suggests that Chekhov was moving away from overt

histrionics towards a more subtle and realistic presentation of character and situation.

The kind of acting required for the 1902 version of *Smoking Is Bad for You* is essentially realistic and reflects Chekhov's increasing 'avoidance of anything artificially "dramatic"'. As Magarshack says:

The acting he had in mind for his plays, Chekhov made it clear, did not mean rushing about the stage and expressing emotions by means of gestures. Strong emotion, he pointed out, should be expressed on the stage as it is expressed in life by cultured people, that is to say, not with one's hands and feet, but with the tone of one's voice and with one's eyes, not by gesticulating but by always keeping one's poise.²⁰

In effect, the final version of this comic monologue requires the kind of realistic acting technique that was being systematised by Stanislavski; a technique that required the actor to play not simply the text, but also to present an implied subtext. A simple but useful definition of 'subtext' and its relationship to the 'text' is provided by I. Rapaport: 'The written words of the role constitute the text. But *the purpose for which the words are spoken, their inner meaning, we call the "sub-text"*.'²¹ What Chekhov had learned by the time he made his final revision of *Smoking Is Bad for You* was how to create characters who had two lives. One life was the externalised objective life that was presented in the text, and the other was the secret subjective inner life that was presented in an implied subtext. The creation of this double life was what enabled audiences to perceive the gap that exists between his characters' subjective and often tragic lives and their objective and often comic behaviour. Through this formal device Chekhov was able to communicate his vision of reality.

In the 1890 version of *Smoking Is Bad for You*, Chekhov attempted to move away from the depiction of Nyukhin's character simply through the presentation of his overt comic behaviour. Chekhov wished to create a subtextual existence for his character but, as yet, he was only able to *state* rather than *imply* that Nyukhin has two lives:

NYUKHIN. ... 'Children,' I always tell my wife's daughters, 'don't laugh at me. After all, you don't know what's going on inside me.'²²

Nyukhin tells us that: 'it's better not to get married'.²³ This insight is something that we are left to deduce for ourselves in the final 1903 version. Again, in this 1890 version, the pathetic Nyukhin tells us: 'I've meekly accepted the punishment which she has inflicted on me.'²⁴ In the final version no such explicit judgement about the character's spineless behaviour is made. It is left to the audience to pass judgement on Nyukhin's pathetic abdication of responsibility for his wasted life.

Finding ways to let an audience know what was going on inside his characters without having them tell the audience directly was a problem Chekhov found difficult to solve in his early plays. The 1903 version of *Smoking Is Bad for You* illustrates how he came to solve this problem.

In this final version Nyukhin does not suffer either from asthma or the hiccups. Instead, Chekhov gives the character a nervous twitch. While asthma, hiccupping and twitching all manifest themselves in a physically comic manner in the text, it is only twitching that implies that there is some subtextual psychological cause. This particular physical behaviour immediately suggests the existence of an inner life. We witness a human being undergoing a breakdown in front of our eyes. Nyukhin desperately and ludicrously attempts to present only the outer life where he pretends to be happy about giving a lecture on the harmfulness of tobacco. As his twitching gets worse, so the happy facade he tries to present crumbles and elements from his tragic subtextual life bubble up and break into the text for all of us to see. Here is a man who, like Andrew [Andrey] in *Three Sisters* and Vanya in *Uncle Vanya*, has wasted his life and, what is more important, knows it.

The moment of recognition arrives for Nyukhin towards the end of the play when he talks about the effect that alcohol has on him. The very mention of the subject causes all of his defences against facing the truth to fall and his subtextually implied tragic inner life can no longer be hidden. His unhappiness becomes overtly presented in the text. What Nyukhin describes as the effects of drink precisely describe the dual experience of Chekhovian tragi-comedy. As audience members we have laughed at the stereotypical hen-pecked male, but now we are forced to see the pathos of Nyukhin's situation and experience Chekhov's implied criticism of this character for wasting his potential:

One glass is enough to make me drunk, I might add. It feels good, but indescribably sad at the same time. Somehow the days of my youth come back to me, I somehow long — more than you can possibly imagine — to escape. [Carried away.] To run away, leave everything behind and run away without a backward glance. Where to? Who cares? If only I could escape from this rotten, vulgar, tawdry existence that's turned me into a pathetic old clown and imbecile! Escape from this stupid, petty, vicious, nasty, spiteful, mean old cow of a wife who's made my life a misery for thirty-three years! Escape from the music, the kitchen, my wife's money and all those vulgar trivialities ... I don't need anything. I'm above all these low, dirty things. Once I was young and clever and went to college. I had dreams and I felt like a human being. Now I want nothing — nothing but a bit of peace and quiet.²⁵

Gottlieb is surely correct in her analysis of how this sort of recognition scene is intended to function in this and the four major plays. It is not simply Nyukhin

who is intended to see that he has wasted his life. In Chekhov's plays, including the 1903 version of *Smoking Is Bad for You*:

... the characters are brought to a point of recognition; and with the characters, so an audience is brought to a similar point of recognition and realisation not to wallow in sad resignation, but — held at a distance — to observe that things need not be so: in Gorky's quotation of Chekhov's words, 'You live badly, my friends. It is shameful to live like that.'²⁶

Increasingly, Chekhov came to share Strindberg's belief that expressing a new vision of reality through the use of outdated dramatic conventions was like trying to put new wine into old bottles. Several of his early plays, including *Platonov*, *Ivanov* and *The Wood Demon*, were frustrating attempts at 'filling the old forms with the contents of a newer age'. All of these plays utilised the stock characters and situations of romantic melodrama, and the early versions of *Smoking Is Bad for You* likewise followed the tried and true conventions of vaudeville. The various versions of *Smoking Is Bad for You* clearly illustrate Chekhov's struggle to find a new form and involve him in a movement away from what Magarshack calls plays of 'direct action' to those of 'indirect action'. Increasingly, he sought to present the actuality of life.

What Gottlieb says of the revisional process employed in the multiple versions of *Smoking Is Bad for You* applies equally to the method that Chekhov adopted when he transformed his early melodramatic full-length play, *The Wood Demon*, into the tragi-comedy *Uncle Vanya*. In both cases the 'theatrical' was replaced by the 'realistic':

Out of the conventional laughing-stock of the hen-pecked husband Chekhov creates a character who is completely three-dimensional, and the balance between the pathetic and the comic is seen very clearly in the characterisation.²⁷

It is quite easy for us today to fail to see just how radical Chekhov's innovations were in terms of playwrighting technique. His highly realistic approach to writing, combined with the Stanislavski-inspired realistic approach to acting, has become the theatrical norm of twentieth-century Western theatre practice. At the time when he wrote, however, overt theatricality was the norm in both dramatic writing and acting style. One look at the plot of *Platonov* immediately shows us that realism was not the natural idiom of this fledgling playwright, who initially adopted many of the conventions of late nineteenth-century romantic melodrama.

Platonov is almost certainly the play that Chekhov's brother, Mikhail, refers to in his introduction to the second volume of *Letters of A. P. Chekhov*, when he wrote that: 'While he was a student he wrote a long play with the ardent hope of having it presented on the stage of the Maly Theatre, Moscow.'²⁸ In this elephantine play, which runs to one hundred and thirty-four pages in the

original manuscript, exciting theatricality overpowers any sense of human reality. The depiction of sensational events takes precedence over any attempt at psychological consistency in characterisation. Donald Rayfield's outline of some of the main features of the plot clearly illustrates how much the student Chekhov's dramatic technique owed to the histrionic tradition of melodrama:

In the course of the play, he [Platonov] arranges to elope with his best friend's wife, Sophia, for a 'new life', but he almost succumbs to the best friend's stepmother, the young widow Anna Petrovna Voynitseva, and he flirts with and assaults the rich and eligible Grekova. He is a catastrophic disrupter: his wife, Sasha, tries to kill herself by throwing herself on the railway line (on stage) and then by eating matches (off stage); the horse-thief, Osip, in the nature of familiar spirit to other characters, tries to murder Platonov; his friend, Sergey Voynitsev, nearly dies of despair; Sophia is so angered by Platonov's betrayal that she kills him ... *Platonov* reads like an abandoned and hastily dramatised novel. It makes incredible demands on stage effects ...²⁹

Platonov was never performed in Chekhov's lifetime. Its main interest lies in its evidence of Chekhov's experimentation with dramatic form. The subtle blending of tragedy with comedy, the hallmark of Chekhov's four mature plays, is nowhere evident in *Platonov*. The play swings wildly between a number of generic forms, and the tone is equally variable. Rayfield notes that in this play, Chekhov mixes 'the tragedy of Platonov with the melodrama of the horse-thief Osip, the comedy of the intriguing guests plotting profitable marriages, and the sheer farce of the hero's incompetent handling of four infatuated women.'³⁰

In his mature plays, instead of alternating wildly between different genres, Chekhov developed a technique for creating synthetic tragi-comedy. In these later plays, events are both tragic and comic at the same time, and the audience's response is made to oscillate between laughter and tears. In these late plays melodrama and farce are not given equal status with tragedy and comedy, as they are in *Platonov*, but are employed in a parodic manner that does not upset the overall tragi-comic tone.

The first full-length play by Chekhov to be performed was *Ivanov*. He had been asked by a Moscow theatre owner, Fyodor Korsh, to write a play for production at his theatre. Despite frequently denying that he would take on such a task, Chekhov quickly wrote *Ivanov* in October 1887. This play, which is still performed today, is a transitional piece showing features that we recognise as typical of the late realistic tragi-comedies, combined with the continuing legacy of the 'theatrics' that are so evident in *Platonov*.

At the time when Chekhov wrote *Ivanov* he had already worked out in theory what he wished to achieve with his writings. Certainly at the time when he was completing a revised version of the play to be performed in 1889, Chekhov was

able to articulate his artistic aims with great clarity. In a letter to A. N. Pleshcheyev, Chekhov outlined a dual artistic aim that remained of central importance to him throughout his career: 'My goal is to kill two birds with one stone: to paint life in its true aspects, and to show how far this life falls short of the ideal life.'³¹

Ivanov failed to achieve the lifelike realism Chekhov sought, though it was certainly much closer to life than *Platonov* had been. However, much to Chekhov's frustration, the second part of his artistic aim continued to elude him.

Several critics have suggested that prior to the late eighteen-eighties, Chekhov had simply wished to depict life as it is, with total objectivity, and that the introduction of the second subjective element that expressed his attitude towards such a life was a major change in his artistic aims. Nicholas Moravceovich writes of Chekhov's 'mellowing' in his views. He claims that he underwent an 'aesthetic transformation' that involved the rejection of his 'youthful aesthetic creed' which had been based on 'his commitment to strict objectivity, which condemned concern with a "message", and denied any usefulness of a didactic stance in the presentation of reality'.³²

Similarly, Magarshack argues that a radical change occurred in Chekhov's artistic credo and asserts that Chekhov's letter to Suvorin written on 25 November 1892, 're-defined his position as a writer by finally relinquishing his stand-point of strict objectivity and placing the 'aim' of a work of art, i.e. its moral purpose, at the head of all its other distinguishing marks.'³³

In fact, Chekhov did not abandon his views about the need for the artist to be objective in his writing, nor did he suddenly undergo some Damascan experience which caused him to see the light and be converted into a socially committed writer. John Hagan is essentially correct when he claimed of Chekhov that: 'After 1888, nothing could be clearer of course than his insistence that the artist's work exhibit a distinct "aim" or "intention" by which he meant not only an aesthetic purpose, but a philosophic and moral one.'³⁴

Where I believe critics like Hagan, Moravceovich and Magarshack are misleading is in their assertion that Chekhov's aesthetic creed had radically changed. Chekhov's greater volubility in the late eighteen-eighties concerning his artistic aims resulted less from any changes in his artistic creed than from a growing sense of frustration with the realistic form he had employed in writing his plays. Increasingly, this form was proving inadequate to communicate his vision of reality. The world view, which he had hoped was being expressed in his works, was constantly being either overlooked or misinterpreted by readers, audiences and critics.

Chekhov came to realise that his use of the conventions of realism and his objective non-judgemental character depiction were adequate means to

communicate a picture of 'life as it is' in all its triviality. However, these same means were not proving adequate to communicate the playwright's criticism of such a life. The critical attitude that he expected his readers and audiences to have in response to the waste of human potential being depicted in his plays did not occur. Both critics and audiences misinterpreted what he was trying to say. The critical reaction to *Ivanov* was to make Chekhov aware that he had not yet created the form needed to communicate his vision.

Chekhov wrote the first draft of *Ivanov* in two weeks. In October 1887, having read and discussed his play with V. N. Davydov who was to play the title role and who loved the play, Chekhov wrote to his novelist friend Yezhov:

If I am to believe such judges as Davydov, then I know how to write plays. It seems that instinctively, because of some kind of flair, and without being aware of [it] myself, I have written an entirely finished piece and not made a single stage error.³⁵

At about the same time, he wrote to his brother Alexander and recounted a similarly enthusiastic response to his play by Korsh who was to present the first production of *Ivanov* at his theatre. Significantly Chekhov's pleasure at the uncritical gushing praise he was receiving from these theatre luminaries was tempered by his own gently sceptical attitude toward his work:

It took two weeks, or rather ten days, as I had some days off or wrote other things. I can't tell how good it is ... Everybody likes it. Korsh hasn't found anything wrong or unstageworthy in it — which shows what fine, sensitive judges I have. It's my first play, so there are bound to be some mistakes.³⁶

In November of the same year we find Chekhov writing to his brother about *Ivanov* in a far less happy fashion: 'You'll never guess what happened. This play ... this wretched piece of crap — it's got completely out of hand.'³⁷

This change in Chekhov's attitude was partly due to the fact that rehearsals had gone badly, but the main reason for the playwright's anguish was the reaction of the Moscow press after the first performance at Korsh's Theatre. As far as Chekhov was concerned, they had totally misinterpreted his play. One reviewer described *Ivanov* as being 'essentially immoral and repulsive, a highly cynical libel on contemporary life and people'.³⁸

Chekhov should not have believed 'such judges as Davydov'. Both Davydov and Korsh had been brought up in a theatrical milieu that thrived on melodrama and the cheap theatricality that Chekhov was trying to break away from. Davydov was not equipped to act, nor Korsh to direct, in the style suitable for Chekhovian drama. It seems, at first sight, surprising that these two theatre people should have liked *Ivanov* at all. However, a closer examination of *Ivanov* provides us with a reason for their positive response.

Chekhov had failed to write the realistic play that he thought he had written. What Korsh and Davydov had responded to in *Ivanov* were the theatrical elements that they recognised. They felt comfortable with the play's melodramatic *coups de théâtre*. Perhaps unconsciously, Chekhov had largely conformed to the rules of the Scribean well-made play. It was the inherent 'Sardoodledom' which Korsh and Davydov had joyfully recognised. The ending of Act II in which Ivanov is caught by his wife Sarah in the act of kissing Sasha could hardly be more clichéd:

SASHA. ... I love you Nicholas. I'll follow you to the ends of the earth, I'll go wherever you like, I'll die if need be, only for God's sake let it be soon, or I shall choke.

IVANOV. [*With a peal of happy laughter.*] What does all this mean? Can I start a new life then Sasha? My happiness! [*Draws her to him.*] My youth, my innocence! [*ANNA comes in from the garden, sees her husband and SASHA, and stands rooted to the spot.*]

IVANOV. So I'm to live, then, am I? And start work again? [*They kiss. After the kiss IVANOV and SASHA look round and see ANNA.*]

IVANOV. [*In horror.*] Sarah!

CURTAIN.³⁹

There is no detectable irony or humour in this scene. In *Uncle Vanya* the equivalent situation where Vanya comes across Helen being kissed by Astrov is treated as being ludicrous rather than straining for dramatic effect as in *Ivanov*. In the early play the cliché is simply a cliché while in *Uncle Vanya* it is given new life by being comically subverted.

The old-fashioned and derivative form of *Ivanov* is apparent in the original ending that Chekhov wrote for the play. Just as the grotesque melodramatic events and heightened rhetorical language found in *Platonov* contradict Chekhov's stated aims of putting life as it is on the stage, so the original finale of *Ivanov* shows Chekhov's failure to jettison the clichéd techniques that were inappropriate to the achievement of his aim. The hustle and bustle of the external action copiously specified in the stage instructions may well have been happily accepted by Korsh and Davydov, who would almost certainly have had little difficulty in playing this nonsense.

Ivanov ends with Dr Lvov entering and 'unmasking' Ivanov on the day that the latter has just married Sasha. In the middle of the celebration Lvov bursts in and proclaims loudly 'Nicholas Ivanov, I want everyone to hear. You are the most unmitigated swine!' The stage instruction, reminiscent of the *consternation générale* so admired by French melodramatists, is predictably '[*Hubbub in the Ballroom*]'. The final scene of the play then follows:

SCENE IX

[LVOV, IVANOV, SHABELSKY, LEBEDEV, BORKIN and KOSYKH, followed by SASHA. IVANOV runs in from the ballroom, clutching his head. He is followed by the others.]

IVANOV. What's that for? Tell me why? [*Collapses on the sofa.*]

ALL. Why? What for?

LEBEDEV. [*To LVOV.*] For Christ's sake, why did you insult him? [*Clutches his head and walks about in agitation.*]

SHABELSKY. [*To IVANOV.*] Nicholas, Nicholas! For God's sake — pay no attention. Show yourself above it all.

BORKIN. That was a rotten thing to say, sir. I challenge you to a duel.

LVOV. Mr Borkin, I consider it degrading even to exchange words with you, let alone fight a duel. As for Mr Ivanov, he can receive satisfaction any moment if he wishes.

SASHA. [*Comes in from the ballroom, staggering.*] Why? Why did you insult my husband? ... [*To her husband.*] Let's get out of here, Nicholas. [*Takes his arm.*]

LEBEDEV. [*To LVOV.*] As head of the household, as father of my son-in-law — that is of my daughter, sir —

[*SASHA shrieks and falls on her husband. Everyone runs up to IVANOV.*]

LEBEDEV. God, he's dead! Get some water! Fetch a doctor.

[*SHABELSKY weeps.*]

ALL. Fetch water, a doctor, he's dead.

CURTAIN.⁴⁰

The first two acts of *Ivanov* are equally 'theatrical' in the Scribean sense. It is true that in this play people do 'come and go, eat, ... and play cards'. There is a great deal of 'eating, drinking, flirting, and saying foolish things', but instead of all this replacing the intrigue-based plots of the well-made play, the trivial day-to-day incidents are additional to the plethora of 'theatrical' events that occur in the play.

Eventually Chekhov did revise *Ivanov* and removed the unacceptable ending where Ivanov literally dies of shame. He replaced this unconvincing ending by having the 'hero' shoot himself. The problem with such a change was that, while it was less ludicrous than the original ending, it conformed even more obviously to the type of 'direct action' drama that Chekhov wished to avoid. The more 'theatrically' acceptable his changes were, the less they fitted his aim to put life on the stage.

It is not only the mechanical plot structure and the theatrical incidents that make *Ivanov* unlikelike. The characterisation itself is often lifeless and two-dimensional. The most theatrically alive characters are creations like Kosykh who is forever talking about his disastrous hands of bridge. This card-playing

fanatic is drawn not from life but from the tried and true tradition of the comic vaudeville plays of which Chekhov was a master. While Chekhov was to make use of such comic types in his later plays, he was to transform them into three-dimensional characters with an inner life. The one-dimensionality of the Nyukhin character in the original version of *Smoking Is Bad for You* is also characteristic of Kosykh, who has no dialogue or existence that does not relate to his comic obsession with bridge:

KOSYKH. [*Tearfully.*] Look here everyone. I held a run — the ace, king, queen and seven small diamonds, the ace of spades and one small heart, see? And she couldn't declare a little slam, damn it! I bid no trumps.⁴¹

A similar lack of realistic three-dimensionality is to be found in even the main characters in *Ivanov*. Dr Lvov's constant harping on the subject of honesty and Ivanov's whining guilt both have a fixed and wooden quality that remind one of the characters that Strindberg attacked in his Foreword to *Miss Julie*:

A character came to signify a man fixed and finished: one who invariably appeared either drunk or jocular or melancholy, and characterisation required nothing more than a physical defect such as a club foot, a wooden leg, a red nose; or the fellow might be made to repeat some such phrase as 'that's capital!' or 'Barkis is willing'.⁴²

Chekhov, who inveighed against this type of clichéd characterisation whenever he was advising friends or relatives on how to write, was unable to avoid using these clichés himself.

We are fortunate that the normally reticent Chekhov has left behind a considerable amount of detailed information in his letters concerning the problems with *Ivanov*. The first time he became aware that all was not well was during early rehearsals for the play's first production. In a letter to his brother Alexander in which he stated that he 'wanted to be original' by avoiding the depiction of clichéd stereotypes, Chekhov expressed his concerns about whether he had achieved this aim:

I don't know if I've succeeded. Korsh and the actors are certain it will come off, but I'm not sure. The actors don't understand, they bungle things, they take wrong parts — while I struggle on thinking the play's doomed if they don't keep my casting. If they don't do it my way I'll have to withdraw it, or we'll have a fiasco on our hands.⁴³

Almost immediately Chekhov was aware that his play was likely to be misinterpreted. Korsh's and Davydov's initial enthusiasm for the play seems to have misled the young playwright. He assumed that their enthusiasm was based on an understanding of how his play worked. What these two practitioners understood and responded to was the play's old-fashioned theatricality. Chekhov

knew that there were stale elements in his play, but he was not concerned about this. What pleased him most was the characterisation of Ivanov which he felt was innovative in an important way:

The plot's involved and rather clever. I finish each act like my short stories, conducting it quietly and peacefully, but with a pinch on the nose for the audience at the end. I've put my entire energy into a few really powerful, vivid scenes, but the linking passages are weak, feeble and hackneyed. Still I'm pleased. Bad as the play may be, I've created an important literary type and a part that only an actor as good as Davydov would take, a part for the actor to expand in and show his paces ...⁴⁴

The whole experience of rehearsals was traumatic for Chekhov. He thought the production was severely under-rehearsed and complained to his brother Alexander that:

Korsh promised ten rehearsals, but had only four, and only two of those can really be called rehearsals because the other two were just occasions for the distinguished cast to indulge in slanging matches with each other. Only Davydov [Ivanov] and Glama [Anna] knew their parts. The others got by with the aid of the prompter and their own inspiration.⁴⁵

To another friend he expressed his disillusionment with the production process:

Unexpectedly my damn play has taken so much out of me that I've lost track of time. I've gone off the rails and I'm heading for a nervous breakdown. It was easy enough to write, but staging it means a lot of nervous strain ...⁴⁶

The anguish of the self-styled "aspiring" playwright who suddenly finds himself a square peg in a round hole,⁴⁷ was expressed in the letter to Nikolai Leykin in which he listed eight complaints. These eight Chekhov felt highlighted only the most glaring concerns. He asserted that: 'There's material enough for another twenty items.'⁴⁸

Korsh is described in complaint number three as 'a business man who just wants a full house and doesn't care about the success of actors and play'.⁴⁹ Chekhov found the actors, as a group, to be 'spoilt, selfish, semi-educated and opinionated. They loathe each other and some of them would sell their souls to the devil to stop a colleague getting a good part'.⁵⁰ The despairing playwright felt that: 'the one consolation is that Davydov and Kiselevsky will be brilliant'.⁵¹ Even that hope was dashed. After the first performance, Chekhov wrote to his brother Alexander:

... I fail to recognise my own play right from the start. Kiselevsky [Shabelsky], of whom I was hoping a lot, did not get one sentence right — literally *not one*, he was ad-libbing ... [In Act IV] Kiselevsky came on. It's a poetic, soul-stirring passage, but friend Kiselevsky doesn't know his lines and is drunk as a lord.

So a short, poetic dialogue turns into something sluggish and off-putting. The audience is baffled. At the end of the play the hero dies as the result of an insult too great for him to bear. The audience, bored and tired by this time, doesn't understand why he dies.⁵²

At the time of the first performance of *Ivanov*, Chekhov was so close to his own play that he could not see that its failure was due not only to the poor acting, but also to his own inexperience as a playwright. He was later to acknowledge his own share in the play's failure to communicate his vision. At the time, however, the painful experience of this initial production led Chekhov to articulate what amounts to a Bill of Rights for playwrights. He was never to relinquish his belief that ultimately the role of theatre artists was to serve the playwright by working within the parameters and tolerances determined by the 'commanding form' of the play. Only nine months before he died, he wrote to Nemirovich-Danchenko, the co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, that 'the important thing is to have a play in which one can feel the author's shaping idea'.⁵³

Feeling that Korsh and the actors were missing his 'shaping idea', Chekhov had attempted to give them advice at rehearsals. Soon after being advised by Nikolai Leykin that such involvement by the playwright was inappropriate, Chekhov replied with his playwright's Bill of Rights:

Your lines about production of plays puzzle me. You write that the author only gets in the production's way, makes the actors uncomfortable, and more often than not contributes only the most inane comments. Let me answer you thusly: (1) the play is the author's property, not the actors'; (2) where the author is present, casting the play is his responsibility; (3) *all* my comments to date have improved the production, and they have all been put into practice, as I indicated; (4) the actors themselves ask for my comments; ... If you reduce author participation to a naught, what the hell will you come up with? Remember how Gogol raged when they put on his play! [First production of *The Inspector General*] And wasn't he right?⁵⁴

In the following month Chekhov wrote to Davydov and recounted the critical responses that the play had elicited. Amongst these was the view that 'the ending isn't untrue to life, but is untrue to the stage. It can only satisfy the audience if played superlatively well.'⁵⁵ It is difficult to imagine how the playwright could have justified having Ivanov literally die from shame as being true to life.⁵⁶

That Chekhov had not yet learned how to employ representational realism to express his ideas is further shown by his response to one of Suvorin's criticisms of the play. Suvorin had rightly seen that an audience would have difficulty in correctly interpreting the central character. Suvorin's suggested solution to this problem was to advocate that Chekhov adopt dramatic conventions that were

alien to dramatic realism. In a letter to Davydov, Chekhov recounted Suvorin's advice:

Ivanov is *sufficiently characterised* — no need to add or subtract anything. But Suvorin has his own ideas on this: 'I can make sense of Ivanov because I think I *am* an Ivanov. But the general public, which every author must keep in mind, won't understand. Why not give him a soliloquy?'⁵⁷

Given Chekhov's theoretical commitment to realism, we might have expected him to reject Suvorin's suggestion. But when he came to make his first revision of the play later in 1888 in preparation for its St Petersburg revival he wrote to Suvorin saying that he had followed his advice:

I've radically changed Acts Two and Four of *Ivanov*. I've given Ivanov a soliloquy, touched up Sasha and so on. If people don't understand *Ivanov* even now, I'll chuck it on the fire and write a story called *I've had enough*.⁵⁸

Chekhov had not objected to incorporating a soliloquy for *Ivanov* because he had not yet fully realised the conventional implication of adopting thorough-going realism. The result is that the plays that precede *The Seagull* are part of a mongrel genre with features of realism uneasily mixed up with the conventions of earlier dramatic forms. The addition of a soliloquy for Ivanov did not violate the conventions of Chekhov's play, because the play, especially in its first draft, already had several soliloquies.

Direct address to an audience, while it may well have been one of the central features of the performance of earlier drama, sounds awkward in a play that claims to be realistic. Modern directors, who know the techniques Chekhov used to overcome this awkwardness in his later plays, have used his later techniques retroactively to overcome the difficulty inherent in the use of soliloquies in a play such as *Ivanov* which aspires to be realistic.

David Jones, in his 1976 production of *Ivanov*, did not follow Chekhov's stage direction that Dr Lvov enter and be '*alone*'. Rather than have Lvov embark on a soliloquy in which he debates whether or not to challenge Ivanov to a duel and follow this with Kosykh entering and talking as usual about cards, as Chekhov specified, Jones had Kosykh on stage with Lvov from the beginning. The result was that the awkwardness of the non-realistic convention of soliloquy was replaced by the realistically justified use of '*disguised soliloquy*'. Instead of Lvov talking to himself or to the audience, Jones, without changing a line of dialogue, lets Lvov outline his plan to Kosykh. This character is, as usual, obsessed with his constant misfortune at cards and, ignoring Lvov, launches into yet another diatribe against his bridge partner's lack of card sense. Realism is thus maintained by '*disguising*' Lvov's soliloquy. As Jones says: 'Lvov *thinks* he's talking to him — but he is not.'⁵⁹

One has only to think of the opening of Act I of *The Cherry Orchard*, where Lopakhin ‘soliloquises’ in the presence of Dunyasha, who is not listening to him, or the opening of Act II of the same play, where Charlotte is on a crowded stage and ‘soliloquises’ to a void, in order to realise that Jones got this idea of how to play Lvov’s soliloquy from his knowledge of Chekhov’s mature dramatic technique. This retroactive application of the Chekhovian technique of disguised soliloquy is completely in tune with Chekhov’s stated aim of showing ‘life as it is’. In effect, Jones has let the mature Chekhov assist the fledgling playwright.

David Jones later had doubts about trying to ‘disguise’ the play’s soliloquies. He admitted that, under his direction, John Wood was not fully successful in realising Ivanov’s monologue in Act III:

In hindsight, I feel our problem was a technical one. There are moments in the play, and this is one, when a character almost steps out of the scene and addresses the audience. I think that if I was directing the play now, I would encourage John to try to share the speech with the audience, in the Shakespearean manner. The effect, I feel, would be both funnier, and more touching. As it was John was torn between thinking the speech through to himself, and playing it out to the audience.⁶⁰

Jones’ earlier solution to the problem of presenting Lvov’s soliloquies was closer to Chekhov’s stated intention of making his dramas as lifelike and non-theatrical as possible. The director’s later idea of having John Wood break the fourth-wall convention by having him direct his soliloquies to an audience fails to accord with the conventions of representational realism. *Ivanov* poses difficulties for directors because Chekhov had not yet solved what Una Ellis-Fermor calls ‘the problem of conveying to the audience thought which cannot naturally form part of the dialogue’.⁶¹

Chekhov considered that both Ivanov’s character and the central action of the whole play had been misunderstood. As far as he was concerned, his ‘intended’ play had not communicated itself to either audiences or critics. In a letter to Michael Chekhov, soon after the first production of *Ivanov*, Chekhov commented:

Suvorin’s excited about the play. The funny thing is that after Korsh’s production no one in the audience understood *Ivanov* — they blamed me and pitied me.⁶²

Chekhov was able to explain clearly what he intended *Ivanov* to be about. He was equally perceptive about why his artistic intention had not been realised:

I cherished the audacious dream of summing up everything written thus far about wincing despondent people and of having my *Ivanov* put a stop to this

sort of writing ... My basic conception of the work came close to the mark, but the realisation isn't worth a damn. I should have waited!⁶³

Despite admitting that he had not found the form to realise his vision, Chekhov expressed his satisfaction with what he was trying to depict. It is no wonder that he should have been so upset by the critical misinterpretation of his play. He had intended *Ivanov* to be a play about wasted potential. In particular, Chekhov wished to suggest an implied criticism of his central character. *Ivanov* was meant to be seen as an example of a literary type well-known in Russia in the late nineteenth-century called the 'superfluous man'. Chekhov had already attacked this type in his feuilleton entitled *A Moscow Hamlet*. The 'superfluous man' was a Russian mixture of the Byronic hero and Hamlet. He was a type who was desirable to women and talented, but who could find no satisfactory goal in life and tended to become over-talkative, indecisive and introspective. Karlinsky points out that: 'Chekhov had hoped finally to put to rest that tired old commonplace of the Russian critical tradition (still with us today, alas): the superfluous man, that sensitive and bright nobleman, unable to find the proper use for his talents.'⁶⁴

Simmons supplies a useful historical contextualisation of this type. He writes that:

Ivanov was intended to symbolise those people among the educated class who, disillusioned by the repressive political and social conditions that followed the assassination of Alexander II, had fallen into dejection and despair. Chekhov wished to debunk this type, to unmask the futility of the intellectual who dreams pleasantly about his past accomplishments but quails before the abuses of the present, then experiences a vague sense of guilt over them, and ends with unstrung nerves among the 'shattered' and 'misunderstood' people of society.⁶⁵

Chekhov had intended to expose the pretentious nature of this stereotypical character type. In particular, he wished to ridicule their failure to accept responsibility for their own lack of purposeful action. As Karlinsky correctly claims:

With his habit of breaking through stereotypes, Chekhov wanted to show that for men of this ilk disappointment and frustration spring not so much from immutable social reality as from their own inability to translate their idealism into a meaningful program of action because their interest in any project or undertaking fades so quickly.⁶⁶

This may indeed have been what Chekhov 'wanted to show', but the response of the critics and the public clearly suggests that his intentions were not realised in practice. What his readers and audience read was something entirely different. Karlinsky accurately describes how Chekhov *intended* *Ivanov's* personality and the situation to be assessed. Karlinsky writes:

With all his faults and shortcomings, the weak and ineffectual Ivanov (his ordinary name was meant to be symbolic) was contrasted in the play on the one hand with a group of provincial bores and gossips, everyone of them far less attractive than he, and on the other hand with the humourless radical fanatic Dr Lvov, who passes judgement on him for all the wrong reasons and reduces Ivanov's complex predicament to simple-minded sociological clichés.⁶⁷

Far from seeing *Ivanov* as a play debunking the 'superfluous man', the responses of critics oscillated between describing the central characters as yet another appealing example of this sensitive and sympathetic type and seeing him as the melodramatic villain of the piece. Chekhov was equally unhappy about the way that Dr Lvov had been interpreted. Having completed a rewrite of the play, which he now jokingly referred to as *Bolvanov*, in preparation for its St Petersburg production, Chekhov wrote to Suvorin about his attempts to make Ivanov and the play clearer. In this long letter, Chekhov outlined the ways in which he felt the critics and the public had misinterpreted his play. He provided Suvorin with an extraordinarily detailed and precise analysis of his main characters. He explained clearly what he had intended to write. This letter provides documentary evidence of Chekhov's aims, and when these are compared with the play itself we can see how and why his aims and intentions were not met by his achievements. Chekhov explained to Suvorin that, as a result of the revisions he had made:

Master Ivanov's now much easier to understand. The ending doesn't satisfy me at all — it's too feeble, apart from the revolver shot — but I take comfort in thinking that it's not in its final form yet ...⁶⁸

Chekhov's hope that he had at last clarified Ivanov's character was dashed when the play went into rehearsal. No one seemed to understand his play, least of all Suvorin. The frustrated playwright set out to explain his play:

The director sees Ivanov as a superfluous man in the Turgenev manner. Savina [Sasha] asks why Ivanov is such a blackguard. You write that 'Ivanov must be given something that makes it clear why two women throw themselves at him and why he is a blackguard while the doctor is a great man.' If all three of you have understood me this way, it means my *Ivanov* is a failure. I must have lost my mind and written something entirely different from what I had intended. If my Ivanov comes across as a blackguard or superfluous man and the doctor as a great man, if no one knows why Sarah and Sasha love Ivanov, then my play has evidently failed to pan out, and there can be no question of having it produced.⁶⁹

Chekhov had hoped to avoid the black-and-white characterisation found in melodramas. He had hoped to depict complex human beings. His Ivanov he saw as someone who exhibited both the attractive features of the 'superfluous man'

and the weaknesses inherent in such a type. Simon Karlinsky blames Suvorin and the production team for their melodramatic reading of the characters of *Ivanov*.⁷⁰ It might be fairer to say that audiences at the St Petersburg production had responded to the well-made play elements that were plainly evident in the play.

After giving a detailed analysis of his *intended* characterisation, Chekhov reiterated the possibility that the misinterpretation of *Ivanov* was his own fault:

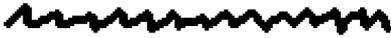
If nothing I've described above is in the play, there can be no question of having it produced. It must mean I didn't write what I intended. Have the play withdrawn. I don't mean to preach heresy from the stage. If the audience leaves the theatre thinking all Ivanovs are blackguards and Doctor Lvovs are great men, I might as well go into retirement and give up my pen.⁷¹

In a postscript to that same letter Chekhov again expresses his sense of puzzlement that something that was so clear to himself should have been so difficult for audiences and readers to interpret correctly:

I'd hoped that the reader and the spectator would be attentive and not need a sign saying, 'This is a plum, not a pumpkin.' I have tried to express myself simply ... I failed in my attempt to write a play. It's a pity, of course. Ivanov and Lvov seemed so alive in my imagination. I'm telling you the whole truth when I say that they weren't born in my head out of sea foam or pre-conceived notions or intellectual pretensions or by accident. They are the result of observing and studying life. They are still there in my mind, and I feel I haven't lied a bit or exaggerated an iota. And if they came out lifeless and blurred on paper, the fault lies not in them, but in my inability to convey my thoughts. Apparently it's too early for me to undertake playwriting.⁷²

Chekhov was his own toughest and, in this case, best critic. He gave plenty of evidence that his characters were indeed drawn from life. The medical scientist in Chekhov resulted in the playwright delineating with naturalistic objectivity the way in which a neurasthenic personality such as Ivanov actually behaves in real life. He supplied Suvorin with pages of information, both psychological and sociological, about the type of person Ivanov was. Chekhov, who once admitted to being deeply interested in psychiatry, backed up his analysis with evidence drawn from current medical research. Ivanov is practically psychoanalysed in Chekhov's letter to Suvorin. So Ivanov's bouts of world-weariness are explained as follows:

This susceptibility to weariness (as Dr Bertenson will confirm) finds expression in more than merely whining or feeling bored. The life of the weary man cannot be represented like this:



It is not particularly even. The weary do not lose their ability to work up a high pitch of excitement but their excitement lasts for a very short time and is followed by an even greater sense of apathy. Graphically we can represent this as follows:



As you can see, the descent forms something rather different from a gradual inclined plane. Sasha declares her love. Ivanov shouts in ecstasy: 'A new life!' But the next morning he has as much faith in that life as he does in ghosts (see his third act soliloquy).⁷³

It was Davydov's inability to oscillate between the moods of ecstasy and depression that led Chekhov to adjust his high opinion of the talents of this actor. He wrote to Suvorin:

If a skilful, energetic actor were to play Ivanov I would have a free hand. But, alas! Davydov plays the part. This means that one must write concisely, in a grayer tone, keeping in mind that all delicate shadings and 'nuances' will be mingled in one grey monotone, and that they will be dull. Can Davydov be tender and also wrathful? When he plays serious parts it is as if a mill were in his throat, a feebly-turning monotonous mill that acts instead of him.⁷⁴

Chekhov was well aware that correct casting was important in order to achieve a proper stage realisation of his vision. He even did some rewriting of the role of Sasha because he admired the abilities of Savina the actress playing the role:

Savina has agreed to play Sasha, but Sasha's part's very weak and pretty poor theatre. When I wrote it eighteen months ago I didn't attach special importance to it. But now the honour done to the play by Savina has decided me to alter her part radically. I've already done it in places, in so far as the play's general structure permitted.⁷⁵

Chekhov eventually came to have a mixed opinion about the worth of *Ivanov*. Though he claimed that his 'characters live and aren't artificial',⁷⁶ he also came to believe that: 'The play's faults are beyond repair.'⁷⁷ In a letter to Suvorin, he had to agree with his friend's criticism of the play: 'You're quite right —

Ivanov probably is clearer in my letter than on the stage.⁷⁸ Chekhov knew that something was not right with the characterisation of his protagonist.

If we examine *Ivanov* without knowing from other sources what Chekhov intended, it becomes difficult to see in what ways Chekhov's character is actually different from the literary stereotype of the 'superfluous man' that he claimed to be attacking. As Hingley wryly comments: 'One could wish that Chekhov had expounded the differences between Ivanov and the superfluous man at greater length.'⁷⁹

Chekhov's claim that Ivanov's acknowledgement of his own responsibility for his behaviour shows that there is a central difference between his character and the literary type, hardly seems to be justified. Most of the objective evidence for such a reading is to be found, not in the play, but in the letter to Suvorin in which he explained what he *intended* his character to be like. So Chekhov's letter clearly states:

... when narrow-minded, dishonest people get into a situation like this, they usually place all the blame on their environment or join the ranks of the Hamlets and superfluous men, and let it go at that. The straightforward Ivanov, however, openly admits to the doctor and the audience that he doesn't understand himself.⁸⁰

In *The Duel* (1891), Chekhov has the zoologist, Von Koren, characterise Layevsky as a superfluous man who, characteristically, blames everyone but himself for his lack of drive:

Why didn't he do anything? Or read anything? Why was he so uncultured, such an ignoramus? At every question I asked he would give a bitter smile and sigh. 'I'm a failure,' he'd say. 'I'm a Superfluous Man' ... Why is he so utterly degenerate, so repulsive? The reason isn't in himself, see — it's somewhere outside him in space. And then — and this is the cunning of it — he's not the only one who's debauched, bogus and odious. There is always *We*. 'We men of the eighties.' 'We, the debilitated, neurotic offspring of the serf system'. 'Civilisation has crippled us.'⁸¹

Having been enlightened by Von Koren's verbal attack on him, Layevsky undergoes a regeneration process. Ivanov's 'enlightenment' brings about no such transformation but instead leads to his suicide.

It is clear that Chekhov intended Ivanov to be, unlike the 'superfluous man', a person of real integrity. The problem that faces an audience, however, is that this supposed integrity is not made manifest in Ivanov's behaviour. While he takes Chekhov's word that Ivanov has integrity, the Soviet critic G. Berdnikov realises that there is still a major problem of dramatic communication that Chekhov has not solved in this play. Any audience member necessarily interprets

Ivanov on the basis of the character's behaviour and not on some putative subjective integrity whose existence cannot be verified:

Chekhov decided to make Ivanov precisely this subjectively honest person who tragically survives his downfall. The complexity of the task rested in the fact that this subjective honesty, while it remained unquestionably a real attribute of the hero, could not and did not change his highly unattractive life.⁸²

The problem with trying to create a 'subjectively honest person' is that, in order for spectators to see the character in this light, they must have objective evidence of the existence of this subjective honesty. Chekhov had to convince his audience that Ivanov did indeed have an authentic inner life, and the only way the playwright could do this, while continuing to maintain his ideal of objectivity, was to 'show' rather than 'tell' his audience about this so-called authentic self.

The materialist Chekhov, who refused 'to separate soul from body', and who claimed that 'outside of matter there is no experience of knowledge and consequently of truth',⁸³ was committed to an essentially behaviouristic representation of inner states. His advice to his brother Alexander written in 1886 is typical of the conventional limits Chekhov set himself in his writing of either stories or plays:

In the area of mental states there are also particulars. May God save you from generalities. It is best to avoid descriptions of the mental states of your heroes; the effort should be made to make these clear from their actions.⁸⁴

In Y. Sobolev's reminiscences entitled 'Tchekhov's Creative Method', he lays great stress on the importance of Chekhov's behaviourist approach to characterisation:

And this has to be pointed out with particular emphasis, for such also is Tchekhov's creative method: *from the outward to the inward* ... From details, particulars, objects of the external world — to generalizations, to the most important and typical — to the inward, the spiritual.⁸⁵

Chekhov knew, like Freud, that much of what is important in people's lives is hidden from others. It was not just the unconscious that was important to Chekhov. He realised that the inner lives of his characters were rich with conscious, but unspoken, thoughts and beliefs. The problem he faced as a dramatist was that, unless he could discover a way to communicate these inner happenings, audience members would not be aware that this inner life existed at all. Chekhov's recourse to soliloquies in *Ivanov* attests to the difficulties he was having in communicating his central character's subjective honesty through purely objective behavioural means. All the audience could see objectively was Ivanov's 'highly unattractive life'. Much as one may dislike the moralistic Dr

Lvov as a personality, it is difficult not to feel that much of his criticism of Ivanov is justified, since the 'hero's' behaviour toward his wife, for example, *appears* indefensible. The soliloquies introduced to clarify Ivanov's character by revealing his innermost thoughts in the text did not adequately serve Chekhov's purpose. In the first place, they broke realism's fourth-wall convention. The conventional strength of soliloquies had been weakened by the rise of dramatic realism and, just as significantly, by the application of the new science of psychology to the art of characterisation. As Esslin has pointed out, there had been a 'basic assumption that underlay all language used in drama' prior to that of the late nineteenth century. That previously unquestioned assumption was 'that what a character said was not only what he or she meant to say, but that he or she was expressing it as clearly and eloquently as possible'.⁸⁶

Once the conventions of realism are applied, such an assumption is immediately questioned. We don't automatically accept that what Ivanov has to say about himself is the truth. We are forced to evaluate him simply in terms of his behaviour and that behaviour contradicts his claims about his 'integrity'. Interestingly, Tolstoy made a similar, though less justified, criticism of *Uncle Vanya*. He commented that Chekhov, when depicting both Vanya and Astrov:

... makes them say that once upon a time they were the best people in the district, but he does not show us in what way they were good. I cannot help feeling that they have always been worthless creatures and that their suffering cannot therefore be worthy of our attention.⁸⁷

In *Ivanov* we find an isolated reference to the hero's integrity in Act I when his wife Anna is talking to Lvov:

ANNA. ... He's a wonderful man, Doctor, and I'm only sorry you didn't know him a year ago ...⁸⁸

In terms of realistic drama, an audience may well not accept Anna's assessment unequivocally because, in the context in which she makes this statement, she may be simply defending her husband out of love for him rather than out of objective honesty. The only other assertions about Ivanov's integrity are made by Sasha, who also loves him. Her comments can be interpreted as stemming from her 'love' for him rather than any adherence to the truth. Chekhov did not believe that Sasha was truly in love with Ivanov. Rather she is shown to be in love with the idea of rescuing him. Even if one accepts this reading of Sasha, her comments about Ivanov cannot be regarded as being 'objective'.

On the evidence of statements made by two emotionally involved people and a number of self-justifying soliloquies, critics such as Berdnikov accept the truth of Chekhov's statement that this character is a subjectively honest person. However, as any reading or performance of the play illustrates, practically everything that Ivanov does in the play contradicts the high claims made for

him. Indeed, Chekhov depicts Ivanov as being unsure about whether or not he has any integrity. At one stage, he says that he is uncertain about whether or not he married Anna for her money.

At the time of writing *Ivanov*, Chekhov had understood in theory the idea of a subtext, but he had not yet discovered the theatrical means to put that theory into effective practice. That the play enjoyed some success was mainly due to its conventionality. It is a theatrically viable treatment of a love triangle and the external events of the play are at times exciting. What Chekhov had not yet developed was a technique whereby the implied subtext could be communicated to an audience. By discovering the ways in which actors could communicate this subtext, Chekhov was to solve the central problem of literal realism and representational form. With the actors using the realistic acting system devised by Stanislavski in the performance of his plays, the problem of expressing 'thought which cannot naturally be expressed through dialogue' was solved. By creating plays with an implied subtext, Chekhov was to rescue his drama from the fate of merely depicting the surface triviality of life.

Throughout his literary career, Chekhov continued to accept the conventions of realism. These conventions allowed him to depict life objectively. The texts of even his last four masterpieces still present the surface triviality of life in a realistic fashion. The subjective or psychic reality of his characters was suggested implicitly through the subtext. Chekhov's objective depiction of life is not compromised by his subjective aim or purpose in writing. John Hagan accurately describes how Chekhov was able to combine objectivity and subjectivity in his mature work. Hagan argues that the playwright:

... presents his characters and their behaviour so as to convey their meanings by implication alone ... Chekhov's espousal of this technique in no way implies that he was indifferent to all values but aesthetic ones. There has been a great deal of confusion on this point. It means only that he preferred to communicate his judgements and attitudes implicitly rather than explicitly, with the ultimate purpose of producing only an illusion of unmediated reality. The crucial principle is that of inference: the writer, instead of spelling out and formulating on an intellectual level the interpretations and evaluations which he wants the reader to make, presents him with suggestive particulars and external signs from which he can draw conclusions of his own.⁸⁹

Progressively, from *The Seagull* through to *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov made his texts more and more lifelike, as he abandoned many of the mechanical theatrical devices of the well-made play that he had used in earlier plays like *Ivanov*. After *Ivanov*, Chekhov's practice was to begin to match his theory of drama in which life should be presented on stage 'exactly as it is, and people should be exactly as simple as they are in life'.⁹⁰

By the time he wrote *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov had managed to remove so much of what was previously regarded as theatrically necessary from his play that, as far as the objectively presented text is concerned, almost nothing happens. Skaftymov aptly describes this development towards what Magarshack calls the plays of indirect action:

One of the salient features of pre-Chekhovian drama is that everyday life is absorbed into, and overshadowed by, events. The humdrum — that which is most permanent, normal, customary, and habitual — is almost absent from these plays. Moments of the even flow of life appear at the beginning of the play, as an exposition and a starting point, but subsequently the entire play, the entire fabric of dialogue is taken up with events; the daily flow of life recedes into the background and is merely mentioned and implied in places ... In Chekhov it is entirely different.⁹¹

Chekhov seems to have agreed with the narrator of his short story *Gooseberries* (1898) who asserts that: 'Life's real tragedies are enacted off-stage.'⁹² In all of Chekhov's major plays there are several potentially theatrical dramas which never reach the stage. In *The Cherry Orchard*, for example, Mrs Ranevsky's love affair, the drowning of her son and her attempted suicide would all provide incidents suitable for a Scribean melodrama. In *Three Sisters* we learn about, but never see, Vershinin's mad suicidal wife. This sort of detail, the centre of a 'Gothic' novel such as *Jane Eyre*, is kept totally in the background in the play. Likewise, in *Three Sisters*, the duel in which Tuzenbach is killed occurs off-stage. The triviality of the events that occur on-stage gain in significance when read by an audience that is made aware of the dramatic events occurring off-stage. As Skaftymov notes:

Chekhov moves events to the periphery as if they were details; and all that is ordinary, constant, recurring, and habitual constitutes the main mass, the basic ground of the play.⁹³

Chekhov did not do this simply because he wished to present life 'realistically'. If this had been all he wished to achieve, he would simply have been a kind of photographic realist. Chekhov knew perfectly well the difference between life and art. His objections to Stanislavski's attempts to justify the use of several sound effects not specified in his script of *The Seagull* is clear evidence that he wished to use realism with an artistic purpose. Meyerhold recounts the incident as follows:

Chekhov had come for the second time to visit a rehearsal of *The Seagull* (September 11, 1898) in the Moscow Art Theater. One of the actors told him that during the play, frogs croaked backstage, dragonflies hummed, and dogs howled.

'What for?' asked Anton Pavlovich, sounding dissatisfied.

'It's realistic,' said the actor.

'Realistic,' Anton Pavlovich repeated with a laugh. And then after a brief pause, he remarked: '...The stage demands certain conventions ... You have no fourth wall. Besides the stage is art; theatre expresses the quintessence of life. There is no need to introduce anything superfluous onto the stage.'⁹⁴

The achievement of verisimilitude on-stage was not an end in itself for Chekhov. However, living when he did, he felt bound to use the artistic conventions of realism to express his vision of reality. This is hardly surprising since, as Bernard Beckerman notes: '[ever] since "reality" became synonymous with "realism" in the course of the nineteenth century, we find it exceptionally difficult to disassociate the idea of "reality" from that of verisimilitude'.⁹⁵ As Skaftymov rightly claims, 'for Chekhov in his excursions into drama, some sort of reproduction of everyday life was an indispensable condition'.⁹⁶

Chekhov however saw that the conventions of realism were artistic customs that were not to be confused with life itself. He knew perfectly well that the conventions of realism were just as 'artificial' as the non-realistic conventions employed by symbolists like Maeterlinck. Chekhov would no doubt have agreed with Raymond Williams, who wrote about the importance of distinguishing between art and life when evaluating a work of art:

The action of a play ... is often only incidentally important in itself. Its interestingness, its truth, cannot be judged as if it were an action in real life. Similarly, with characters, the important dramatist is concerned, not necessarily to simulate 'real, live people', but rather to embody in his personages certain aspects of experience. That this will frequently result in the creation of characters which we feel we can accept as 'from life itself' is certain, but the result will not always be so, and we must be careful that our judgement depends not on whether the characters are lifelike, but on whether they serve to embody experience which the author has shown to be true.⁹⁷

When we look at his plays as a whole we can see a clear movement from the depiction of external action to that of internal action juxtaposed with external inaction. What Magarshack called the movement from plays of 'direct action' to plays of 'indirect action' may best be illustrated by a look at the decreasing use Chekhov made of violence in his plays. Ronald Hingley provides the following illuminating chart:⁹⁸

Date	Title of Play	Items
?1880-1	<i>Platonov</i>	Two attempted suicides — one on, one off stage; an attempted knifing; a lynching off stage; murder by shooting.
1887-9	<i>Ivanov</i>	Suicide by shooting (on stage).
1889-90	<i>The Wood Demon</i>	Suicide by shooting (off stage, shot not heard by audience).
?1890-96	<i>Uncle Vanya</i>	Attempted murder by shooting on stage.

1896	<i>The Seagull</i>	Attempted suicide; an actual suicide (off stage, shot heard by audience).
1900–01	<i>Three Sisters</i>	Death by shooting (off stage in duel; shot heard in distance by audience).
1903–04	<i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	No shooting (but Yepikhodov carries a revolver so that he can commit suicide if necessary).

From the time when he wrote *The Seagull*, Chekhov was able to dispense with much of the theatrical machinery of the well-made play and develop the dramatic techniques that involved an interplay between an often comic text and implied tragic subtext.

The two levels of text and subtext are reflected in Chekhov's dualistic tragi-comic vision of reality. Chekhov was always aware that life could not be regarded as either totally tragic or totally comic. Kuprin's memory of Chekhov saying that in life 'everything is mixed up together, the important and the paltry, the great and the base, the tragic and the ridiculous'⁹⁹ is supported by various statements in the playwright's letters, in which he acknowledges that his particular vision of reality, and, consequently, the generic form needed to express that vision, could never be either pure tragedy or pure comedy. Chekhov's plays combine both tragedy and comedy.

Even an early play such as *Platonov*, which dramatises highly serious issues, is infused with comedy. The English director and actor, George Devine, who has directed this play, stressed the importance of the 'humorous aspect of the young Chekhov's work'. He noted that:

... when the play was produced at the Royal Court in 1960, an extraordinary idea was put about with considerable vehemence that the play was meant to be entirely serious. A study of the text and stage directions will prove this contention to be entirely fallacious. Even in the near tragic last moments after *Platonov* has been shot, the Doctor shouts for water, presumably for the patient, and is handed a decanter. 'The doctor drinks the water and throws the decanter aside', says Chekhov's stage direction. If this is not *intended* by the dramatist to be funny, in the midst of tragedy, I'll be confounded.¹⁰⁰

In a letter to the poet Yakov Polonsky in 1888, Chekhov wrote about how he found it impossible to write 'seriously' all of the time:

What am I to do if my fingers are itching and simply force me to commit some tra-la-la? However much I try to be serious, nothing comes of it, and always the serious alternates with the vulgar with me. I suppose that's fate.¹⁰¹

The comic gestures that Chekhov's characters make in their inept attempts to realise their dreams are juxtaposed with the seriousness of those aspirations for a better life. The failure of Chekhov's characters to achieve their aims or to live up to their potential is often presented in a comic manner, but their failure is not in any sense inevitable. Part of what makes some of the behaviour of

Chekhov's characters ludicrous is the fact that they could have done better but instead have wasted their lives. If there is a 'tragic' aspect to the lives of Chekhov's characters, it is not because of the existence of any 'tragic inevitability'. As R. L. Jackson has convincingly argued: 'Man's tragedy for Chekhov, lies primarily not in any absolute helplessness before his fate, but in the fact that he is continuously affirming fate's autonomy through abdication of his own responsibility.'¹⁰²

As we shall see, one of the major problems that has beset productions of Chekhov has been the tendency of directors to direct his plays either as gloomy tragedies or, more recently, as hilarious comedies. Chekhov complained about Stanislavski's over-gloomy productions of his plays. He would only have to look at a production like Robert Sturua's Bakhtin-inspired postmodern deconstruction of *Three Sisters* to see how productions have been pushed to the opposite pole. It is an understatement to say that Sturua's *Three Sisters* was an over-funny production:

It was, wrote Sheridan Morley, theatre critic of the New York *Herald Tribune* 'a knockabout farce ... forever trying on a new emotion as though it were just another funny hat' (19.12.90), while the *Mail on Sunday* noted that the production was 'not short on high jinks, low jinks or even funny noses' ... Masha could be seen at one point in Act Two twanging an elastic band on her comic false nose and there was, declared the *Sunday Telegraph*, 'a great deal of horse-play, and by-play, and just about every play apart from Chekhov's play (16.12.90).'¹⁰³

Neither the totally tragic nor the totally comic versions of Chekhov remain within the parameters and tolerances defined by Chekhov's playtexts.¹⁰⁴ Nick Worrall may 'not have been in the least perturbed by the lack of psychological realism' in the Georgian director's production, nor worried about 'his eschewal of emotional empathy in this deliberately stylised conception of *Three Sisters*'.¹⁰⁵ However, I find myself deeply concerned about a production that actively goes against the playwright's specific demands. Consequently, when Worrall states that: 'Sturua's theatre is not one of emotional identification, but one in which a notion of the "theatre theatrical" is deliberately foregrounded',¹⁰⁶ I vividly recall Chekhov's desperate pleas to the actors at the Moscow Arts Theatre to be more lifelike and less theatrical.

No other playwright has been more realistic in form and, at the same time, been able to express truthfully the tragi-comic complexity of life. Even Ibsen preferred to use the basic form of the well-made play in many of his so-called realistic dramas. Chekhov was the first and possibly the writer most thoroughly committed to the realistic depiction of both the surface and inner reality of life. Chekhov's extensions of the expressive possibilities of realism are well described

by John Gassner and illustrate just how important his innovations were for generations of later dramatists:

For plumbing the depths of the individual psyche, realism was of little avail because the realistic technique, with its 'fourth wall' convention and its absence of poetic dialogue and soliloquy, could present our experience and feeling only on one plane; it could let audiences see only the surfaces that any outsider sees. Realistic drama is pre-eminently logical, but the inner self is not logical. The realist cannot allow the individual character to expose his inner processes by means of soliloquies and asides, nor is he free to shape the play to suit the character's state of mind. The ordinary conventional realist is in the position of the diver whose hands and feet are bound, and who is deprived of a pipe line through which he can inhale oxygen and communicate with the surface.¹⁰⁷

Chekhov was no 'ordinary conventional realist'. We have seen how through the creation of a perceptible subtext he created a 'pipe line' which supplied the necessary life-giving properties that allowed for the communication of the playwright's own vision of reality and all this was achieved while still remaining within the bounds of realistic conventions.

In the next chapter we will examine *The Seagull*, in particular, its two markedly different productions by Evtikhy Karpov in St Petersburg in 1896 and by Konstantin Stanislavski in Moscow in 1898. Chekhov was to see his first masterpiece interpreted in ways that caused him considerable anguish. Chekhov's response to these two productions reveals much about his own views about how the play ought to be performed. Despite Chekhov's reservations, Stanislavski's production proved to be such a theatrical success that the survival of the Moscow Art Theatre was ensured.

ENDNOTES

¹ Glicksberg, C. I., *Modern Literary Perspectivism*, Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, 1970, p. 78.

² Strindberg, A., 'Foreword to *Miss Julie*', quoted in Williams, R., *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp. 81–2.

³ Karlinsky, S. and Heim, M. H., trans., *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975, p. 280.

⁴ When he was a medical student, Chekhov earned money to support himself and his family by churning out farcical short stories for a variety of comic journals. Almost as if he felt ashamed to acknowledge these hurriedly-written works, Chekhov distanced himself from them by employing a variety of pseudonyms, the most common one being 'Chekhonte'. In 1889, Chekhov received a letter from the then-famous writer, Dmitry Grigorovich, who encouraged him to take his writing talent more seriously. Partly as a result of this recognition, Chekhov began to work on his writing technique and took much greater care with his writing. The result was increasing fame for his expertise in this literary genre.

⁵ Krutch, J. W., *Nation*, 31 October 1928, in Emeljanow, V., ed., *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, pp. 338–9.

⁶ Magarshack, D., *Chekhov the Dramatist*, Eyre Methuen, London, 1980, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁸ Avilova, L., *Chekhov in My Life: A Love Story*, Methuen, London, 1989, p. 89.

- ⁹ Rayfield, D., *Chekhov: The Evolution of His Art*, Paul Elek, London, 1975, p. 15.
- ¹⁰ Hingley, R., *A New Life of Chekhov*, Oxford University Press, London, 1976, p. 108.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- ¹² Chekhov, A., Letter to A. F. Marks, 1 October 1902, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, p. 189.
- ¹³ Chekhov, A., Letter to V. Bibilin, 14 February 1886, quoted in Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 151.
- ¹⁴ Simmons, E. J., *Chekhov: A Biography*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1963, pp. 579–80.
- ¹⁵ Magarshack, D., op. cit., pp. 150–1.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- ¹⁷ Gottlieb, V., *Chekhov and the Vaudeville*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 187.
- ¹⁸ Chekhov, A., *Smoking Is Bad for You* (1889), in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, London, 1968, p. 191.
- ¹⁹ Chekhov, A., *Smoking Is Bad for You* (1890), in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 1, p. 197.
- ²⁰ Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 152.
- ²¹ Rapaport, I., *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1955, p. 62. I use the term subtext in a wider sense than Rapaport to include not only motivation, but all ideas, values and beliefs that are part of the inner life of a character.
- ²² Chekhov, A., *Smoking Is Bad for You* (1890), p. 199.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Chekhov, A., *Smoking is Bad for You* (1903), in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 1, pp. 157–8.
- ²⁶ Gottlieb, V., op. cit., p. 178.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- ²⁸ Chekhov, M., quoted in Makaroff, D., 'Notes on the Play', in Chekhov, A., *Platonov*, Methuen, London, 1961, p. 7. The manuscript of this unpublished and untitled play was only discovered in 1920. It has been performed in various cut versions and is usually called *Platonov*. Possibly the most successful version of this play is Michael Frayn's adaptation, entitled *Wild Honey*.
- ²⁹ Rayfield, D., op. cit., pp. 96–7.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- ³¹ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. N. Pleshcheyev, 9 April 1889, in Josephson, M., ed., *The Personal Papers of Anton Chekhov*, Lear, New York, 1948, p. 150.
- ³² Moravcevic, N., 'Chekhov and Naturalism: From Affinity to Divergence', *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 4, No. 4, Winter 1970–71, p. 224.
- ³³ Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 40.
- ³⁴ Hagan, J., 'Chekhov's Fiction and the Idea of "Objectivity"', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. 81, October 1966, p. 414.
- ³⁵ Chekhov, A., Letter to N. M. Yezhov, 27 October 1887, quoted in Simmons, E. J., op. cit., p. 136.
- ³⁶ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov between 10 and 12 October 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, pp. 284–5.
- ³⁷ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov, 24 November 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 287.
- ³⁸ Anonymous reviewer, quoted in Valency, M., *The Breaking String*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1966, p. 86.
- ³⁹ Chekhov, A., *Ivanov*, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 197.
- ⁴⁰ Chekhov, A., First draft ending of *Ivanov*, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, pp. 325–6.
- ⁴¹ Chekhov, A., *Ivanov*, p. 183.
- ⁴² Strindberg, A., 'Author's Foreword to *Miss Julie*', in Sprigge, E., ed., *Six Plays of Strindberg*, Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1955, p. 64.
- ⁴³ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov, 24 October 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 285.
- ⁴⁴ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov, between 10 and 12 October 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 285.

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- ⁴⁵ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov, 20 November 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 286.
- ⁴⁶ Chekhov, A., Letter to N. A. Leykin, 4 November 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 285.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 285.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- ⁵² Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov, 20 November 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, pp. 286–7.
- ⁵³ Chekhov, A., Letter to V. Nemirovich-Danchenko, 2 September 1903, in Friedland, L. S., *Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics by Anton Chekhov*, Dover Publications, New York, 1966, p. 201.
- ⁵⁴ Chekhov, A., Letter to N. Leykin, 15 November 1887, in Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, pp. 70–1.
- ⁵⁵ Chekhov, A., Letter to V. N. Davydov, 1 December 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 288.
- ⁵⁶ One is reminded of melodramas like Hazlewood's *Lady Audley's Secret*, where the lead character conveniently 'goes mad and dies' at the end of the play!
- ⁵⁷ Chekhov, A., Letter to V. N. Davydov, 1 December 1887, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 288.
- ⁵⁸ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin between 4 and 6 October 1888, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 289.
- ⁵⁹ Jones, D., quoted in Allen, D., 'David Jones Directs Chekhov's *Ivanov*', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 15, August 1988, p. 246. According to Motowo Kobatake, Chekhov's characters 'often give voice to their feelings and the other characters on the stage are uncertain whether they ought to listen or not'. (Kobatake, M., 'Soliloquy and Modern Drama', *Theatre Annual*, Vol. 18, 1961, p. 22.) Rather than being embarrassed at another character's expression of feelings, it is more accurate to say that Chekhov's characters are usually unaware of other's feelings, being bound up with their own inner lives.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- ⁶¹ Ellis-Fermor, U., *The Frontiers of Drama*, Methuen, London, 1964, p. 96.
- ⁶² Chekhov, A., Letter to M. Chekhov, 3 December 1887, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 289.
- ⁶³ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 7 January 1889, in Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, p. 84.
- ⁶⁴ Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- ⁶⁵ Simmons, E. J., *op. cit.*, p. 138.
- ⁶⁶ Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 19 December 1888, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 290.
- ⁶⁹ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 30 December 1888, in Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, p. 76.
- ⁷⁰ See Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- ⁷¹ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 30 December 1888, in Karlinsky, S., *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 81–2.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9.
- ⁷⁴ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 7 January 1889, in Friedland, L. S., *op. cit.*, p. 142.
- ⁷⁵ Chekhov, A., Letter to F. A. Fyodorov-Yurkowsky, 8 January 1889, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 296.
- ⁷⁶ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. N. Pleshcheyev, 2 January 1889, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 295.
- ⁷⁷ Chekhov, A., Letter to I. L. Leontyev-Shcheglov, 31 December 1888, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 295.

- ⁷⁸ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 6 February 1889, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 297.
- ⁷⁹ Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 297.
- ⁸⁰ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 30 December 1888, in Karlinsky, S., op. cit., p. 77.
- ⁸¹ Chekhov, A., *The Duel*, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Oxford University Press, London, 1970, Vol. 5, p. 147.
- ⁸² Berdnikov, G., 'Ivanov: An Analysis', in Jackson, R. L., ed., *Chekhov*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1967, p. 90.
- ⁸³ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 7 May 1889, in Karlinsky, S., op. cit., p. 144.
- ⁸⁴ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. Chekhov, 10 May 1886, in Yarmolinsky, A., op. cit., p. 37.
- ⁸⁵ Sobolev, Y., 'Tchekhov's Creative Method', in Koteliansky, S. S., ed., *Anton Tchekhov: Literary and Theatrical Reminiscences*, Benjamin Blom, New York, 1965, p. 11. For a similar argument see Hagan, J., op. cit., p. 417.
- ⁸⁶ Esslin, M., 'Chekhov and the Modern Drama', in Clyman, T. W., ed., *A Chekhov Companion*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1985, pp. 135–6.
- ⁸⁷ Tolstoy, L., quoted in Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 16.
- ⁸⁸ Chekhov, A., *Ivanov*, p. 179.
- ⁸⁹ Hagan, J., op. cit., p. 415.
- ⁹⁰ Chekhov, A., quoted in Melchinger, S., op. cit., p. 75.
- ⁹¹ Skaftymov, A., 'Principles of Structure in Chekhov's Plays', in Jackson, R. L., op. cit., pp. 74–5.
- ⁹² Chekhov, A., *Gooseberries*, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 9, Oxford University Press, London, 1975, p. 35.
- ⁹³ Skaftymov, A., op. cit., p. 75.
- ⁹⁴ Meyerhold, V., 'Naturalistic Theater and the Theater of Mood', in Jackson, R. L., op. cit., pp. 65–6.
- ⁹⁵ Beckerman, B., 'The Artifice of "Reality" in Chekhov and Pinter', *Modern Drama*, Vol. 21, 1978, p. 154.
- ⁹⁶ Skaftymov, A., op. cit., p. 73.
- ⁹⁷ Williams, R., *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1953, p. 21.
- ⁹⁸ Hingley, R., 'Introduction' to Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 2, p. 2.
- ⁹⁹ Chekhov, A., recalled by Kuprin, A., in Laffitte, S., *Chekhov*, Angus and Robertson, London, 1974, p. 16.
- ¹⁰⁰ Devine, G., 'Introduction', in Chekhov, A., *Platonov*, Methuen, London, 1961, p. 7.
- ¹⁰¹ Chekhov, A., Letter to Yakov Polonsky, 22 February 1888, quoted in Magarshack, D., *Chekhov: A Life*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1970, p. 144.
- ¹⁰² Jackson, R. L., 'Perspectives on Chekhov', in Jackson, R. L., op. cit., p. 12.
- ¹⁰³ Worrall, N., 'Robert Sturua's Interpretation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*: An Experiment in Post-modern Theatre', in Clayton, J. D., ed., *Chekhov Then and Now: The Reception of Chekhov in World Culture*, Peter Lang, New York, 1997, p. 79.
- ¹⁰⁴ When Laurence Senelick claims that: 'Sturua's energetic and exuberant prodding unblocked the constipation of the English approach to Chekhov' (Senelick, L., *The Chekhov Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 348.), or when Nick Worrall states that: 'The critics who complained that the production left them "unmoved" were demanding sentimental productions of a categorically preordained type, based on established traditions' (Worrall, N., op. cit., p. 82), they both imply that it is incorrect to think that there could be 'preferred readings' of Chekhov's works. It may well be that Sturua's unblocking of the constipation of the English approach to Chekhov resulted only in his producing his own diarrhoea. One wonders if Worrall has considered the possibility that being 'unmoved' by a performance of a Chekhov play is a sure sign that the production is an inadequate realisation of the work.
- ¹⁰⁵ Worrall, N., op. cit., p. 82.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 82–3.
- ¹⁰⁷ Gassner, J., *The Theatre in Our Times*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1963, p. 16.