



Checking out *Chekhov*

A GUIDE TO THE PLAYS FOR ACTORS,
DIRECTORS, AND READERS

SHARON MARIE
CARNICKE

Checking out *Chekhov*

A GUIDE TO THE PLAYS FOR ACTORS,
DIRECTORS, AND READERS

SHARON MARIE
CARNICKE



BOSTON
2013

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

The bibliographic data for this title is available from the Library of Congress.

Copyright © 2013 Academic Studies Press

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-936235-91-9

Cover design by Ivan Grave

Published by Academic Studies Press in 2013

28 Montfern Avenue

Brighton, MA 02135, USA

press@academicstudiespress.com

www.academicstudiespress.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Biography of the Author</i>	7
<i>To the Reader</i>	8
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	9
<i>Permissions</i>	10
<i>Illustrations</i>	11
<i>Transliterations of Russian Words, Names, and Titles of Works</i>	12
<i>Ellipses and Dates</i>	13
<i>The Usage of Russian Names</i>	13
 Introduction: A Taste Like Olives	 15
 Chapter One: Chekhov on His Own Terms	 22
Finding Chekhov	29
Family	34
Head of Household	45
Medicine, Civic Work, and Life Outside Moscow	49
Literature	52
Marriage to the Moscow Art Theatre	59
 Chapter Two: The Literary Soil for Chekhov's Drama	 66
From the Medical Point of View	68
"The Student": A Reading	76
Chekhov's Literary Innovation in Context	89
 Chapter Three: The Devil in the Details of Chekhov's Plays	 99
Types of Details	104
1. Apparent non sequiturs in conversations and behavior.	105
2. Apparent irrelevancies.	106
3. Puns and word play.	109
4. Verbal tics, meaningless phrases, and eccentric grammar.	110
5. Fractured foreign languages.	111
6. Grandiloquent speech and philosophizing.	111
7. Clothing as commentary.	112

8. Stage settings and the emotional progression of a play. . . .	115
9. Furniture and inanimate objects.	118
10. Food and drink as commentary on the symptoms of heartache.	119
11. The pause.	121
12. Soundscapes and the music of everyday life.	122
Chapter Four: Dramatic Innovations, Part One: Vaudeville.	125
Chekhov's Love of French Vaudeville	127
A Vaudeville by Scribe and a Joke by Chekhov	135
Chekhov's Comic Sensibility	140
Chapter Five: Dramatic Innovations, Part Two: Melodrama	151
Traditional Melodramatic Writing and Acting	151
Chekhov's Loathing of Melodrama	157
Melodrama Turned Inside Out in Chekhov's Plays	162
Details Plus Vaudeville Plus Melodrama Equals...	176
Chapter Six: Chekhov's Plays as Blueprints for Performances.	182
Stanislavsky's Score for <i>The Seagull</i>	192
The Score of <i>The Seagull</i> as Realized on Stage, 1898	211
Conclusion: A Matter of Perspective.	219
Annotated Bibliography	224
Citations to Chekhov's Work.	224
Chekhov's Stories, Letters, and Plays in Selected English Editions	224
Sources in Russian.	226
Sources in English	227
Index of Names, Terms, and Chekhov's Works	232
Index of Character Names from Chekhov's Major Plays	237

Checking out *Chekhov*

**A GUIDE TO THE PLAYS FOR ACTORS,
DIRECTORS, AND READERS**



Checking out Chekhov

A GUIDE TO THE PLAYS FOR ACTORS,
DIRECTORS, AND READERS



Checking out *Chekhov*

A GUIDE TO THE PLAYS FOR ACTORS,
DIRECTORS, AND READERS

SHARON MARIE
CARNICKE

BOSTON
2013

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

The bibliographic data for this title is available from the Library of Congress.

Copyright © 2013 Academic Studies Press

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-936235-91-9

Cover design by Ivan Grave

Published by Academic Studies Press in 2013

28 Montfern Avenue

Brighton, MA 02135, USA

press@academicstudiespress.com

www.academicstudiespress.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Biography of the Author</i>	7
<i>To the Reader</i>	8
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	9
<i>Permissions</i>	10
<i>Illustrations</i>	11
<i>Transliterations of Russian Words, Names, and Titles of Works</i>	12
<i>Ellipses and Dates</i>	13
<i>The Usage of Russian Names</i>	13
 Introduction: A Taste Like Olives	 15
 Chapter One: Chekhov on His Own Terms	 22
Finding Chekhov	29
Family	34
Head of Household	45
Medicine, Civic Work, and Life Outside Moscow	49
Literature	52
Marriage to the Moscow Art Theatre	59
 Chapter Two: The Literary Soil for Chekhov's Drama	 66
From the Medical Point of View	68
"The Student": A Reading	76
Chekhov's Literary Innovation in Context	89
 Chapter Three: The Devil in the Details of Chekhov's Plays	 99
Types of Details	104
1. Apparent non sequiturs in conversations and behavior.	105
2. Apparent irrelevancies.	106
3. Puns and word play.	109
4. Verbal tics, meaningless phrases, and eccentric grammar.	110
5. Fractured foreign languages.	111
6. Grandiloquent speech and philosophizing.	111
7. Clothing as commentary.	112

8. Stage settings and the emotional progression of a play. . . .	115
9. Furniture and inanimate objects.	118
10. Food and drink as commentary on the symptoms of heartache.	119
11. The pause.	121
12. Soundscapes and the music of everyday life.	122
Chapter Four: Dramatic Innovations, Part One: Vaudeville.	125
Chekhov's Love of French Vaudeville	127
A Vaudeville by Scribe and a Joke by Chekhov	135
Chekhov's Comic Sensibility	140
Chapter Five: Dramatic Innovations, Part Two: Melodrama	151
Traditional Melodramatic Writing and Acting	151
Chekhov's Loathing of Melodrama	157
Melodrama Turned Inside Out in Chekhov's Plays	162
Details Plus Vaudeville Plus Melodrama Equals...	176
Chapter Six: Chekhov's Plays as Blueprints for Performances.	182
Stanislavsky's Score for <i>The Seagull</i>	192
The Score of <i>The Seagull</i> as Realized on Stage, 1898	211
Conclusion: A Matter of Perspective.	219
Annotated Bibliography	224
Citations to Chekhov's Work.	224
Chekhov's Stories, Letters, and Plays in Selected English Editions	224
Sources in Russian.	226
Sources in English	227
Index of Names, Terms, and Chekhov's Works	232
Index of Character Names from Chekhov's Major Plays	237

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

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

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK TO THE READER

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERMISSIONS

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

ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover Photograph: A portrait in oils of A. P. Chekhov by his brother N. P. Chekhov, 1883. S. M. Carnicke's collection.

1. A. P. Chekhov, 1902. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
2. The Chekhov family at the Korneyev estate, 1890. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
3. A. P. Chekhov and O. L. Knipper, 1901. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
4. A. R. Artyom as Chebutykin, *Three Sisters*, the Moscow Art Theatre, 1901. IMRC's collection.
5. A. P. Chekhov and Maksim Gorky in Yalta, 1901. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
6. A. P. Chekhov and L. N. Tolstoy in Yalta, 1901. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
7. K. S. Stanislavsky as Astrov and O. L. Knipper as Yelena, *Uncle Vanya*, the Moscow Art Theatre, 1899. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
8. M. A. Zhdanova as Anya and O. L. Knipper as Ranyevskaya, the 1904 production of *The Cherry Orchard*, as performed at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1912. IMRC's collection.
9. I. M. Moskvina as Yepikhodov and N. G. Aleksandrov as Yasha, *The Cherry Orchard*, the Moscow Art Theatre, 1904. IMRC's collection.
10. S. M. Carnicke as Natalya Stepanovna and George Naylor as Lomov, *The Proposal*, the Potato Players (New York), 1978. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
11. K. S. Stanislavsky as Astrov, A. R. Artyom as Telegin, M. P. Lilina as Sonya, and A. L. Vishnevsky as Vanya, *Uncle Vanya*, the Moscow Art Theatre, 1899. IMRC's collection.
12. O. L. Knipper as Arkadina and K. S. Stanislavsky as Trigorin, *The Seagull*, the Moscow Art Theatre, 1898. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
13. V. A. Simov's 1898 set for Acts I and II of *The Seagull*, the Moscow Art Theatre, photographed in 1905. S. M. Carnicke's collection.
14. Cartoon Illustration by V. I. Porfiryev for Chekhov's *On the Moon* (*Na lune*) as published in *Fragments (Oskolki)*, 1885. A. P. Chekhov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridtsati tomakh* [The Complete Works and Letters in Thirty Volumes], Vol. 3 (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 457.

TRANSLITERATIONS OF RUSSIAN WORDS, NAMES, AND TITLES OF WORKS

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

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

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