

CHEKHOV

IBSEN

SHAW

O'CASEY

WILLIAMS

MILLER

SIX

**GREAT MODERN
PLAYS**

Here are six plays that stand as landmarks of the modern drama:

Chekhov's THREE SISTERS

repeats, in terms of a handful of people, the spasms of a dying society.

Ibsen's THE MASTER BUILDER

is the tragedy of the modern romantic, caught between desire and reality.

Shaw's MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION

shocked England and America; this play was the first honest attempt in our era to deal with prostitution.

O'Casey's RED ROSES FOR ME

is about a Protestant worker of Dublin who is a symbol of the ravaging conflicts in Ireland—and in man.

Williams' THE GLASS MENAGERIE

is a tender, despairing portrait of two women, one lost in the past, the other in herself.

Miller's ALL MY SONS

is a biting though compassionate, indictment of success through moral betrayal.

We call these plays "modern." But they are high art, and are written with devotion to truth, and those two qualities have already made them timeless.

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GREAT MODERN PLAYS



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THREE SISTERS [1900]

by Anton Chekhov

[1860-1904]

The action takes place in a country town
Among the Prozorovs, former nurse, an old woman of 80
County Office
FEODOR (Prozorov-Splinkovskiy), an old porter from the
KOD, Vladimir Kuzovich, Second Lieutenant
FERDINAND, Aleksey Petrovich, Second Lieutenant
CHEREMNYKH, Ivan Romanovich, Army Doctor
SOLONY, Vasily Vasilovich, Captain
TROZNEBNA, Nikolai Lvovich, Baron, Lieutenant in the Army
Commander
VEREMINA, Alexander Ignatievich, Lieutenant-Colonel, Battery
husband of Maria
KOD, Vladimir Kuzovich, Second Lieutenant
FEODOR (Prozorov-Splinkovskiy), an old porter from the
County Office
Among the Prozorovs, former nurse, an old woman of 80
The action takes place in a country town

CHARACTERS

PROZOROV, *Andrey Serghyevich*

NATASHA [*Natalia Ivanovna*], *his fiancée, afterwards his wife*

OLGA [*Olga Serghyevna, Olia*]

MASHA [*Maria Serghyevna*]

IRENA [*Irena Serghyevna*]

} *his sisters*

KOOLYGHIN, *Fiodor Ilyich, master at the High School for boys, husband of Masha*

VERSHININ, *Alexandr Ignatyevich, Lieutenant-Colonel, Battery Commander*

TOOZENBACH, *Nigolai Lvovich, Baron, Lieutenant in the Army*

SOLIONY, *Vassily Vassilich, Captain*

CHEBUTYKIN, *Ivan Romanych, Army Doctor*

FEDOTIK, *Aleksey Petrovich, Second Lieutenant*

RODÉ, *Vladimir Karlovich, Second Lieutenant*

FERAPONT [*Ferapont Spiridonych*], *an old porter from the County Office*

ANFISA, *the Prozorovs' former nurse, an old woman of 80*

The action takes place in a county town

ACT ONE

[A drawing-room in the Prozorovs' house; it is separated from a large ballroom¹ at the back by a row of columns. It is midday; there is cheerful sunshine outside. In the ballroom the table is being laid for lunch. OLGA, wearing the regulation dark-blue dress of a secondary school mistress, is correcting her pupils' work, standing or walking about as she does so. MASHA, in a black dress, is sitting reading a book, her hat on her lap. IRENA, in white, stands lost in thought.]

OLGA. It's exactly a year ago that Father died, isn't it? This very day, the fifth of May—your Saint's day, Irena. I remember it was very cold and it was snowing. I felt then as if I should never survive his death; and you had fainted and were lying quite still, as if you were dead. And now—a year's gone by, and we talk about it so easily. You're wearing white, and your face is positively radiant. . . . [A clock strikes twelve.] The clock struck twelve then, too. [A pause.] I remember when Father was being taken to the cemetery there was a military band, and a salute with rifle fire. That was because he was a general, in command of a brigade. And yet there weren't many people at the funeral. Of course, it was raining hard, raining and snowing.

IRENA. Need we bring up all these memories?

¹A large room, sparsely furnished, used for receptions and dances in Russian houses.

[*Baron TOOZENBACH, CHEBUTYKIN and SOLIONY appear behind the columns by the table in the ballroom.*]

OLGA. It's so warm to-day that we can keep the windows wide open, and yet there aren't any leaves showing on the birch trees. Father was made a brigadier eleven years ago, and then he left Moscow and took us with him. I remember so well how everything in Moscow was in blossom by now, everything was soaked in sunlight and warmth. Eleven years have gone by, yet I remember everything about it, as if we'd only left yesterday. Oh, Heavens! When I woke up this morning and saw this flood of sunshine, all this spring sunshine, I felt so moved and so happy! I felt such a longing to get back home to Moscow!

CHEBUTYKIN [*to TOOZENBACH*]. The devil you have!

TOOZENBACH. It's nonsense, I agree.

MASHA [*absorbed in her book, whistles a tune under her breath*].

OLGA. Masha, do stop whistling! How can you? [*A pause.*] I suppose I must get this continual headache because I have to go to school every day and go on teaching right into the evening. I seem to have the thoughts of someone quite old. Honestly, I've been feeling as if my strength and youth were running out of me drop by drop, day after day. Day after day, all these four years that I've been working at the school. . . . I just have one longing and it seems to grow stronger and stronger. . . .

IRENA. If only we could go back to Moscow! Sell the house, finish with our life here, and go back to Moscow.

OLGA. Yes, Moscow! As soon as we possibly can.

[*CHEBUTYKIN and TOOZENBACH laugh.*]

IRENA. I suppose Andrey will soon get a professorship. He isn't likely to go on living here. The only problem is our poor Masha.

OLGA. Masha can come and stay the whole summer with us every year in Moscow.

MASHA [*whistles a tune under her breath*].

IRENA. Everything will settle itself, with God's help. [*Looks through the window.*] What lovely weather it is to-day! Really, I don't know why there's such joy in my heart. I remembered this morning that it was my Saint's day, and suddenly I felt so happy, and I thought of the time when we were children, and Mother was still alive. And then such wonderful thoughts came to me, such wonderful stirring thoughts!

OLGA. You're so lovely to-day, you really do look most attractive. Masha looks pretty to-day, too. Andrey could be good-looking, but he's grown so stout. It doesn't suit him. As for me, I've just aged and grown a lot thinner. I suppose it's through getting so irritated with the girls at school. But to-day I'm at home, I'm free, and my headache's gone, and I feel much younger than I did yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight, after all. . . . I suppose everything that God wills must be right and good, but I can't help thinking sometimes that if I'd got married and stayed at home, it would have been a better thing for me. [*A pause.*] I would have been very fond of my husband.

TOOZENBACH [*to SOLIONY*]. Really, you talk such a lot of nonsense, I'm tired of listening to you. [*Comes into the drawing-room.*] I forgot to tell you: Vershinin, our new battery commander, is going to call on you to-day. [*Sits down by the piano.*]

OLGA. I'm very glad to hear it.

IRENA. Is he old?

TOOZENBACH. No, not particularly. Forty, forty-five at the most. [*Plays quietly.*] He seems a nice fellow. Certainly not a fool. His only weakness is that he talks too much.

IRENA. Is he interesting?

TOOZENBACH. He's all right, only he's got a wife, a mother-in-law and two little girls. What's more, she's his second wife. He calls on everybody and tells them that he's got a wife and two little girls. He'll tell you about it, too, I'm sure of that. His wife seems to be a bit soft in the head. She wears

a long plait like a girl, she is always philosophizing and talking in high-flown language, and then she often tries to commit suicide, apparently just to annoy her husband. I would have run away from a wife like that years ago, but he puts up with it, and just grumbles about it.

SOLIONY [*enters the drawing-room with CHEBUTYKIN*]. Now I can only lift sixty pounds with one hand, but with two I can lift two hundred pounds, or even two hundred and forty. So I conclude from that that two men are not just twice as strong as one, but three times as strong, if not more.

CHEBUTYKIN [*reads the paper as he comes in*]. Here's a recipe for falling hair . . . two ounces of naphthaline, half-a-bottle of methylated spirit . . . dissolve and apply once a day. . . . [*Writes it down in a notebook.*] Must make a note of it. [*To SOLIONY.*] Well, as I was trying to explain to you, you cork the bottle and pass a glass tube through the cork, Then you take a pinch of ordinary powdered alum, and . . .

IRENA. Ivan Romanych, dear Ivan Romanych!

CHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my child, what is it?

IRENA. Tell me, why is it I'm so happy to-day? Just as if I were sailing along in a boat with big white sails, and above me the wide, blue sky, and in the sky great white birds floating around?

CHEBUTYKIN [*kisses both her hands, tenderly*]. My little white bird!

IRENA. You know, when I woke up this morning, and after I'd got up and washed, I suddenly felt as if everything in the world had become clear to me, and I knew the way I ought to live. I know it all now, my dear Ivan Romanych. Man must work by the sweat of his brow whatever his class, and that should make up the whole meaning and purpose of his life and happiness and contentment. Oh, how good it must be to be a workman, getting up with the sun and breaking stones by the roadside—or a shepherd—or a schoolmaster teaching the children—or an engine-driver on the railway. Good Heavens! it's better to be a mere ox or horse, and work, than the sort of young woman who

wakes up at twelve, and drinks her coffee in bed, and then takes two hours dressing. . . . How dreadful! You know how you long for a cool drink in hot weather? Well, that's the way I long for work. And if I don't get up early from now on and really work, you can refuse to be friends with me any more, Ivan Romanych.

CHEBUTYKIN [*tenderly*]. So I will, so I will. . . .

OLGA. Father taught us to get up at seven o'clock and so Irena always wakes up at seven—but then she stays in bed till at least nine, thinking about something or other. And with such a serious expression on her face, too! [*Laughs.*]

IRENA. You think it's strange when I look serious because you always think of me as a little girl. I'm twenty, you know!

TOOZENBACH. All this longing for work. . . . Heavens! how well I can understand it! I've never done a stroke of work in my life. I was born in Petersburg, an unfriendly, idle city—born into a family where work and worries were simply unknown. I remember a valet pulling off my boots for me when I came home from the cadet school. . . . I grumbled at the way he did it, and my mother looked on in admiration. She was quite surprised when other people looked at me in any other way. I was so carefully protected from work! But I doubt whether they succeeded in protecting me for good and all—yes, I doubt it very much! The time's come: there's a terrific thunder-cloud advancing upon us, a mighty storm is coming to freshen us up! Yes, it's coming all right, it's quite near already, and it's going to blow away all this idleness and indifference, and prejudice against work, this rot of boredom that our society is suffering from. I'm going to work, and in twenty-five or thirty years' time every man and woman will be working. Every one of us!

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm not going to work.

TOOZENBACH. You don't count.

SOLIONY. In twenty-five years' time you won't be alive, thank goodness. In a couple of years you'll die from a stroke—or I'll lose my temper with you and put a bullet in your head, my good fellow. [*Takes a scent bottle from his pocket and*

sprinkles the scent over his chest and hands.

CHEBUTYKIN *[laughs]*. It's quite true that I never have done any work. Not a stroke since I left the university. I haven't even read a book, only newspapers. *[Takes another newspaper out of his pocket.]* For instance, here. . . . I know from the paper that there was a person called Dobroliubov, but what he wrote about I've not the faintest idea. . . . God alone knows. . . . *[Someone knocks on the floor from downstairs.]* There! They're calling me to come down: there's someone come to see me. I'll be back in a moment. . . . *[Goes out hurriedly, stroking his beard.]*

IRENA. He's up to one of his little games.

TOOZENBACH. Yes. He looked very solemn as he left. He's obviously going to give you a present.

IRENA. I do dislike that sort of thing. . . .

OLGA. Yes, isn't it dreadful? He's always doing something silly.

MASHA. "A green oak grows by a curving shore, And round that oak hangs a gold'en chain" . . . *[Gets up as she sings under her breath.]*

OLGA. You're sad to-day, Masha.

MASHA *[puts on her hat, singing]*.

OLGA. Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRENA. What a strange thing to do.

TOOZENBACH. What! Going away from your sister's party?

MASHA. What does it matter? I'll be back this evening. Good-bye, my darling. *[Kisses IRENA.]* And once again— I wish you all the happiness in the world. In the old days when Father was alive we used to have thirty or forty officers at our parties. What gay parties we had! And to-day—what have we got to-day? A man and a half, and the place is as quiet as a tomb. I'm going home. I'm depressed to-day, I'm sad, so don't listen to me. *[Laughs through her tears.]* We'll have a talk later, but good-bye for now, my dear. I'll go somewhere or other. . . .

IRENA *[displeased]*. Really, you are a . . .

OLGA *[tearfully]*. I understand you, Masha.

SOLIONY. If a man starts philosophizing, you call that philosophy, or possibly just sophistry, but if a woman or a couple of women start philosophizing you call that . . . what would you call it, now? Ask me another!

MASHA. What are you talking about? You are a disconcerting person!

SOLIONY. Nothing.

"He had no time to say 'Oh, oh!'

Before that bear had struck him low" . . .

[*A pause.*]

MASHA [*to OLGA, crossly*]. Do stop snivelling!

[*Enter ANFISA and FERAPONT, the latter carrying a large cake.*]

ANFISA. Come along, my dear, this way. Come in, your boots are quite clean. [*To IRENA.*] A cake from Protopopov, at the Council Office.

IRENA. Thank you. Tell him I'm very grateful to him. [*Takes the cake.*]

FERAPONT. What's that?

IRENA [*louder*]. Tell him I sent my thanks.

OLGA. Nanny, will you give him a piece of cake? Go along, Ferapont, they'll give you some cake.

FERAPONT. What's that?

ANFISA. Come along with me, Ferapont Spiridonych, my dear. Come along. [*Goes out with FERAPONT.*]

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov fellow, Mihail Potapych, or Ivanych, or whatever it is. It's best not to invite him here.

IRENA. I haven't invited him.

MASHA. Thank goodness.

[*Enter CHEBUTYKIN, followed by a soldier carrying a silver samovar. Murmurs of astonishment and displeasure.*]

OLGA [*covering her face with her hands*]. A samovar! But this is dreadful! [*Goes through to the ballroom and stands by*

the table.]

IRENA. My dear Ivan Romanych, what are you thinking about?
TOOZENBACH [*laughs*]. Didn't I tell you?

MASHA. Ivan Romanych, you really ought to be ashamed of yourself!

CHEBUTYKIN. My dear, sweet girls, I've no one in the world but you. You're dearer to me than anything in the world! I'm nearly sixty, I'm an old man, a lonely, utterly unimportant old man. The only thing that's worth anything in me is my love for you, and if it weren't for you, really I would have been dead long ago. [*To IRENA.*] My dear, my sweet little girl, haven't I known you since the very day you were born? Didn't I carry you about in my arms? . . . didn't I love your dear mother?

IRENA. But why do you get such expensive presents?

CHEBUTYKIN [*tearfully and crossly*]. Expensive presents! . . . Get along with you! [*To the orderly.*] Put the samovar over there. [*Mimics IRENA.*] Expensive presents!

[The orderly takes the samovar to the ballroom.]

ANFISA [*crosses the drawing-room*]. My dears, there's a strange colonel just arrived. He's taken off his coat and he's coming up now. Irenushka, do be nice and polite to him, won't you? [*In the doorway.*] And it's high time we had lunch, too. . . . Oh, dear! [*Goes out.*]

TOOZENBACH. It's Vershinin, I suppose.

[Enter VERSHININ.]

TOOZENBACH. Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin!

VERSHININ [*to Masha and IRENA*]. Allow me to introduce myself—Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin. I'm so glad, so very glad to be here at last. How you've changed! Dear, dear, how you've changed!

IRENA. Please, do sit down. We're very pleased to see you, I'm sure.

VERSHININ [*gayly*]. I'm so glad to see you, so glad! But there were three of you, weren't there?—three sisters. I remem-