Anton Chekhov's Selected Plays

Translated and Edited by
Laurence Senelick

A Norton Critical Edition

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

ANTON CHEKHOV'S SELECTED PLAYS

Authoritative Texts of

THE BEAR
IVANOV
THE WEDDING
THE CELEBRATION
THE SEAGULL
UNCLE VANYA
THREE SISTERS
THE CHERRY ORCHARD

VARIANTS AND LETTERS
CRITICISM
DIRECTORS ON CHEKHOV

Translated and Edited by

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Preface

Chekhov's dramatic reputation is based largely on his last four plays. They are included here, accompanied by the last version of his first produced play, *Ivanov*, as well as by three "vaudevilles," farces that account for his celebrity as a comic author. This edition is meant for those students, theater people, and lovers of Chekhov who do not read Russian but who wish to have as much information as they can get about the plays. It is therefore heavily annotated, not merely to provide explanations of obscure names and terms, but also to point out jokes and subtleties in the originals and to explain the translator's choices.

A number of features included herein intend to improve readers' understanding of Chekhov and his plays. First, I have included a choice of variants. Plays in pre-Revolutionary Russia had to undergo two censorships, one for publication and one for performance. Occasionally, the censorship required deletions or rewrites of lines that, in the case of speeches about Arkadina's liaison with Trigorin in *The Seagull* or Trofimov's remarks about social conditions in *The Cherry Orchard*, were never restored in Chekhov's lifetime. In other cases, such as *Ivanov*, Chekhov kept tinkering with the play for years, the final published version being quite distinct from the two different stage versions of 1887 and 1888. Often a Chekhov play was published in a magazine before it was produced, and, in rehearsal, the director required or suggested changes. For example, Stanislavsky insisted that Act II of *The Cherry Orchard* end with a love scene between Anya and Trofimov. Here the variants may coincide more exactly with Chekhov's ideas than do the final versions. The fewest variants appear in *Uncle Vanya*, since it was a thorough revision of a pre-existing play, *The Wood Goblin*.

I have seen no reason to include variant inversions of words or minor changes that would be of interest chiefly to Slavic specialists who can consult the Russian originals, but I have left in anything that can provide more information about a character or insight into Chekhov's working methods. Except when the changes were made at the instigation of third parties, I do not recommend pasting these remnants from Chekhov's wastepaper back into the plays. He was a shrewd editor of his own work, regularly deleting lines that were

too explicit, repetitive, or caricatural. In his case, less is definitely more.

Next, I have provided every mention of a play in this collection that Chekhov made in a letter. Although some of his juicy letters and pungent remarks have already been translated, this is the first time many of his comments, particularly those dealing with finances or specific performances, have appeared in English. I hope the plenitude will help in gauging Chekhov's fluctuating attitudes toward his dramatic works.

In selecting critical essays, I have tried to avoid the "usual suspects"—the essays and articles regularly reprinted in anthologies. I also avoided work by critics who cannot read Chekhov in the original, because they tend to overlook details. This edition therefore includes a number of essays that are either new to the English-speaking reader or have been relegated to obscurity despite their perspicacity (for example, George Calderon's introduction to his translation of Chekhov's plays, one of the earliest accounts in English, is also one of the best).

It is my firm conviction that directors who have staged Chekhov usually provide valuable insight. I have therefore added a final section, "Directors on Chekhov," that draws primarily on Russians and Europeans who have a resumé of powerful and influential productions.

Over the years, my translations of Chekhov have benefited greatly from the directors and companies that have staged them. My thanks go to all of them for enhancing my understanding. Among the many individuals, scholars, and theater people who deserve my gratitude are John Emigh, Donald Fanger, Spencer Golub, André Gregory, John Hellweg, Simon Karlinsky, Nils Åke Nilsson, Emma Polotskaya, Herta Schmid, Virginia Scott, Julie de Sherbinin, Anatoly Smeliansky, Jurij Striedter, Richard Trousdell, and the late Irene Worth.

LAURENCE SENELICK

A Note on the Translations

The texts of Chekhov's plays on which these translations are based are of those in Volumes 11, 12, and 13 of A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy i pisem v tridtsati tomakh* (*Complete Works and Letters in Thirty Volumes* [Moscow: Nauka, 1978]). They were drawn from the latest versions published in Chekhov's lifetime and subject to his revision: *The Seagull* and *Three Sisters* as published in the magazine *Russian Thought* (*Russkaya Mysl*); *Uncle Vanya* in the collected *Plays* (*Pyesy*, 1897); *The Cherry Orchard* in an anthology of contributors to the magazine *Knowledge* (*Znanie*) and simultaneously in Chekhov's collected works published by Adolph Marks (1901), which, in its second edition (1902), also included *Ivanov*, *The Bear*, *The Wedding*, and *The Celebration*.

Anatoly Smeliansky, dean of the Moscow Art Theater school, recently taught a class of American acting students. He described how Ivanov, at the end of the play of that name, shoots himself on stage, and how he, Smeliansky, had seen dozens of actors trying to expire before the audience's eyes. "But in our translation," a student protested, "he runs offstage to commit suicide." Smeliansky was nonplussed. Could it be that all the performances he had seen had been a travesty of Chekhov's intent? Only after he consulted the original Russian and saw that Chekhov had indeed written that Ivanov "runs to one side and shoots himself" (*otbegaet v storonu i zastrelitsya*) was he reassured. Meanwhile, the translation—one that was well reviewed, frequently acted, and is still readily available—continues to mislead readers.

Chekhov himself had his doubts about the efficacy of translation, and after reading some Russian prose translated into French, concluded that transmission of Russian literature into another language was pointless. Later, when his own plays began to be translated, he lamented that purely Russian phenomena would have no meaning for foreign audiences. To offset these misgivings, the translator of Chekhov must be as sedulous in making choices as the author was in composing the original work.

From his earliest farces, Chekhov wrote plays with an eye to their

being performed. He often had specific actors in mind, and, despite his discomfort with histrionic convention, he expected his dialogue to be recited from the stage. Therefore, translating his plays entails problems different from those encountered in translating his prose fiction. At first sight, the vocabulary and sentence structure seem straightforward; under scrutiny, however, the seeming simplicity turns out to be illusory.

The literary psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg, initiating American readers to Russian drama in 1920, stated point-blank that Chekhov was fundamentally untranslatable, more so even than Aleksandr Ostrovsky and Maksim Gorky. "Chekhov's plays lose their chief element in translation into whatever other language: the particular harmony and rhythm of the original. The student must bear in mind that studying Chekhov's drama in English he actually studies only some elements of them, the rest being lost in a foreign language."[1]

The "harmony and rhythm" so lost derive from a number of sources. First, Chekhov uses language to consolidate his major plays: recurrent phrases echo off one another, often for ironic effect. George Bernard Shaw was another playwright well aware that it was precisely this adhesive repetition of key words that knit a play together. He scolded his German translator,

> The way in which you translate every word just as it comes and then forget it and translate it some other way when it begins (or should begin) to make the audience laugh, is enough to whiten the hair on an author's head. Have you ever read Shakespear's *Much Ado About Nothing*? In it a man calls a constable an ass, and throughout the rest of the play the constable can think of nothing but this insult and keeps on saying, "But forget not, masters, that I am an ass." Now if you translated *Much Ado*, you would make the man call the constable a Schaffkopf. On the next page he would be a Narr, then a Maul, then a Thier, and perhaps the very last time an Esel.[2]

In Chekhov, a commonplace uttered in the first act may return to resonate with fresh significance. For example, in *Uncle Vanya*, Astrov complains that when people cannot understand him, they call him "weird" (*stranny*); later, Yelena uses that very word to describe him, thereby revealing that she does not understand him. To translate it as "weird" in its first occurrence and "odd" in its second would be to lose Chekhov's thematic irony, the cement he employs to bind the play together. The same holds true for *chudak* (crackpot) and its derivatives. Similarly, in *Three Sisters*, the phrases *vsyo ravno* (it

1. Gregory Zilboorg, "A Course in Russian Drama," *The Drama* (Nov. 1920), 69.
2. *Bernard Shaw's Letters to Siegfried Trebitsch*, ed. Samuel A. Weiss (Stanford: Stanford, 1986), 30 (December 26, 1902). The words translate as "sheep's head," "fool," "muzzle," "beast," and "ass."

doesn't matter, it's all the same) and *nadoelo* (fed up, sick and tired) recur regularly, and in *The Cherry Orchard*, changes are rung on *neschastye* (unhappiness, misfortune, trouble). It is the translator's obligation to preserve these verbal leitmotifs as much as possible.

Lexical and etymological elements subliminally affect the atmosphere. In *Uncle Vanya*, words based on *dush*—(implying psyche and soul) and *dukh*—(implying breath and spirit) help create a sense of stifling and suffocation. In *The Cherry Orchard*, earthy terms such as *nedotyopa* (half-chopped) contribute to the theme of hewing down the cherry trees. Literary allusions to the Russian classics (Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Krylov, Ostrovsky) enrich the cultural context; for the educated Russian of Chekhov's time, they would have been immediately familiar.

Second, Chekhov is extremely careful in choosing which words to use at any given moment. A French translator has pointed out that in *The Seagull*, Chekhov employed three separate words for *why*: *otchego, zachem*, and *pochemu*. I have been very careful to observe those choices, translating them as "how come," "what for," and "why." Hence, in this translation the famous opening line is not "Why do you always wear black?" but instead "How come you always wear black?", which distinguishes Medvedenko's way of asking a question from that of others.

Every character in Chekhov speaks in a particular cadence. Compare Pishchik's short asthmatic phrases with the run-on grandiloquence of Trofimov or with Anya's iambic meters. Although both Vershinin and Tusenbach spout speeches about the future, one can tell merely by the tone and phrasing which one is speaking. When Nina Zarechnaya starts picking up Arkadina's phrases, Chekhov gives us insight into her character.

Third—and this is difficult to pin down—the specific gravity of a statement may reside in its structure. Since Russian can reassemble the elements of a sentence to make a particular emphasis, English has to find a way of reproducing this. Mere phrasebook translation, offering a direct statement, can betray the subtle emphases of the original. To render Charlotta Ivanovna's "*Uzhasno poyut éti lyudi*" as "These people sing horribly" is to miss her idiosyncratic syntax and the course of her thought (which implies, "It's awful the way these people break into song at the drop of a hat"—although to spell that out explicitly would be to over-translate).

Finally, certain words and phrases that held a special meaning in Chekhov's time may require that an explanation be imbedded in the translation, particularly if it is meant to be performed. "*Nado delo delat*" should not be rendered literally as "It is necessary to do something," or even as the customary "We must work," because it has to convey the idea that it is an outdated and platitudinous slogan of

liberalism. The quotations from Nekrasov's poems have to reflect the pseudo-progressivism of the person doing the quoting. Just what sort of foods are the *raznye kabuli* that the Professor imposes on the Voinitsky household? (They are in fact spicy Central Asian stews, which accounts for his dyspepsia and offers a vivid contrast to the nanny's homely noodles.)

The same applies to jokes. Chekhov often imbeds *jeux de mots* and facetious phrasing as depth charges; the translator's first task is to be aware of them, and then to find a way of making them detonate properly. At the beginning of *Ivanov*, Count Shabelsky complains that Anna has no more musical ear than a *farshirovannaya ryba*. Earlier translations have rendered this as "stuffed pike" or "stuffed trout," both of which miss the point. Shabelsky is always teasing Anna about her Jewish origins (in an early version of the play, he even calls her a *rebbitzin*, or rabbi's wife); the fish in question is therefore not a piece of taxidermy but gefilte fish instead.

These particularities of Chekhov come in addition to the usual problems experienced in translating from Russian: the passive constructions, such as *Tyazhelo mne* (literally, "it is heavy to me"); the distinction between verbs of imperfect and perfect action (the difference between *strelilsya* and *zastrelilsya*, Konstantin's having shot himself and having shot himself for good); and onomatopoeic sounds that are overlooked or scanted. The last lines of *Uncle Vanya*—the repeated *my otdokhnyom*—consist of soft, aspirated sounds, easily drawn out and wafted into the air. "We shall rest" (or worse, "We will rest"), with its terminal dental sound, cannot be manipulated by an actress in the same way.

Reviewers who rarely if ever read a work in the original are fond of praising a translator for making the dialogue sound "smooth." Imagine a French translator of David Mamet or a German translator of Eugene O'Neill, playwrights noted for erratic dialogue, being praised for their smoothness! I have not attempted to "smooth out" Chekhov where he is rough or to second-guess his choices. In *Ivanov*, for example, there is stilted dialogue over which Chekhov himself fussed for years; it alternates with some of the most saltily colloquial dialogue in any Chekhov play. The contrast between Ivanov's fustian soliloquies and Avdotya Nazarovna's pungently folksy idioms ought not to be elided in translation. In this regard, I bear in mind Prince Mirsky's remark that "no one in real life ever spoke as Chekhov's people do."[3]

I have not pretended that Chekhov is anything other than Russian. Although I have converted weights and measures into Western

3. D. S. Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature 1881–1925* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1926), 94.

equivalents so that an audience can more easily gauge distances and density, I have left currency, beverages, and, in particular, names in their Russian forms. Modern readers and audiences rapidly adjust to patronymics, diminutives, and nicknames. What is the point of turning Pavel into Paul and Yelena into Helen unless one refers to *Uncle Jack* instead of *Uncle Vanya* and *Ivanov* as *Johnson*?

Guide to Transliteration and Pronunciation

When a Russian name is a Cyrillic transliteration of a European name, I have used the European form; for example, Mühlbach, Tusenbach, Charlotta, Maupassant, and Buckle.

Cyrillic	*System Used in this Book*	*Pronunciation*
Аа	a	f*a*ther
Бб	b	*b*ank; (at the end of words) to*p*
Вв	v	*v*et; to*w*el; (at the end of words) dea*f*
Гг	g	*g*et; (at the end of words) brea*k*
Дд	d	*d*addy; (at the end of words) ve*t*
Ее	e, ye (when it begins a name)	m*e*t; m*i*tt; *ye*ah
Ёё	yo	b*o*rder; *yo*re
Жж	zh	vi*s*ion; pu*sh*
Зз	z (except when it indicates a German *s*)	*z*eal
Ии	i	ch*ee*se; *i*f
Йй	i; y (at the end of names)	unstressed vowel
Кк	k	*k*ept
Лл	l	*l*og
Мм	m	*m*ama
Нн	n	*n*o
Оо	o	(stressed) *o*rder; (unstressed) *a*rtistic
Пп	p	*p*age
Рр	r	*r*ake
Сс	s	mi*ss*
Тт	t	*t*en

Уу	u	sp*oo*n
Фф	f	*f*orm
Хх	kh (except when it indicates a German *ch*)	*h*ah; a*ch*
Цц	ts	i*ts*
Чч	ch	*ch*ief
Шш	sh	*sh*oe
Щщ	shch	fi*sh ch*owder
Ъъ	*omitted*	No sound value
Ыы	y	ph*ooey*
Ьь	*omitted*	No sound value
Ээ	é	v*e*t; d*ay*
Юю	yu	*you*; s*ue*
Яя	ya	*ya*hoo

Combinations of vowels

-ай	ay	*eye*
-ый	y	*i*ts
-ий	y	*e*ven
-ия	iya	tri*a*ge
-ье	ye	*ye*ah
-ьи	yi	*yi*p

Phonetic Pronunciation of the Names in the Plays

'H indicates an aspirated h, usually represented in Roman letters by *kh*, as in *Chekhov*—which should be sounded more like *Chehoff* than *Chek-off*.

The Bear

Yelena Ivanovna Popova	yeh-LYEH-nah ee-VAH-nahf-nah pah-PAW-vah
Grigory Stepanovich Smirnov	gree-GAW-ree stih-PAH-nah-veech SMEER-nahf
Luka	Loo-KAH
Nikolay Mikhailovich Korchagin	nee-kah-LYE mi-'HAY-lah-veech kahr-CHAH-gheen
Vlasov	VLAH-sahf
Gruzdyov	grooz-DYAWF
Yaroshevich	yah-rah-SHAY-veech
Kuritsyn	koo-REET-sin
Mazutov	mah-ZOO-tahf
Tamara	tah-MAH-rah
Dasha	DAH-shah
Pelageya	pih-lah-GAY-ah

Ivanov

Nikolay Alekseevich Ivanov	nee-kah-LYE ah-lik-SAY-eh-veech ee-VAH-nahf
Kolya	KAWL-yah
Nikolasha	nee-kah-LAH-shah
Anna Petrovna	AH-nah pit-RAWF-nah
Anya	AHN-yah
Anyuta	AHN-yoo-tah

Sarra	SAH-rah
Matvey Semyonovich Shabelsky	maht-VAY sim-YAWN-ah-veech sha-BYEHL-skee
Matyusha	maht-YOO-shah
Pavel Kirillych Lebedev	PAH-wel kee-REE-litch leh-beh-DYEHF
Pasha	PAH-sha
Pashenka	PAH-shehn-kah
Zinaida Savishna	zee-nah-EE-dah SAH-veesh-nah
Zyuzyushka	ZYOO-zyoosh-kah
Sasha	SAH-sha
Aleksandra Pavlovna	ah-lik-SAHN-drah PAHV-lahv-nah
Sanichka	SAHN-eech-kah
Sashenka	SAH-shyehn-kah
Shura	SHOO-rah
Shurka	SHOOR-kah
Shurochka	SHOO-rahch-kah
Yevgeny Konstantinovich Lvov	yehv-GAYN-ee kahn-stahn-TEE-nah-veech lVAWF
Marfa Yegorovna Babakina	MAHR-fah yeh-GAWR-ahf-nah ba-BA-kee-nah
Marfusha	MAHR-foosh-ah
Marfutka	MAHR-foot-kah
Dmitry Nikitich Kosykh	DMEE-tree nee-KEE-teech KAW-see'h
Mikhail Mikhailovich Borkin	mee-'hye-EEL mee-'HYE-lah-veech BAWR-keen
Misha	MEE-sha
Michel Michelich	mee-SHEHL mee-SHEHL-eech
Avdotya Nazarovna	ahf-DAWT-yah nah-ZAH-rahf-na
Yegorushka	yeh-GAW-roosh-kah
Pyotr	PYAWTr
Gavrila	gav-REE-lah
Gavryusha	gav-RYOOSH-ah
Plesniki	PLEHS-nee-kee
Ovsyanov	ahf-SYAH-nahf
Zarev	ZAHR-yehff
Korolkov	kah-rahl-KAWF
Angot	ahn-GO
Balabalkina	bah-lah-BAHL-kee-nah
Babakalkina	bah-bah-KAHL-kee-nah
Mushkino	MOOSH-keen-ah
Zaimishche	ZYE-meesh-cheh

Dudkin	DOOD-keen
Budkin	BOOD-keen
Dobrolyubov	dah-rah-LYOO-bahf
Chatsky	CHAHT-skee
Gerasim Nilych	gheh-RAH-seem NEEL-ich
Barabanov	bah-rah-BAH-nahf

The Wedding

Yevdokim Zakharovich Zhigalov	yehv-dah-KEEM zah-'HAHR-ah-veech zhee-GAH-lahf
Nastasya Timofeevna	nahs-TAHS-yah tee-mah-FAY-ehf-nah
Darya Yevdokimovna	DAHR-yah yehv-dah-KEEM-ahf-nah
Dashenka	DAH-shehn-kah
Epaminond Maksimovich Aplombov	ay-PAH-mee-nahndmahk-SEE-mah-veech ah-PLAWM-bahf
Fyodor Yakovlevich Revunov-Karaulov	FYAW-dahr yah-KAWF-lyeh-veech reh-VOO-nahf-kah-rah-OO-lahf
Andrey Andreevich Nyunin	ahn-DRAY ahn-DRAY-eh-veech NYOO-neen
Andryusha	ahn-DRYOO-sha
Anna Martynovna Zmeyukina	AHN-nah mahr-TEE-nahf-na zmay-OO-kee-nah
Ivan Mikhailovich Yat	ee-VAHN mee-'HEY-lah-veech YAHT
Kharlampi Spiridonovich Dymba	'hahr-LAHM-peespee-ree-DAWN-ah-veech DEEM-bah
Dmitry Stepanovich Mozgovoy	DMEE-tree stih-PAH-nah-veech mahz-gah-VOY
Osip Lukich Babelmandebsky	AW-seep LOO-keech bah-byehl-mahn-DIHB-skee

The Celebration

Andrey Andreevich Shipuchin	ahn-DRAY ahn-DRAY-eh-veech shee-POO-cheen
Tatyana Alekseevna	taht-YAH-nah ah-lik-SAY-ehf-nah
Kuzma Nikolaevich Khirin	kooz-MAH nee-kah-LYE-eh-veech 'HEE-reen
Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina	nahs-TAHS-yah FYAW-dah-rahf-nah mir-CHOOT-kee-nah
Katya	KAH-chah
Onegin	ah-NYEH-gheen
Seryozha	sir-YAW-zhah
Grendilevsky	gryehn-dee-LYEHF-skee
Boris Matveich	bah-REES maht-VAY-eech
Berezhnitsky	byeh-ryehzh-NEET-skee

The Seagull

Irina Nikolaevna Arkadina	ee-REE-nah nee-kah-LYE-eff-nah
Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplyov	kahn-stahn-TEEN gahv-REEL-ah-veech Trip-LYAWF
Kostya	KAWST-yah
Gavrilych	gahv-REEL-ihch
Pyotr Nikolaevich Sorin	PYAW-tr nee-kah-LYE-yeh-veech
Petrushka	pit-ROO-shash
Nina Mikhailovna Zarechnaya	NEE-nah mee-'HEIL-ahf-nah zah-RYECH-nye-ah
Ilya Afanasevich Shamraev	eel-YAH ah-fah-NAHSS-yeh-veech shahm-RY-ef
Polina Andreevna	pah-LEE-nah ahn-DRAY-ef-nah
Marya Ilyinishna	MAHR-ya eel-YEEN-eesh-nah
Masha	MAH-shah
Mashenka	MAH-shin-kah
Boris Alekseevich Trigorin	bah-REESS ah-lik-SAY-eh-veech tree-GAWR-een

Evgeny Sergeevich Dorn	yihv-GHEHN-ee sehr-GAY-eh-veech DAWRN
Semyon Semyonovich Medvedenko	sim-YAWN sim-YAWN-ah-veech myehd-VYEHD-in-kah
Yasha	YAH-shah
Odessa	ah-DYEHSS-ah
Nekrasov	nik-RAHSS-ahff
Duse	DOO-zah
Pavel Semyonych Chadin	PAH-wehl sim-YAWN-eech CHAH-deen
Rasplyuev	rahss-PLYOO-yehf
Sadovsky	sah-DAWF-skee
Tolstoy	tahl-STOY
Turgenev	toor-GHEHN-yehf
Suzdaltsev	sooz-DAHL-tsehf
Elizavetgrad	ill-EEZ-ah-vyeht-grahd
Izmailov	eez-MY-lahf
Matryona	maht-RYAW-nah
Pushkin	POOSH-keen
Kharkov	'HAHR-kahf
Yelets	yell-YEHTS

Uncle Vanya

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Serebryakov	ah-lik-SAHND'r vlah-DEE-mir-ah-veech syeh-ryehb-yah-KAWFF
Yelena Andreevna	yehl-YAY-nah an-DRAY-ehf-nah
Lenochka	LYEHN-ahch-kah
Sofya (Sonya)	SAWF-yah (SAWN-yah)
Sonechka	SAWN-itch-kah
Mariya Vasilyevna	mah-REE-ah vah-SEEL-yeff-nah
Ivan (Vanya) Petrovich Voinitsky	ee-VAHN (VAHN-yah) pit-RAW-veech voy-NEET-skee
Mikhail Lvovich Astrov	mee-'high-EEL LVAW-veech AHS-trahf
Ilya Ilyich Telegin	eel-YAH eel-EECH tel-YAY-gheen
Marina Timofeevna	mah-REE-nah tee-mah-FAY-ehf-nah