ANTON CHEKHOV AND AMERICAN THEATER IN THE FIFTIES: A STUDY IN INFLUENCE

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MARY ANN WALTERS
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has been accepted towards fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

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By

Mary Ann Walters

Literary influences are usually traced back to the prime movers--to those several innovators whose contributions to literature were both new and decisive. One of the prime movers of the modern theater was Anton Chekhov. It is the purpose of this study to examine several ways in which American dramas have been influenced by Chekhov's innovative and complex dramaturgy, and to suggest, in the process, answers to some of the questions that cluster around the concept of influence itself: What was it about Chekhov that seemed imitable? How was Chekhov himself received by Americans? Why were most of the plays that were labeled "Chekhovian" written during the Fifties? Was there more than one way in which Chekhov's influence could be demonstrated? What happened to the Russian model when it was deliberately transplanted in American soil? Is there anything about the American mind which precludes a Chekhovian vision?

Chapter I describes what is commonly meant by the term Chekhovian. By collecting into an integrated scheme the various critical analyses of Chekhov's vision, his character-drawing, and his plot-making, the chapter attempts to establish a definition by consensus. But the term Chekhovian, however it is defined, had little meaning for Americans apart from the actual productions of Chekhov's plays that were available to them. Chapter II both qualifies and expands the definition proposed in Chapter I by reviewing the performances of Chekhov's plays on the American stage and the reaction to them. By the mid-Fifties, the prolonged debate over the correct way to perform Chekhov's plays remained unresolved, but Chekhov had become a staple on the American stage. He had also been named a new mentor for American dramatists.

Chapter III explores, through the comments of critics and playwrights, the extent of such implied indebtedness. An identifiable new genre--the low-pressure, reticent Mood Play--emerged on Broadway during the relatively quiet decade of the Fifties, and it was often assumed that the Mood Plays had a common genesis in Chekhov. A comparison of the Mood Plays with Chekhov's plays, however, reveals that such an assumption was based on a reductive and limited perception of Chekhov's art. Although the Mood Plays resembled Chekhov's dramas only casually and superficially, the decade produced at least

two plays which may serve as examples of the ways in which the Chekhovian model proved useful for American playwrights. Joshua Logan borrowed from Chekhov a plot; Lillian Hellman garnered from him a thesis. Together, Chapters IV and V demonstrate contrasting ways in which the term influence may take on concrete meaning.

Joshua Logan's The Wisteria Trees (1950) was intended to be an American analogue to Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard. Despite the deliberate parallels of characters and situations, however, The Wisteria Trees is strangely unlike The Cherry Orchard. Mr. Logan made several additions and deletions to the plot, he changed the method of characterization, and he substituted an alternative means for achieving comic effect. In his ministrations to the masterpiece, Logan missed the Chekhovian allusiveness and universality, but he did give the American public a cherry orchard tailored to their sensibilities and theatrical expectations.

Lillian Hellman's The Autumn Garden (1951) reflects a Chekhovian influence that is broader than the duplication of a specific plot. After establishing a reputation for writing well-made plays, Miss Hellman came, in middle age, to share with Chekhov a sobering vision of life. Although she made into a thesis the vision that Chekhov had allowed to remain an inconclusive suggestion, the nature of that thesis demanded that she adjust her

techniques of plotting and character-drawing in favor of the more relaxed Chekhovian method. The basic structure of The Autumn Garden resembles the structure of Uncle Vanya.

No American playwright of the Fifties ever wrote a truly Chekhovian play. Those who were influenced by Chekhov were influenced by fragments of his art that they admired and found useful. There was, however, one quality that eluded all American playwrights, and that was the sophistication that remains Chekhov's truest signature.

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Mary Ann Walters

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INTRODUCTION

One of the ways of viewing American drama is in terms of its response to European influences. It is, in fact, a commonplace of criticism to assume that American drama borrowed nearly all of its forms and many of its themes. Thus, in order to understand O'Neill, we look to Sophocles, to Freud, to German expressionism, and to Strindberg. We think of Arthur Miller as the disciple of Ibsen, of Clifford Odets as the legatee of German agit-prop plays, and of Tennessee Williams as the heir of D. H. Lawrence.

We rarely speak of it the other way around. Who imitates O'Neill? Who is indebted to Odets? Who are the followers of Miller? There are many, perhaps, but the fact remains that literary influences are usually traced back to the prime movers--to those several innovators whose contributions were both new and decisive. The prime movers of the modern stage are relatively few and decidedly un-American; they include Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Brecht, Pirandello, Artaud, and Chekhov. It is the purpose of

this study to examine several ways in which American dramas have been influenced by the unique and complex dramaturgy of Anton Chekhov.

The first problem one faces in any study of literary influences is that of establishing a definition for the term influence. Defined too broadly, the meaning of the term evaporates into woolly speculation or expands into an unmanageable search for echoes. When the term is used in a very broad sense, Chekhov may be said to be a model for a great many British and American writers: Bernard Shaw, J. B. Priestley, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Mansfield, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, James T. Farrell, Paul Green, Tennessee Williams, Ellen Glasgow, and Margaret Mitchell come to mind.

This study, however, assumes a more narrow meaning of the term influence. It assumes two criteria for determining whether or not a drama was influenced by Chekhov: the dramatist must have been acquainted with Chekhov's plays, and the drama itself must reveal internal evidence of demonstrable indebtedness. The first criteria guards against the logical fallacy of the red herring; the second against the fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc. Both fallacies have already surfaced in the annals of American dramatists who wished to be associated with Chekhov.

Take, for example, the case of Clifford Odets. In publicity releases that preceded the openings of Awake and Sing! and of Paradise Lost in 1935, Odets and other members of the Group Theatre suggested that his plays might well be compared with those of Chekhov. In an interview for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, members of the Group were reported to have declared their colleague "the nearest thing to Tchekov."[1] Odets took up his cue in the New York Times when he compared the middle-class characters in Paradise Lost with Chekhov's characters.

> Our confused middle class today--which dares little--is dangerously similar to Chekhov's people. Which is why the people in "Awake and Sing!" and "Paradise Lost" (particularly the latter) have what is called a "Chekhovian quality." Which is why it is sinful to violate their lives and aspirations with plot lines.[2]

Thus alerted, many critics looked at Odets' plays with Chekhov in mind, and they found the similarities they sought. The disconnected dialogue, the atmosphere of discontent, the symbolism--all these surely demonstrated lessons learned from Chekhov. Stark Young asserted that "it can do Mr. Odets no harm to say that his plays could never in the form they are now have existed without Chekhov."[3]

The truth is that they did. In a column for the World-Telegram, Odets admitted that the Chekhov analogy was a red herring. He had never read Chekhov. "You have my word for it that I intend to read 'The Cherry Orchard'

tonight for the first time in my life,"[4] he offered with some embarrassment.

The case of John Van Druten was quite different. There was never any doubt, really, that Van Druten was thoroughly acquainted with Chekhov. His mother was the notorious lady who, after seeing the London Stage Society perform The Cherry Orchard in 1911, had declared that either the play was completely insane or the entire audience was. Van Druten took it upon himself to explain what it was about Chekhov that had so bewildered his mother, and he declared himself in Chekhov's debt for revealing to him an entirely new method of writing plays. I Am a Camera, Van Druten explained, was a Chekhovian play.[5]

The play itself, however, belies its author's assertions. If it is in any way Chekhovian, it is so only in the most superficial sense. I Am a Camera fails to meet the second requirement for indebtedness--the testimony of the play itself.

When the concept of influence is defined through the application of these two criteria--the testimony of the author and the testimony of the play--the field is narrowed considerably. Plays like Odets' Awake and Sing! and Van Druten's I Am a Camera are systematically excluded. It is not the purpose of this study, however, to exhaust the field, even a field thus narrowed. I have not

attempted to answer questions of statistics or bibliography. Rather, I have been interested in broader, more speculative questions that would seem to cluster around the concept of influence itself. What was it about Chekhov that seemed imitable? How was Chekhov himself received by Americans? Was there more than one way in which his influence could be demonstrated? What happened to the Russian model when it was deliberately transplanted in American soil? Why were most of the plays that were labeled "Chekhovian" written during the Fifties? Is there anything about the American mind which precludes a Chekhovian vision?

Not all of these questions can be answered with absolute certainty, and I have made no attempt to force this investigation into the service of tidy conclusions. I have assumed throughout that negative evidence is as valid as positive evidence, and have allowed questions to remain so when the answers I was seeking continued to be elusive or proved to be untrue.

This study concentrates on and ends with the American dramas of the mid-Fifties. The influence of Chekhov did not exhaust itself at that time, of course, but the decade of the Fifties did seem to be the heyday for the Chekhovian fashion in American dramaturgy.

Chapter I attempts to describe what is commonly meant by the term Chekhovian. Because the purpose of the

chapter is that of establishing a definition by consensus, I have advanced no new theories or interpretations. I have merely tried to collect the explications of several critics into an integrated scheme, although I became, in the process, particularly fond of William Styan's interpretations of Chekhov's plays in Chekhov in Performance, and of Maurice Valency's insights in The Breaking String.

The term Chekhovian, however it is defined, had little meaning for American audiences apart from the actual productions of Chekhov's plays that were available to them. Chapter II briefly reviews the productions of Chekhov's plays on the American stage into the decade of the Fifties, and thus may be considered a companion chapter to Chapter I. The performances of the plays and the reactions to those performances sometimes qualify, sometimes reinforce the definition that is proposed in Chapter I.

Chapter III is, in some respects, the nexus of this study. It explores, through the comments of critics and playwrights, the availability of the Chekhovian model for American playwrights. It also addresses itself to the Mood Play, a genre that seemed to be particularly endemic to the relatively quiet decade of the Fifties.

Out of that decade came at least two plays which may serve as examples of the ways in which the Chekhovian

model proved useful for American playwrights. Joshua Logan borrowed from Chekhov a plot; Lillian Hellman garnered from him a thesis. Together, Chapters IV and V demonstrate contrasting ways in which the term influence may take on concrete meaning.

CHAPTER I

THE CHEKHOV SIGNATURE

The term Chekhovian entered the lexicon of modern dramatic criticism shortly after Chekhov's four major plays were made available to European and American audiences. The plays seemed strange at first; they bewildered audiences, intrigued directors, and invited imitators. Since that time, critics, viewing other plays by other playwrights, have been reminded of Chekhov, and many of them have noted the resemblances by a rather loose application of the term Chekhovian to the plays under consideration. It is the purpose of this chapter to give the term Chekhovian a definition by reviewing the characteristics of Chekhov's dramaturgy.

Chekhov articulated his artistic credo often and consistently. He thought the most interesting subject for art was ordinary life; one ought, he felt, to "write simply--about how Pyotr Semyonovich got married to Mariya Ivanovna, that's all."[1] Elsewhere he elaborated:

> In real life, people don't spend every minute shooting at each other, hanging themselves and making confession of love. They don't spend all the time saying clever things. They're more occupied with eating, drinking, flirting and talking stupidities--and these are the things which ought to be shown on stage. A play should be written in which people arrive, go away, have dinner, talk about the weather and play cards. Life must be exactly as it is, and people as they are--not on stilts. . . . Let everything on the stage be just as complicated and at the same time just as simple as it is in life. People eat their dinner, just eat their dinner, and all the time their happiness is being established or their lives are being broken up.[2]

Chekhov's commitment to "life . . . exactly as it is" sounds very much like that of Zola, who wrote in 1880:

> You start from the point that nature is sufficient, that you must accept it as it is, without modification or pruning; it is grand enough, beautiful enough to supply its own beginning, its middle, and its end. Instead of imagining an adventure, of complicating it, of arranging stage effects, which scene by scene will lead to a final conclusion, you simply take the life study of a person or a group of persons, whose actions you faithfully depict. The work becomes a report, nothing more; it has but the merit of exact observation, or more or less profound penetration and analysis, of the logical connection of facts.[3]

Because Chekhov's basic assumptions about drama are so similar to those of Zola, it is useful to think of Chekhov as a Naturalist. A doctor by vocation and training (although there is little evidence that Chekhov spent much time in the practice of medicine), he was wont to speak of his art in the language of the scientists. He wrote in 1887:

> To chemists there is nothing unclean in this world. A man of letters should be as objective as a chemist; he has to renounce ordinary subjectivity and realize that manure piles play a very respectable role in a landscape and that evil passions are as inherent in life as good ones.[4]

One year later he argued that he thought of himself as "an ordinary reporter," whose job it was merely to record what he saw and heard.

> It seems to me that it is not up to writers to solve such questions as God, pessimism and so on. The job of the writer is to depict only who, how and under what circumstances people have spoken or thought about God or pessimism. The artist should not be a judge of his characters or of what they say, but only an objective observer. I heard a confused, indecisive talk by two Russians on pessimism and so must convey this conversation in the same form in which I heard it, but it is up to the jury, i.e., the readers, to give it an evaluation. My job is only to be talented, i.e., to be able to throw light upon some figures and speak their language.[5]

Naturalism is a way of looking at reality, but it does not necessarily provide a method for communicating that vision. The fact is that Chekhov did not develop a new method for "throw[ing] light upon some figures and speak[ing] their language," a method which set him apart from other Naturalists and other Realists. In order to arrive at the differentia of Chekhov's art, it is helpful to take a look at the way in which his plays evolved from the standard theater fare of the late nineteenth century.

In 1887, when Chekhov wrote his first serious play, Ivanov, the Russian theater was subsisting on farces, the realistic comedies of Ostrovsky, and the translations

of Scribe and Sardou.[6] Chekhov's early one-act plays are farces. Ivanov is essentially a well-made melodrama. But as Chekhov began to rely more and more on his own vision of "life as it is" and less on life according to the expectations of the theater, he gradually sloughed off the theatrical conventions of Scribe and Sardou[7] or converted them almost beyond recognition to his own ends. By the time he had written The Sea Gull he wrote to his editor Souvorin: "Well, I have finished with the play. . . . I began it forte and ended it pianissimo--contrary to all the rules of dramatic art."[8] By the time he wrote The Cherry Orchard, he had pretty much purged his craft of all the overtly melodramatic mannerisms that were his inheritance, and his legacy was a relatively new form in which to cast his Naturalistic vision. That legacy may be examined in terms of theme, plot-making, and character-drawing.

Strictly speaking, Chekhov's plays do not have themes at all. Chekhov did have ideas, however, and many of his personal ideas about life and art are put into the mouths of his characters. In every play, there are several potential raissoneurs: In The Sea Gull Trepleff articulates Chekhov's exasperation with an outmoded theater, in The Cherry Orchard Trofimoff echoes his impatience with the useless intelligentsia, in The Three Sisters Virshinin states his hopes for the future, and

in Uncle Vanya Astroff, with his love of trees and his medical conscience, seems to be a man much like Chekhov himself. None of these characters, however, is allowed to be the authorial mouthpiece, for the plays themselves forbid such identifications. Chekhov's characters invariably undercut or qualify the ideas that they espouse. Trepleff may be right about the state of the Russian stage, but his own contribution to that stage is dreadful. Virshinin, who believes that "after two or three hundred years, life on earth will be unimaginably beautiful,"[9] has urgent domestic reasons for his prophecy. Trofimoff, who passes judgment on the idle gentry, does nothing himself; when we first hear of him, he is asleep, and when we last see him, he is searching helplessly for his rubbers. And Astroff, perhaps the strongest candidate for raissoneur in any of the plays, leaves his trees and his medical practice to flirt with the exquisite Elena.

We cannot find Chekhov the man in any of his plays. He held no idea so dear that he was willing to write a play about it or sacrifice a character for its sake. His plays are not about ideas at all (students of Chekhov have difficulty finding lines to underline), and thus they make a clean break with the didacticism that pervades so much of Western theater. While Chekhov's most famous contemporaries, Shaw and Ibsen, were pressing their dramas into the service of intellectual propositions,

and while even the Naturalists were making tacit predications about the scientific nature of reality, Chekhov refused to enlist us in any cause or summon us to accept any explicit truth. He also refused to make any moral judgments.

Readers of Western drama are accustomed to making moral judgments, as our vocabulary will testify. We speak of heroes, villains, tragic flaws, poetic justice, and satire--terms which assume, to one degree or another, a dualism of good and evil. Most dramas highlight a conflict, one side of which is preferable to the other, or expose a condition which is either good or bad. Chekhov remained curiously aloof from such assumptions. His plays contain neither heroes nor villains, and whenever we think we may have found a villain, we are uncomfortable with Chekhov's treatment of him. How are we to feel, for example, about Ivanov, a man who brings ruin to everyone around him? We may be inclined to share Lvov's harsh, direct condemnation: "Your behavior disgusts me, it offends my sense of decency."[10] But Lvov is not entirely trustworthy. Chekhov described him as "the embodiment of a program, a walking tendency. He looks through a narrow frame at every person and event, he judges everything according to preconceived nations."[11] Frustrated in our own attempts to "judge [characters] according to preconceived notions," we must take Chekhov

at his word when he said of his play: "I wanted to be original: I did not portray a single villain, not a single angel (though I could not refrain when it came to the clown), did not accuse anyone, or exculpate."[12] Later he added, "If the audience will leave the theatre with the conviction that Ivanovs are scoundrels and that Doctor Lvovs are great men, then I'll have to give up and fling my pen to the devil."[13]

Chekhov was consistent in his refusal to condemn or condone. Just as there are potential raissoneurs in every play, there are also potential villains and victims. All of them, however, are qualified out of our unequivocal judgment or sympathy. Trigorin, for example, is a character in the tradition of the melodramatic stage villain. He seduces Nina, impregnates her, and then abandons her to go back to his former mistress. The Sea Gull, however, is not a play about seduction and abandonment; these events never take place on stage at all, but rather occur sometime between Acts III and IV. Instead of emphasizing Trigorin's villainy, the play calls attention to smaller things: he loves fishing, he jots down all his thoughts in a notebook, he is conscious of his professional mediocrity, and he has holes in his shoes.[14] Trigorin is too weak, too ordinary, too recognizable to be a proper villain. And so it is with Serebriakoff, Natasha, and Lopahin. A stronger case may

be made for Natasha's villainy than for the others, perhaps, but even she is too familiar, too normal to be wholly evil.[15] Chekhov was concerned simply that we understand his characters, and, as he remarked in his notebook, "To understand is to forgive, and it would be strange not to forgive."[16]

Chekhov made it a point to equivocate his victims as well as his villains, and in doing so, he departed from both the melodramatic tradition and from the Naturalistic bias, which tended to see characters as helpless victims of deterministic causality. His plays are full of victims--charming, lovable people whose plights make us sad. But these charming people are also foolish, idle, extravagant, irresponsible, and short-sighted. Who, then, is to blame for their fates? That question is one Chekhov never really asked.

Chekhov's plays are deliberately amoral. They are also non-political, and the two stances are, of course, related. Chekhov himself was disinterested in politics; in 1889 he wrote to a radical friend: "I am not a liberal, not a conservative, not a believer in gradual politics, not a monk, not an indifferentist. I would like to be a free artist and nothing more. . . ."[17] There are, however, potentially political issues in all his plays, and especially in The Cherry Orchard. The Russia of Chekhov's day was unstable and

repressive, and though there is little evidence that Chekhov sensed revolutions around the corner, a majority of his characters are discontent with the status quo. Some, like Fiers and the Prozoroff sisters, look back to happier days in the past. Others--Virshinin, Astroff, Trofimoff, Anya, Andrei--speak enthusiastically about a better life in the future. But no one of these prophets of the future has a specific program in mind; each merely hopes that somehow the world will be a happier place in a few hundred years. In the meantime they resolve, idly, to work. It would seem that it was not the nature of their all-too-vague political dreams that interested Chekhov but rather the irony of their having any at all.[18]

Political issues are less vague in The Cherry Orchard. In this play a very real class struggle is taking place; we see a former peasant rise in economic and social stature to the point of purchasing the estate he once worked on, and we see the corresponding dispossession of the landed gentry. But even this situation is treated ambiguously. In his perceptive study, Chekhov in Performance, J. L. Styan notes that

> Chekhov makes nothing political of this [situation]; rather, it is emphasized that the man who buys it had no intention of doing so, and Chekhov takes immense pains to subvert any easy alignment of the spectator either with the old or the new owner. If the "action" concerns the sale of the orchard, its fate is sealed from the start, and Chekhov denies his audience the satisfaction of a sensational

> crisis. In its place the play that Chekhov wrote allows only an intelligent, objective curiosity about how the sale of the estate will affect the individual lives of those who live there. Chekhov takes no stand on the issues themselves; there is no triumph, no villainy, no message, no lesson, no argument.[19]

By firmly eschewing triumphs, villainy, messages, lessons, and arguments of all sorts, Chekhov managed to disengage himself from the mainstream of romantic, realistic, and naturalistic drama. He did so even more decisively by his innovative method of plot-making.

The adjective that is applied most frequently to Chekhov's plays is "plotless." When critics do address themselves to the problem of Chekhov's plots anyway, they often do so by way of analogy; they compare Chekhov's plots not with those of any other playwright but rather with music, with impressionistic paintings, and with poetry. It will best serve our purposes to arrive at a description of the structure of Chekhov's plays by way of contrast--by contrasting them with the orthodox method of plotting.

A long time ago, Aristotle declared plot the most important element of drama. He called attention to the fact that the most effective plots were those which proceeded, in linear fashion, from a beginning through a middle toward an end. The relationship between the events should be that of cause to effect, and the resolution at the end of a plot was best achieved by

means of recognitions, discoveries, and peripetia. Aristotle's suggestions became assumptions for most Western dramatists and critics, and tightly linear plotting became the sine qua non for any well-made play.

Chekhov's plays break with this tradition. They do have plots, but, as he refined his method of structuring his plays, Chekhov relegated the plots more and more to the background. Plots are, after all, a theatrical convention. Life does not come in plots; lives are usually lived much more piecemeal than Aristotle's suggestions would imply. When we actually see when we observe people is "eating, drinking, flirting and talking stupidities." Somewhere underneath these trivial commonplaces, people's "happiness is being established or their lives are being broken up." The establishment of happiness and breaking up of lives constitute the plots of Chekhov's plays, but only during his internship did he dramatize these processes on stage. In his mature plays he hid away the plots and the usual furniture of plot-making--the obligatory scene,[21] the climactic reversal, and the conclusive denouement.

Chekhov apparently began writing plays with no thought of doing anything new. Ivanov and The Wood Demon, his first full-length plays, are fairly conventional melodramas. The plot of Ivanov concerns the

results of the unfortunate marriage of the protagonist, who, after sending his wife to her grave and narrowly escaping a second marriage with a young girl, shoots himself in an appropriate gesture of remorse. The final "big scene" is preceded by three dramatic curtain scenes. Chekhov admitted that each act ended with "a sockdologer. All my energy was spent on a few really brisk, forceful climaxes. . . ."[21] Two years after he finished Ivanov, Chekhov wrote The Wood Demon, a romantic comedy which boasted not only a dramatic suicide, but the timely revelations of a hidden diary and three complete sets of lovers. With Ivanov and The Wood Demon, Chekhov proved himself capable of writing well-made plays. But he was not particularly good at it.

In the six-year interval between The Wood Demon and The Sea Gull Chekhov apparently took another look around and noticed that "in real life, people don't spend every minute shooting at each other, hanging themselves and making confessions of love." Consequently, he deliberately flattened the obligatory scenes. After The Wood Demon, the climactic moments of the plays barely rise above the level of expository action and, in the last play, they are dispensed with altogether. Trepleff kills himself, surely, but his suicide is mentioned only in the last line of the play, and it is a throw-away line at that. Vanya shoots twice at

Serebriakoff and misses both shots. In The Three Sisters, the shot that signals Tusenbach's death is heard faintly in the distance, and the fact of his death is muted by the inconsequential dialogue on stage. In The Cherry Orchard there are no climactic scenes whatever.

Chekhov went further than reducing the climactic scenes; he suppressed central actions altogether. "Be awkward and impudent,"[22] he wrote his brother Alexander, and it was certainly the height of impudence to disguise as he did the normal theatrical process of development and crisis. If there is a central action in The Sea Gull, it is the rivalry between two artists for the love of a girl. In the hands of a more conventional dramatist, the reversal of the play would have been Trigorin's abandonment of Nina and return to Arkadina. But none of this is shown on stage. Nina's degradation takes place during the two years that lapse between Acts III and IV and is merely reported by Trepleff in Act IV. Similarly, the central action of The Cherry Orchard is the sale of the orchard. Everything in the play leads up to it or down from it. An auction scene would have made exciting theatrical fare, but Chekhov chose not to dramatize it. His characteristic method was to dramatize instead a potpourri of secondary actions, usually based upon or motivated by the central action, but sometimes related to it only tangentially. He buried

his plots underneath the surface of the plays to concentrate on the smaller actions that take place on the surface. Maurice Valency, in his fine critical biography, compared Chekhov's plots to "an invisible skeleton, an indispensable armature which sustains and justifies, but is not in itself the action of the play."[23] Those secondary actions that do get dramatized on stage seem to be disciplined only by the frame of the departure-arrival pattern Chekhov favored. Within that frame, there is no linear progression of cause-effect relationships between actions. The relationship of one action to another is that of juxtaposition rather than causality, a juxtaposition in which one scene modifies another by ironic or discordant contrast.

By avoiding big scenes and by burying his plots, Chekhov was able to "let everything on the stage be just as complicated, and at the same time just as simple as it is in life." That complex simplicity has additional implications for Chekhov's denouements. He was convinced that in real life people do not change very much. They make mistakes, they suffer, and they see the world change around them, but these events do not make much difference; people remain what they always were, and sometimes that fact is the only thing they learn. Translated into dramaturgic terms, this means that Chekhov's plays may contain recognitions, but no peripetia.

The time-honored formula for dramatic action is that a conflict is resolved by means of a peripety, usually accompanied by a discovery or recognition, and that peripety leads to a resolution. Chekhov's plays stop short of any peripetias. The disturbing visit of the beautiful Elena changes nothing; it merely makes Sonia, Astroff, and Vanya more excruciatingly aware of the waste of their lives. The Prozoroffs are the same at the end of the play as they were at the beginning--only more so. Nothing happens to save the cherry orchard. There is a small, ironic reversal in The Cherry Orchard, however; Semyonoff-Pishtchik's estate is saved, but it is saved by superfluous chance, and the gratuitous discovery of white clay on his land merely highlights the fate of the Gayeff estate. The kind of recognition that is characteristically Chekhovian leads to no changes at all; his characters come to the awareness that what seemed to be so really is so. Eric Bentley, in In Search of Theatre, contrasts this kind of recognition with that of Ibsen:

> In Ibsen the terrible thing is that the surface of everyday life is a smooth deception. In Chekhov the terrible thing is that the surface of everyday life is itself a kind of tragedy. In Ibsen the whole surface of life is suddenly burst by volcanic eruption. In Chekhov the crust is all too firm; the volcanic energies of men have no chance of emerging.[24]

Chekhov's practice of suspending rather than resolving his actions goes a long way toward explaining the strangely disquieting effect of his plays. It would have been conventionally satisfying for Lopahin to marry Varya, for Olga to have ousted Natasha, for a *deus ex machina* to have saved the cherry orchard. When none of these things happens, we are forced to realize that life is not that way, and we feel a sense of loss. Though an equilibrium of sorts is established at the end of each play, the pity is that it is so much like the equilibrium at the beginning.

The waste, the pity, the loss that we feel after reading all his plays is perhaps the most distinctive Chekhovian note. No one who has addressed himself to either Chekhov's plays or his short stories has failed to mention the particular mood of wistful sadness that pervades all his works. Russian critics claimed that Chekhov invented the "literature of *nastroenie*."[25] Many critics, failing to find any plot, but reluctant to say that the plays lacked unity, spoke of their unity of mood. "Unity of mood" is not a very useful critical concept, although it is descriptive of the identical effect evoked by all the plays. But that effect is difficult even to define and impossible to analyze. One can only suggest tentatively that the Chekovian mood is created in part by the beautiful natural settings,

in part by the sound effects, in part by the indeterminate plots, in part by the absence of definite themes, and in part by the poignant lives of the fragile patricians who occupy his stage.

When Chekhov looked about him at "life as it is," he noticed no plots and no themes. But he did notice people. The main energy of all of his plays, therefore, is given to characterization, and, unlike Ibsen's, many of Chekhov's characters seem to be allowed to exist quite apart from their specific service to plot or idea. Chekhov's method of characterization is perhaps his most important contribution to the modern stage.

First of all, he dispensed with conventional heroes and stereotypes and protagonists. He dispensed with heroes for the simple reason that he never saw any. He explained to a young writer:

> I am often reproached--even Tolstoy has reproached me--with writing about trifles. I'm told I have no positive heroes; revolutionaries, Alexanders of Macedon, or even, as in Leskov's stories, honest police inspectors. But where am I to get them from? Our life is provincial, our towns are unpaved, our villages are poor, our people are shabby. When we are young, we all chirp rapturously like sparrows on a heap of muck, but at the age of forty, we are already old and start thinking of death. . . . What sort of heroes are we?[26]

He dispensed with stereotypical characters for the equally simple reason that he had seem them too often. He said,

> Retired captains in the reserve, with huge, red noses, newspaper-reporters who drink, starving authors, consumptive women-toilers, honest young people without a flaw in their make-up, ideal maidens, good-natured nurses,--all these have been described again and again, and should be avoided as a pitfall.[27]

The avoidance of heroes and melodramatic stereotypes made Chekhov modern, but it did not necessarily distinguish him from Ibsen, Shaw, and Strindberg. The dismissal of protagonists did. In each of the plays after Ivanov, Chekhov distributed the focus of his attention among members of a group rather than concentrating it on a single character. The concept of ensemble character-drawing was so new that it was only because of the happy alliance of Chekhov with the orchestrated acting techniques of the Moscow Art Theatre that it could even be understood.

Although Chekhov concentrated on many characters equally, he slighted none; he saw them all as individuals. Seeing them as individuals meant that he was not so much interested in his characters' dramatic functions as in their essence, or in "life as it is" for characters who are unaware that they have any dramatic function at all. And the method he found for expressing the inner lives or essence of these characters was quite unprecedented.

Stage dialogue typically serves two functions: it reveals the thoughts of the characters and it moves

the action forward. Consider a bit of dialogue from the second act of Ibsen's Hedda Gabler:

> HEDDA: Do you find it so very strange that a young girl--when she can do so, without anyone knowing--
> LOVBORG: Yes--?
> HEDDA: --that she wants to take a peek into a world which--
> LOVBORG: --which--
> HEDDA: --she is not supposed to know anything about?
> LOVBORG: So that was it!
> HEDDA: That, too. That, too--I think--
> LOVBORG: Companionship in the lust for life. But why couldn't that at least have continued?
> HEDDA: That was your own fault.
> LOVBORG: You were the one who broke off.
> HEDDA: Yes, when reality threatened to enter our relationship. Shame on you, Eilert Lovborg! How could you want to do a thing like that to your frank and trusting comrade!
> LOVBORG: (clenching his hands) Oh, why didn't you do it! Why didn't you shoot me down, as you said you would!
> HEDDA: Because I'm scared of scandal.
> LOVBORG: Yes, Hedda. You are really a coward.[28]

The main purpose of this scene is expository. With admirable economy Ibsen informs us about the nature of Lovborg and Hedda's past relationship, about Hedda's cowardice, about Lovborg's latent death wish. He also points ahead to the gun shots, deaths, and scandals later in the play. The scene is well made. It is so well made that we have the impression that Hedda and Lovborg are collaborating in the making of their scene; their lines are almost stichomythic in the way they dovetail into each other, and their words are precisely the ones that underscore one of the themes of the play. Lovborg speaks of "companionship in the lust for life,"

and Hedda notes how "reality threatened to enter our relationship." Hedda and Lovborg are proving something for Ibsen, and thus their words have a direct relation to their thoughts.

Chekhov was aware that in off-stage conversations, words may have only an oblique relation to thoughts, and he allowed his dialogue to reveal this truism. In real life words serve many different functions. Sometimes we use words to conceal or camouflage our thoughts. Often we express our private train of thoughts without regard for the topic at hand and without reference to others. Sometimes we say nothing, even when there is much that could be said. Most of us guard very carefully the hidden depths of our personalities; none of us expresses everything that he thinks or feels. And so it is with Chekhov's characters. Chekhov was interested first of all in the guarded depths of their personalities, and this he could only reveal indirectly or obliquely by letting the characters talk out of their hearts willy-nilly and without apparent regard for the advancement of action or idea.

In Act III of The Cherry Orchard the central action of the play--the auction--is taking place off stage. On stage there is a party. In the inner room there is dancing and music which frequently spills into the downstage area, where the following dialogue ensues:

(TROFIMOFF and LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA dance in the ballroom and then in the drawing room.)

LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA: Merci. I'll sit down awhile--(Sitting down) I'm tired.

ANYA (ANYA enters. Agitated): And just now in the kitchen some man was saying that the cherry orchard had been sold today.

LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA: Sold to whom?

ANYA: He didn't say who to. He's gone. (Dancing with TROFIMOFF, they pass into the ballroom.)

YASHA: It was some old man babbling there. A stranger.

FIERS: And Leonid Andreevich is still not here, he has not arrived. The overcoat he has on is light, mid-season--let's hope he won't catch cold. Ach, these young things!

LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA: I shall die this minute. Go, Yasha, find out who it was sold to.

YASHA: But he's been gone a long time, the old fellow. (Laughing.)

LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA (With some annoyance): Well, what are you laughing at? What are you so amused at?

YASHA: Epihodoff is just too funny. An empty-headed man. Twenty-two misfortunes!

LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA: Fiers, if the estate is sold, where will you go?

FIERS: Wherever you say, there I'll go.

LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA: Why do you look like that? Aren't you well? You know you ought to go to bed--

FIERS: Yes--(With a sneer) I go to bed and without me who's going to serve, who'll take care of things? I'm the only one in the whole house.

YASHA (To LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA): Lyuboff Andreevna, let me ask a favor of you, do be so kind! If you ever go back to Paris, take me with you, please do! It's impossible for me to stay here. (Looking around him, and speaking in a low voice) Why talk about it? You can see for yourself it's an uncivilized country, an immoral people and not only that, there's the boredom of it. The food they give us in that kitchen is abominable and there's that Fiers, too, walking about and muttering all kinds of words that are out of place. Take me with you, be so kind!

PISHTCHIK (Pishtchik enters): Allow me to ask you--for a little waltz, most beautiful lady--(LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA goes with him) Charming lady, I must borrow a hundred and eighty roubles from you--will borrow--(Dancing) a hundred and eighty roubles-- (They pass into the ballroom.)

YASHA (Singing low): "Wilt thou know the unrest in my soul!"

Here we have no sense at all that the characters are joining forces to move the play forward or to reveal to us their characters. Lyuboff is in a state of nervous anxiety about Gayeff's fortunes at the auction--anxiety which she tries to control and which no one else on stage seems to share. Anya lets fall the bombshell--the news that the orchard has been sold. But Anya has her mind on other things. Trofimoff has instructed her that "All Russia is our orchard," and orchards of any sort are less important to her than the chance to dance with Trofimoff. Her reply to Lyuboff's question is hurried and unconcerned. Fiers, preoccupied as usual with properties and the specific care of Gayeff, merely adds to her anxiety and frustration. Yasha is no help either. He is reflecting patronizingly and smugly on his unfortunate rival for the favors of Dunyasha. Pishtchik seizes the opportunity of a dance with Lyuboff to ask once again for a loan. And so it goes. The question that hangs over the scene is this: Who bought the orchard? But nearly every speech in the

scene is irrelevant to that question. Instead, the speeches reveal the separate preoccupations of each character.

Sometimes the speeches cover up even that. Chekhov's characters are reticent people, for the most part, and they occasionally use language to conceal rather than to reveal their thoughts. In The Cherry Orchard there is a scene between Lopahin and Varya which, in the hands of a more conventional dramatist, would be an obligatory love scene. In Chekhov's hands the scene is abortive; very few of Chekhov's lovers find their love reciprocated. Lopahin is expected to ask Varya to marry him, and she is prepared to say "yes." But Lopahin talks instead about the weather and his trip to Harkhoff. Varya mentions a broken thermometer and pretends to be searching for something. The tension between the trivia that is spoken and the deeper feelings that remain unspoken is punctuated by painful pauses. The scene is slow and awkward. Nothing happens.

We do not know why Lopahin does not ask Varya to marry him. Perhaps he is too embarrassed, perhaps he is in love with Lyuboff, perhaps he is too self-conscious of his peasant origins, or perhaps he is not all that fond of Varya. We can guess, but we can never know for sure. Chekhov invariably left the question of his

characters' motives unanswered, for he was reluctant to view them as behavioral case studies. Valency observes that

> the result of this resolute objectivity is an immense gain in the vitality of the characterization. Modern drama, with its rigorously analytic method, often gives the impression of an autopsy, an examination of the walking dead. But Chekhov's characters spring to life readily, in all their dimension, intact and self-contained the moment they are contemplated. They are neither analyzed nor dissected; their inner life is their own. They remain mysterious, and their mystery interests us particularly because the author does not suggest that he understands it; and if he understands it, he makes no move to betray it.[29]

Nor does Chekhov allow his characters to betray each other. Much of dramatic dialogue reads like a debate in which the dramatist uses one character to unmask or score over an opponent. But when Chekhov's characters say something banal, insincere, or unkind, the remark is allowed to pass or to die in a pause, and the audience is left considering its source.

This is not to say that Chekhov's characters never say anything incisive or condemning or directly revelatory. They do. But most often Chekhov undercuts the weight of their remarks with a gesture or disparate action. In a heated moment of truth in The Cherry Orchard, Trofimoff tells Lyuboff what he thinks of her Parisian lover: "But he is a scoundrel, only you, you are the only one that doesn't know it. He is a petty scoundrel, a nonentity--" Stung into anger,

Lyuboff retaliates with: "You are not above love, Petya, you are, as our Fiers would say, just a good-for-nothing. Imagine, at your age, not having a mistress--!" Both accusations, true as they are, are undercut by Trofimoff's stagey over-reaction and farcical exit.

> TROFIMOFF (Horrified): This is terrible! What is she saying! (Goes quickly into the ballroom, clutching his head) This is horrible--I can't bear it, I am going-- (Goes out but immediately returns) All is over between us. (Goes out into the hall.)
> LYUBOFF ANDREEVNA (Shouting after him): Petya, wait! You funny creature, I was joking! Petya! (In the hall you hear someone running up the stairs and suddenly falling back down with a crash. You hear ANYA and VARYA scream but immediately you hear laughter) What's that?
> ANYA (ANYA runs in. Laughing): Petya fell down the stairs!

Here Chekhov uses a combination of the head-clutching of old-fashioned melodrama and the pratfalls of farce to touch a truth that is less theatrical, but much deeper, than the actual reputation of Lyuboff's lover or the sex life of Trofimoff. What the characters think of themselves is more to Chekhov's point than what is "objectively" true of them, and the ironic fact is that they sometimes think of themselves theatrically.[30] Trofimoff's image of himself is that of misunderstood visionary. In his love scene with Anya in Act II, he orates to her a self-portrait which seems at once rehearsed and aesthetically satisfying to him:

> Believe me, Anya, believe me! I am not thirty yet, I am young, I am still a student, but I have already borne so much! Every winter I am hungry, sick, anxious, poor as a beggar, and--where has destiny not chased me, where haven't I been! And yet, my soul has always, every minute, day and night, been full of inexplicable premonitions. I have a premonition of happiness, Anya, I see it already--

Such a man--who can speak thus of himself to an infatuated young girl on a moonlit night--would be precisely the kind of character who would clutch his head and say the theatrical line: "All is over between us." The line rings true. It also rings false. Chekhov has undercut the way Trofimoff sees himself by his own words, by his actions, by the way the other characters see him, and by ringing the changes on a traditional theatrical convention.

This method of undercutting, or of the juxtaposition of line or action, became Chekhov's sharpest tool for probing the deep and elusive truths of "life as it is." "Chekhov knows," says Styan,

> that by reversing a current of feeling, muting a climax, toppling a character's dignity, contradicting one statement with another, juxtaposing one impression with its opposite, he is training his audience to see the truth of the total situation. To be compassionate and yet cool at the same time is to take a big step nearer this truth, and Chekhov's final, hard discipline is to prove that the truth is relative by trying it dialectically on his audience's feelings.[31]

The "training" of American audiences "to see the truth of the total situation" was a process that

took several decades. But as Americans became more and more familiar with Chekhov's innovative methods of plot-making, character-drawing, and undercutting, the Chekhovian truths also became available to them.

CHAPTER II

CHEKHOV ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

Chekhov was first brought to the American stage by way of the Little Theatre movement. During the 1915-1916 season, seven years before the Moscow Art Theatre formally introduced Chekhov to Americans, the Washington Square Players twice included Chekhov in the repertory.

A casually organized group of theatrical amateurs, the Washington Square Players were dedicated to the production of plays written by their own members and by unfamiliar foreign playwrights not likely to be performed on Broadway. Not many foreign playwrights were familiar to Americans or likely to be performed on Broadway. The Broadway hits of 1915--Fair and Warmer, Hit-the-Trail Holiday, Common Clay, Hip-Hip-Hooray, The Boomerang--both reflected and formed American theatrical tastes. But at their tiny Bandbox Theatre on East 57th St., the Washington Square Players bravely offered Andreyev, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, and Chekhov. In

1915, the first year of their existence, they staged Chekhov's one-act farce The Bear. At the close of their first season, they performed The Sea Gull.

It is quite possible that the Washington Square Players chose to perform The Sea Gull as much because it was a play about an artist as because it was a play by Chekhov. Earnest, young, and self-consciously artistic, the Players often chose plays about artistic temperaments, and they chose to end their tenure at the Bandbox Theater with the death of Trepleff. The Sea Gull was the first full-length drama the company had ever attempted, and they were, remarked the New York Times reviewer, beyond their depth. Moreover, the play itself was peculiar.

> It is all most elusive, after the Russian manner, and while there are no doubt countless hidden beauties in the play discernible to the Russian eye, they remained pretty generally hidden to the untrained Western eye after last night's interpretation.[1]

The "countless hidden beauties" in Chekhov remained hidden to nearly everyone, with the exception of two precocious reviewers for The New Republic. Gertrude Besse King saw Chekhov's plays performed in Russia, and she sent back rave reviews, calling them "a miracle."[2] Philip Littell shared her enthusiasm, and his comments on The Sea Gull are remarkably insightful.

> The most surprising thing about them [Chekhov's characters] is just the naturalness of their behavior, the liberty which Tchekov gives them to be themselves. He does not seem to interfere at all, to intrude at any point his will upon their wills or their will-lessness. And he ends by making you see this Russian world of his as a place where self-knowledge deepens boredom, though boredom may be as acute without self-knowledge, where men and women are discouraged, where success is as futile as failure, were life is sad, where ennui stretches away on all sides, endlessly, like the great Russian plains. But the picture is not hard or dry; for the painter has the secret of a quiet, silvery, minor-key pity, and is often amused by the people he pities.[3]

Such naturalness of style, however, was not necessarily satisfying to American audiences, as Littell ruefully noted at the close of his review: "'The Sea Gull' will certainly dissatisfy many of us, when we go to the theatre again in the autumn, with the unlifelike relevance and orderliness of what we see there."[4]

Despite the efforts of the few Americans who reviewed English translations of Chekhov's plays as they appeared or commented on the performances of his plays in England and Russia, Chekhov remained, until the Twenties, a minor curiosity, a theatrical footnote. It was not until the Moscow Art Theatre took The Cherry Orchard to Broadway that Chekhov made am impact on the American stage.

The fact that the Moscow Art Theatre came at all is indicative of a new American attitude toward European drama. Many Americans had been abroad during

World War I, and when they returned, they helped create a climate of receptivity toward things foreign. Although Broadway itself rarely attempted to mount a European play in translation, it welcomed foreign visitors like Fermin Gemier of the Odeon, and it paid Eleanora Duse $2,500 to perform in Italian.[5]

The Moscow Art Theatre arrived in New York City after a flurry of advance publicity. On January 8, 1923, the company opened at the Al Jolson Theater with a performance of Tsar Fyodor Ivanovitch. After an eight-week engagement they toured Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia, and returned to New York in May for two final weeks of performances. On November 9, 1923, the company came to the United States for a second season that lasted until May 11, 1924. Their touring repertoire included Tolstoy's Tsar Fyodor, Gorky's The Lower Depths, Turgenev's The Lady from the Provinces, excerpts from Dostoievsky's The Brothers Karamazov, and Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, The Three Sisters, and Uncle Vanya. It was the first time any of these plays had been performed in America.

Reaction to the Moscow Art Theatre was mixed. Most of those who came to the sold-out performances came to see the famous Stanislavsky ensemble in action, and they were not disappointed. Although the plays were performed in Russian, the acting was much praised.

In The Cherry Orchard, Stanislavsky himself played Gayeff, and Olga Knipper-Tchekhova played Mme Ranevskaya. Special matinees were scheduled on Fridays to accommodate those New York actors and actresses who otherwise would not be able to attend the performances.[6] The idea of a repertory company--relatively new to American theater--seemed attractive, and the Theatre Guild met with Stanislavsky to discuss the possibility of forming a Guild Acting Company.[7] "Here was that rarest of events in the theatre anywhere," exclaimed Stark Young in The New Republic, "the combination of acting, producing and dramatic writing, one proceeding from another and all illuminating one idea. . . ."[8]

The acting of the plays was praised far more than the plays themselves, an understandable reaction, since few critics understood the Russian text. Ludwig Lewisohn of the Nation confessed to extreme boredom.

> To listen to a play in a foreign language, to realize that the acting is superb and yet to lose the concrete, human texture of the lines, is an experience not easily to be risked, not lightly ever again to be repeated. I go to the theatre for the play.[9]

John Corbin, writing for the New York Times, was not so much bored as censorious of the gloomy Slavic temperament he saw portrayed. "What must one think," he asked rhetorically,

> of a man of genius who deliberately deals in pessimism, holding up before his countrymen a picture of their will and character at its lowest ebb--of a nation that accepts this image as true and significant and throws about it the utmost glamour of artistic representation? . . . When exploited as a commodity, surely, Sunny Jim is preferable to Gloomy Ivan, less pernicious to the national character. . . . It bodes ill for the Russian nation if it has no loftier notion of living, no firmer purpose, no greater power of tragic exultation than is revealed in these plays.[10]

Because he seemed to equate praise of the Russians with a reproach to native American theater, Corbin found fault with the performances as well. The sets were far below Broadway standards for realism, he noted, and, although the acting was very good--with the exceptions of Stanislavsky, who was too vigorous and orderly for the part of Gayeff, and Olga Knipper-Tchekhova, who was too Junoesque for Mme Ranevskaya--America's actors and actresses were equally impressive. Rather resentfully casting his lot with Sunny Jim and the American theater, Corbin declared that he liked John Ferguson, Passions for Men, and Rain quite as well as The Cherry Orchard. The Russian productions might be fine, but ". . . if some Moscovite should rise and tell us that in any season our own stage produces casts as perfect and ensembles as finely studied in detail, it would be quite possible to believe him."[11]

John Corbin's reluctance to appear unpatriotic by unabashedly enjoying foreign fare was, perhaps,

shared by many Americans. It is often difficult to determine, except by box-office scores, what the average theater-goer's reaction is to a given play. But John Van Alstyne Weaver, popular poet of American slang, suggested one such response in a poem he submitted to the New York Times. The persona of the poem, in Natty Bumpo tradition, describes an ambivalent experience that the review for the Times may have understood.

A 100 Per Cent American Speaks:

> The wife says, "What you want to see them for?
> It's only a bunch of dirty Bolshevicky
> That's tryin' to turn the country upside down
> The way they done their own. Why don't they stay
> In Russia, where they belong?" And so I says,
> "Well, I'll go there and give the stuff the razz."
>
> I stands in line for a couple hours or so,
> And finely gets a seat in the gallery
> In with the foreigners and all the garlic.
> The name of the show was called "The Cherry Orchard,"
> And the first two acts was sure the bunk to me--
> A lot of people runnin'up and down
> In a great big room, carryin' suitcases and trunks,
> And whisperin' in the corners. After that
> They sat around in a silly-lookin' field,
> With hay, and done a whole lot more talkin',
> And it sounded like they was talkin' English,
> But makin'up words just while they went along.
> I couldn't make out nothin' from the program,
> And so I ast one of them Bolshevicky
> Behind me if he wouldn't put me wise.
> And so he says it was a real rich family
> That didn't know how to manage property
> Because they couldn't keep their minds on it,
> And when they tried to talk, got makin' jokes.
> And one of the birds that useta be a slave,
> Or I guess his old man was, well, anyway,
> This bird was tryin' to tell 'em what to do.
> He says that they should take the Cherry orchard
> And cut it up in little lots--you know,
> Like Pleasant Heighths--suburban subdivision--

That sort of thing, and sell 'em. And that way
They could save half the old farm. See? But they
Just wouldn't listen. They was nice enough,
But nit-wits, see? And in the third act, then,
They're havin' a dance, and waitin' for the news
From the auction sale. The brother went to the auction
With money that they borrowed from a aunt,
And just when they're havin' the swellest kind of a time
The brother comes back. And he says the money
Was not enough. And so they lost the place,
And what do you think? The guy that was a slave
He went and bought it! And he comes in soused,
And yells around about how proud he is.
So then the last act's where they got to move,
And packin' up the stuff, and sayin' good-bye,
And--listen, I can't make out yet how it happened,
But when that great big goof looked at the orchard,
And I could hear the axes cuttin' the trees,
And all of a sudden this six-foot bird breaks down,
And stuffed his handerchief right in his mouth,
And real tears in his eyes--can y' imagine?
I just set there and blubbered like a baby.
I sure do hope nobody didn't see me.
Just think of a bunch of low-down Bolshevicky
That can't talk even a word of English, makin'
A hard-boiled egg like me cry like a kid!
And me not understandin' what they said!
I tell you what. It's just like I was watchin'
A movie where somebody told me what
Was goin' on, and not a wild movie, either,
Hardly anything happenin' at all,
But with the best actors that ever was.
Why did it get me? I ain't goin' again.
I don't like things that I can't understand,
And yet can get me like them foreigners did.[12]

John V. A. Weaver

However mixed the reactions to the Moscow Art Theatre performances were, there is no doubt that the Russian visitors changed the complexion of American theatre. They left in their wake new standards for acting, a new concept of repertory theater, and at least one devotee of the plays of Chekhov.

That energetic devotee was Eva Le Gallienne, who, in 1926, organized the Civic Repertory Theatre, an ensemble company devoted to presenting classic plays at cheap prices. Among the fourteen permanent members of the company was Alla Nazimova, a former student at the Moscow Art Theatre, who had emigrated to America in 1905. The Civic Repertory Theatre presented The Three Sisters as the second play of its first season. It was the first time the play had ever been performed in English in America. Eva Le Gallienne both directed the play and cast herself in the role of Masha. Quite naturally, the performance was compared with that of the Moscow Art Theatre, and "naturally, too, that comparison is unfavorable," said John Mason Brown.

> Obviously Miss Le Gallienne is not yet Madame Tchekova any more than Egon Brecher is Stanislavsky or Sayre Crowley is Katchelov. Obviously the fulness of that original production is not to be found in this one. The amazing thing is that the comparison offers no handicap to enjoyment, and that this present company, but recently assembled, succeeds so well in mastering so many of the difficulties that the play presents. Its performance is much more than competent.[13]

The Three Sisters took a permanent place among the company's offerings, along with The Good Hope, Cradle Song, and The Master Builder. In 1928 the company added The Cherry Orchard to their repertory, with Alla Nazimova in the part of Mme Ranevskaya and Eva Le Gallienne playing Varya. In 1929 they opened their season with The Sea Gull.

Eva Le Gallienne's company was not the only one performing Chekhov in the Twenties. The first English version of The Cherry Orchard was staged by James B. Fagan at the Bijou Theater. The play opened on March 5, 1928, and played for six matinee performances. The production was a failure; J. Brooks Atkinson spoke for himself and others when he confessed to being "drenched in boredom" by a "lamentably inadequate performance."[14]

The second production of The Sea Gull in English was mounted by the Yiddish Art Theatre, a co-operative acting company directed by Leo Bulgakov, a former member of the Moscow Art Theatre. The company modeled itself on the Moscow Art Theatre, and in November 1928 they interrupted their run of Kidush Hashem to present a few performances of The Cherry Orchard in honor of the thirtieth anniversary of their Russian prototype.[15] Later that season they staged The Sea Gull, which ran for thirty-three performances at the Comedy Theatre. The performance received modest praise; the play itself received greater praise. "Even in a wavering performance," said Atkinson, "'The Sea-Gull' is sheer light."[16]

Although the credit for introducing English versions of The Cherry Orchard and The Sea Gull to America belonged to others, Eva Le Gallienne clearly deserved the credit for making Chekhov comprehensible

and familiar. The Fagan and Bulgakov productions received perfunctory critical attention; only after the Civic Repertory Company's offerings did the critics begin to examine the peculiar charm of Eva Le Gallienne's favorite playwright. Most critics who had commented on the Moscow Art Theatre performances had assumed that Chekhov was writing about a very unusual and decadent society, totally alien to American sensibilities.[17] The Fagan performance of The Cherry Orchard had not disabused them of this assumption. Atkinson had reluctantly concluded

> that Chekhov was writing so fervently for his own peculiar times and his own countrymen that no performance in English so many years later can capture the beauties of his play. . . . Acting "The Cherry Orchard" requires, one suspects, a personal experience of the same futilities in politics and living. Spirit shaped the play; spirit must give it expression.[18]

The Civic Repertory Theatre's productions made possible critical interpretations that were more universal and more sympathetic. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, who had left the Moscow Art Theatre's performance of The Three Sisters in bewildered disgust during the third act, announced that Eva Le Gallienne's The Cherry Orchard was "one of the great moments of the season. . . . The Cherry Orchard is written in a spirit of delicate and ironic comedy. The Civic Repertory company has caught and sustained the note."[19] Eight months

after Atkinson had sadly assumed that the meaning of The Cherry Orchard was forever locked into a former era and foreign psyche, he was surprised into understanding by the Civic Repertory Theatre's interpretation of the play.

> Excepting the Moscow Art Theatre's production, which suffered the handicap of being in a foreign language, no acted performance here has ever revealed the compassionate beauties of character we thought we saw lovingly tucked away in the text. Now the secret is out. In a limpid, modulated performance Miss Le Gallienne's troupe conjures up the serenity of Chekhov's personality.[20]

Joseph Wood Krutch, too, talked about Chekhov's secret--"the secret of a charm . . . the charm of a mood generated by Chekhov's sympathetic and yet amused contemplation of his passionately futile puppets."[21] Critics began to analyze Chekhov's sympathetically amused perception of his characters and to articulate his vision of life. By the end of the Twenties, their comments had already become repetitive, and Krutch and others began their reviews by saying that there was no need to speak further about Chekhov's charm or melancholy humor. Stark Young summed up the impact Chekhov had had on America during the Twenties and suggested what his influence might be for the future of American drama:

> Of the important European dramatists, Chekhov is at present the one who can be of most use to us. The technique of Ibsen is by now absorbed everywhere into modern playwriting, in so far as an insistent technical method, as divorced from the

> moral seriousness behind it, can be absorbed. At the other extreme, the poetic method seems far off from what is being thought for the stage. Chekhov's is of them all, the method most profoundly available to our uses. Without more management or stylization than we employ, without more removal or traditional manner than we practice, his realism has the same world as our realism, the only world our art knows for the present. What Chekhov can give us is plain. More delicacy of perception, more deeply interwoven themes, more subtlety of feeling, more poignancy, sincerity and truth of intention. For our American dramatists of today he offers the closest great influence to be had.[22]

It was not until some years later that Chekhov's influence on dramatists became clearly discernible. In the meantime, his dramas became available to larger audiences. Until 1930, Chekhov had been carefully nurtured in small, experimental, off-Broadway theater groups, groups which existed more for the purpose of improving the standards of American drama than for the purpose of making money. After 1930, his plays were performed on Broadway, and the Broadway maxim that it is impossible to revive a classic without a star was brought to bear on the productions.

In 1930 Jed Harris produced Uncle Vanya at the Cort Theater. The star was Lillian Gish, brought from Hollywood to play the part of Elena. It was the first time Uncle Vanya had been performed since the Moscow Art Theatre had introduced it during their second season, and most critics agreed that it was the least entertaining of Chekhov's major plays. But the production won high praise. Now that critics had seen

English versions of all Chekhov's major plays, they began to speak of a tradition of Russian theater, and to imply that Chekhov was becoming the darling of the cognoscenti. Atkinson wrote,

> To many theatregoers Chekhov is still an enigma and a bore. In spite of the ballyhoo of Chekhov up and down Broadway and the belated recognition of a master hand, the drama of ellipsis and inference is still, for many people, completely undramatic. But to those who have the patience to listen Chekhov has pith and truth to convey.[23]

Even Eva Le Gallienne ultimately brought Chekhov to Broadway. By 1933, her Civic Repertory Theatre had to be temporarily abandoned because of financial losses. In order to keep the company together and in hopes of raising enough money for another year's repertory program, Miss Le Gallienne took the season's most successful production, Alice in Wonderland, uptown to the New Amsterdam Theatre. The original 1928 production of The Cherry Orchard was revived and added to the bill. Although Alla Nazimova again played Ranevskaya, the production contained no glittering stars, and had to be played as the weaker half of a two-play repertory. The Cherry Orchard played the first part of every week, while the popular Alice in Wonderland packed the theater on weekends.

In 1938 two of Broadway's favorite stars lent their lustre to The Sea Gull. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne played Trigorin and Arkadina in the Theatre

Guild's production of the play at the Shubert Theater. The natural question to be asked of such a production was this: How do performers who are trained to be Broadway stars fare in a play deliberately written for a homogeneous ensemble? The critics' answer was nearly unanimous--Lunt fared relatively well, while Fontanne failed altogether. John Mason Brown spoke for most of his colleagues when he observed that

> [Mr. Lunt's] Trigorin fits easily into the ensemble. He is quiet, unassuming, and co-operative. . . . His whole performance is acted not only from within the character he is creating but well within the demands of the ensemble.
>
> Miss Fontanne is not so successful in meeting either need. Her red-wigged Irina does not seem to have been approached from within. She is a totally external creation; a noisy, blatant, road-company Queen Bess. . . . There is no subtlety about her Irina. She refuses to let us discover her faults for ourselves. She wears them with as much concealment as a sandwich man carries his ads.[24]

Brooks Atkinson remarked that the play had become "robustly American," and his final evaluation illuminated what he meant: ". . . only half of the plays is to be found on the stage of the Shubert just now. It is the literal half. The other half is the genius of Chekhov's 'The Sea Gull.'"[25]

Whatever the Theatre Guild's production missed in the way of insightful interpretation was largely compensated for by Stark Young's new translation of the play. Until this time, the recognized translator

of Chekhov's plays had been Constance Garnett, "whose admirable zeal and indefatigable perseverance was only equalled by her inadequate knowledge of Russian which never rose above the dictionary level."[26] There had been other translators, among them Rose Caylor, who adapted the original text for the Jed Harris production of Uncle Vanya, and George Calderon, who provided the translation used in the James B. Fagan production of The Cherry Orchard. But the clarity and unaffected simplicity of the new translation was a happy improvement over all predecessors. Stark Young himself wrote at some length about his endeavor.

> . . . the idea holds that Chekhov is something smokey as to the lines, moody, complex, soulful perhaps, certainly very often vague. I once shared this notion. And lately I have been looking into some of those translations with which I began my Chekhov acquaintance, and have searched for instances that might easily excuse or justify such a conception of his style. It is no wonder that we all thought what we did.[27]

Elsewhere, Young demonstrated how Chekhov had been blurred, flattened, and complicated in other translations. Nearly everyone who commented on the production noted that the vagueness that they had previously thought to be a part of Chekhov's style proved instead to belong to the styles of earlier translations.

The Sea Gull ran for forty-one performances, a moderate success for a revival. Chekhov was in the air and everyone, guessed Brooks Atkinson, was planning to

stage The Three Sisters the next season. The group that actually did so was the Surry Players, a relatively young group of actors and actresses, who opened the play on October 14, 1939, at the Longacre Theater. The Surry Players were the first performers who tried to present Chekhov in a new way. Until this time, it seemed, Chekhov done in a traditional manner had been innovative enough, but the Longacre production tried to break away from the detailed realism that had normally been the setting for Chekhovian productions. Instead, the play was staged on multi-leveled platforms with roofless, airy expanses above the scattered properties. The experimental staging illuminated nothing, for nearly all the values and subtleties of the play were left unexplained. The actors, said John Mason Brown, "were playing a hopeless game of blind man's bluff."[28] The Three Sisters closed at the Longacre after only nine performances.

The Longacre debacle was followed, two years later, by another production of The Three Sisters, this one an assemblage of the most glamorous stars the theater had ever seen in a single cast. During Christmas week of 1942, Katherine Cornell, the American theater's sole actress-manager, opened the play at the Ethel Barrymore Theater. Her husband, Guthrie McClintic, directed it, and the roles of Olga, Masha, Irina, and

Natasha were played by Judith Anderson, Katherine Cornell, Gertrude Musgrove, and Ruth Gordon. The collection of so many celebrated actresses elicited a great deal of publicity and curiosity. The three sisters appeared on the cover of the December 21 issue of Time magazine, and feature articles addressed themselves to such questions as which star was assigned to which dressing room, and whether or not the actresses got on with each other. Guthrie McClintic assured readers of Theatre Arts that the ladies were a "congenial threesome," and described rehearsal schedules and techniques.[29] It was, raved Time, a "dream production."[30]

It was also a somewhat peculiar choice for Christmas week of 1942. America was in the throes of a war, the nation was caught up in a frenzy of patriotism, and Broadway was anxiously and self-consciously concerned about justifying its existence in terms of the turbulent reality outside itself. The industry found two ways of doing so: one might view the theater as a place of escape, "the shortest distance between two hours,"[31] or one might see it as a vehicle for propaganda, a means of bringing the war home to the people. The first justification was the easier, of course, since Broadway had been providing escapist entertainment all along. During the early days of the war, particularly,

Broadway brought out its gayest wares--vaudeville, musicals, light comedies, and farces--as anodyne to the battlefront headlines that lit up Times Square. Most critics, however, seemed uncomfortable with the escapist theory, feeling that the function of a wartime theater should be reminder, not escape, and they periodically measured the theater's self-respect by counting the number of war plays on the boards. Though few of those war plays were ones that would live beyond the duration, they did allow the theater industry some relief from the uneasiness that came from its intimations of irrelevancy.

The Three Sisters fit neither category; it was not escape entertainment, nor was it a war play. It did reflect the national interest in Russia, but the Russia of World War II was nothing like the Russia of Chekhov. Newsweek commented that current events in Russia sadly dated The Three Sisters. "Remembering the Red Sniper Ludmila Pavlichenko makes it even harder to understand the futility of the three Prozorov girls. . . ."[32] John Gassner contrasted The Three Sisters with The Russian People, a new Soviet war play, in order to demonstrate the fact that Chekhov's old order had thoroughly disappeared.[33]

Although nearly all the critics praised the production of The Three Sisters, their praise was equivocated by a new impatience with the Chekhovian vision that they had heretofore found charming, sensitive, profound, or poignantly truthful. Several critics gave Chekhov a new label--that of minor playwright. Joseph Wood Krutch found it "hard to imagine a better production," but he added that

> one may, I think, just as well confess that there is a real sense in which Chekhov, like most modern writers, is minor, and that however grateful we may be for his virtues we would gladly, if we could, exchange them for major ones. No one who cares for the modern theater should miss this production. Nevertheless, passion is better than wistful charm, strong people are more interesting than weak ones, and an author who has some kind of faith in human nature is better than one who, however regretfully, gives it up. Moreover, a writer who can successfully handle a story by the normal method is even more impressive than one who can escape bathos and banality only by inverting it.[34]

Lewis Nichols, Atkinson's war-time replacement for the New York Times, found the play

> remote. The descendants of Olga and Masha and Irina, writing another page in Russian history this morning, make the history of the static efforts of the sisters to return to Moscow appear a bit out of the present world.[35]

And Mary McCarthy, summarizing the critical consensus, judged that the great talents gathered together for the all-star production were

> wasted on an inferior play by a dramatist whom we all revere but who, it must be confessed, seems dull and bookish in these stirring times.[36]

The "stirring times" of 1942 clearly precluded the play's striking a responsive chord in the hearts of war-time American patriots. The Three Sisters was "not for everybody," warned Wolcott Gibbs, and he went on to describe the complex, atypical American who might be considered the ideal spectator.

> [He] should have his own share of the paradoxes that make up the Russian character--an outlook on life both childlike and worldly, a sense of humor that derives almost equally from the graveyard and the nursery, and a mind in dubious balance between hilarity and rich gloom. Such people are almost sure to enjoy the absurd, tragic, long-drawn-out, and practically definitive study in frustration at the Ethel Barrymore. All others, with the exception of earnest scholars and theatrical technicians, are warned to think twice.[37]

Many Americans, apparently, did think twice, though perhaps they were drawn more by their favorite actresses than by the play itself. The Three Sisters ran for a record 123 performances, and was a financial success. It was also a popular success, as measured by the specialized war-time criteria of the response of the men in uniform. Guthrie McClintic reported that

> Both Kit and I are impressed by the tremendous amount of young people that come to see The Three Sisters and their enthusiasm is more than gratifying. Many soldiers and sailors have written keenly appreciative letters about it and one of our most treasured experiences was

> the performance we gave for the soldiers at Fort Meade one Sunday afternoon before we opened in New York. Their rapt attention and sensitive reaction to the play plus their cheers at the conclusion of the performance evoked from Miss Cornell her one and only curtain speech.[38]

The war years yielded one other Chekhov production. On January 25, 1944, The Cherry Orchard opened at the National Theater under the joint direction of Margaret Webster and the indefatigable Eva Le Gallienne, who also played Ranevskaya. The most notable feature of the production was that it was played for laughs, and, though most critics acknowledged that the play was, in a way, a comedy, they found the 1944 comedy excessive, wrenched out of proportion into burlesque and vaudeville. Kappo Phelan attempted to explain the directorial instinct that elicited such an interpretation.

> I think it is safe to say that Chekhov has made both the hero and the villain of the piece what we can only call progress; and that he has made its victim what we can only call beauty. And possibly it is true that for the average American audience, this contravention may lack point and importance; that any opposition of personality to competence, of grace to efficiency can, to the average American mind, make neither sense nor music . . . it is obviously in support of some such contention as this that the directors published their determination to produce the piece purely for comedy; and here for every reason (of craft as well as of heart) I know they have been wrong. For to present Chekhov as an excuse for a number of out-loud laughs is to abuse him. . . . Certainly to laugh at this play rather than with its

> characters is to find these people merely queer, stupid, capricious; it is to leave the theater long before the end.[39]

Although Phelan's contention that Chekhov's assumed priorities made "neither sense nor music" to most Americans was largely true, at least during the war years, it was equally true that The Cherry Orchard made more sense to Americans than did Chekhov's other plays. The Cherry Orchard had not been performed more often than the other plays, but it seemed, somehow, to make easier contact with the public. Many Americans persisted in identifying Chekhov with a single play. The greater ease with which The Cherry Orchard assumed a generic dimension may explain, in part, why the sense of estrangement that suffused nearly every critical response to the 1942 production of The Three Sisters was largely missing from the response to the 1944 Cherry Orchard.

The decade of the Forties saw one more Chekhov production on Broadway, this one imported from England. The Old Vic company, on a six-week engagement in America, included five performances of Uncle Vanya in a repertory completed by Shakespeare's Henry IV and Oedipus Rex, and Sheridan's The Critic. It had been sixteen years since American audiences had seen a performance of Uncle Vanya, and, for that reason alone, the play was welcomed by the critics.

The Laurence Olivier-Ralph Richardson production was lugubrious and overly conscientious, and it led critics once again to the conclusion that Chekhov was a difficult assignment for English-speaking actors. "'Uncle Vanya,' in this spring of 1946," said the New York Times,

> has the reputation something like Dr. Johnson's woman preacher--the marvel is not that it may not be done well but that it is done at all.[40]

It was not until the Fifties that Chekhov "done well" became both a marvel and a reality. The three productions of the Forties had been star-studded and lavishly mounted, but they had not done much to illuminate Chekhov. In the Fifties, however, a young director took the plays off Broadway, chose Stark Young's translations, and proceeded to disencumber the plays of the accumulated assumptions of two previous decades.

On February 25, 1955, The Three Sisters opened at the Fourth St. Theater. The theater was a long, narrow loft, divided in the center by an open stage. Half the audience sat on either side of the stage, and the public aisles served as stage exists and entrances. In this austere setting, David Ross mounted a cycle of Chekhov plays: The Three Sisters was followed, eight months later, by The Cherry

Orchard; Uncle Vanya and The Sea Gull opened during the 1956 season.

David Ross's productions were consistently based on Stark Young's translations of the plays. These translations had appeared regularly over the previous decade: The Sea Gull in 1938, The Three Sisters in 1941, The Cherry Orchard in 1947, and Uncle Vanya in 1950. Of these, The Sea Gull was the only one that had ever been performed, and those who saw the David Ross productions marvelled at the oversight. Commonweal stated that

> The voice of Chekhov has been so clouded and obscured in our theatre--thickened with cant or a false gentility--that Mr. Young's translations, which release its potency through their own vibrant, exact and accessible language, stand uniquely as creative and reconstitutive acts of the highest fidelity and love.[41]

"Fidelity and love" were key words in the response to the productions as well as to the translations. Suddenly, David Magarshack's insistence, in Chekhov the Dramatist, that Chekhov was a humorous playwright, made sense. The insight came as a surprise, not because Chekhov had never before been played as comedy, but because the Fourth St. productions did not seem to reach for comedy. Rather, the humor in the plays seemed natural. It seemed an intrinsic result of Chekhov's love for his characters, a love which was everywhere noted and often contrasted with

the harsher vision of other playwrights. Harold Clurman observed that Chekhov came out on the long end of a contrast with "recent writers [who] have been long on hysteria and short on love."[42] Eric Bentley was more specific:

> It may be said of Chekhov himself as of Shakespeare that he was "of an open and free nature," a phrase no one would apply to our minor playwrights, nor even to Ibsen and Strindberg. Chekhov seems to me the only democrat among the major modern dramatists, or perhaps I mean the only Christian. At any rate, he seems to be the only one who can depict the "little" people around him with a deeply romantic and passionate love and hence without direct contempt on the one hand or, on the other, the indirect contempt of abstract, doctrinaire admiration.[43]

By the mid-Fifties, Chekhov had become a staple on the American stage. Each revival had re-kindled the hot debate over the right way to produce his plays, a debate that was never quite settled. Chekhov had been labeled both gloomy Slavic soul and the only modern Christian. His plays had been variously described as dismal and hilarious, boring and entertaining, incomprehensible and truthful, pessimistic and optimistic. Productions of those plays had been acknowledged as a minor curiosity, a cause célèbre, a holy terror, and an act of piety. The prolonged debate had involved directors, actors, critics, and audiences. It was bound to affect American dramatists as well.

CHAPTER III

"CHEKHOVITIS" IN THE FIFTIES

When Stark Young concluded his review of the 1929 performance of The Sea Gull, he named a new mentor for American dramatists. The technical lessons of Ibsen, the old mentor, having been thoroughly absorbed, American playwrights were now ready for lessons more advanced and more sophisticated, and they would do well to look to Chekhov. "What Chekhov can give us is plain," Young said, and he specified: "More delicacy of perception, more deeply interwoven themes, more subtlety of feeling, more poignancy, sincerity and truth of intention."[1]

Stark Young's announcement that "Chekhov is at present the [European dramatist] who can be of most use to us,"[2] coming as it did at the end of the Twenties, was somewhat premature. The climate of American life during the socially conscious Thirties and the patriotic Forties was such that "delicacy of perception" and "subtlety of feelings" remained values

that were less than urgent. Nor was there any particular reason why "more sincerity and truth of intention" could no longer be communicated by the standard Ibsenesque formula. As the decade of the Fifties approached, however, the mood of the nation shifted. The Ibsenesque pièce à thèse, which had served so well for the issues of the depression and the war years, lost its universal appeal. In a quieter decade, several American dramatists responded to their sense of contemporary life by abandoning the well-made play formula in favor of a style that, some felt, had been endorsed by Chekhov.

The early Fifties were not especially inspiring years, by anyone's reckoning. Deadened by the Eisenhower administration, intimidated by the McCarthy hearings, and confused by the Korean War, America offered little to inspire its dramatists. "During this timorous, confused, and apathetic decade," wrote Emory Lewis in his history of the American stage,

> the arts took a sharp turn away from content to an inwardness, a preoccupation with self, a frenzied interest in form for its own sake. It was a full-scale retreat from the political struggle and social commitment. The tranquilized fifties, poet Robert Lowell neatly labeled them.
> . . .
> In retrospect, the salient feature of Broadway in the fifties was the dismal quality of its productions. It was the worst decade of theatre since the birth of the American dramatic arts back in the teens. . . . The theatre served

> up pallid pulp, and it had virtually nothing to do with the world outside or with art.[3]

John Gassner, in Theatre at the Crossroads, lumped several of the plays of the Fifties into a chapter entitled "Ebb Tide," and reluctantly suggested that "a law of entropy [was] operative in a period of uncertainty and disillusionment."[4] Brooks Atkinson, writing in 1953, looked around him and noticed that

> It is a difficult time because everything seems to be temporary. The great decisions have not been made--whether it is to be war or peace, whether Western freedoms are going to survive in the world. When such fundamental issues as these remain unresolved, it is difficult for writers to settle down to work with a fixed set of values. The workaday themes seem so petty in comparison with the classic themes of freedom and survival.[5]

Arthur Miller agreed. The year before, he had offered to the New York Times his speculations why "a lizardic dormancy seems to be upon us, the creative mind seems to have lost its heat."[6] But whereas Atkinson took comfort from the truism that "As long as there are people . . . there is plenty of material to write about,"[7] Miller refused such comfort. The "classic themes of freedom and survival" were still available to American dramatists, he insisted, if they would only summon up the moral energy to pursue them. But he saw no indications of such energy. Instead, artists were timid, shy of bringing on stage "the plays that reflect the soul-wracking,

deeply unseating questions that are being inwardly asked on the street, in the living room, on the subways."[8] That timidity was a natural response to the age, but the artists were nevertheless responsible for their reactions. Miller asked,

> Is the knuckle-headedness of McCarthyism behind it all? The Congressional investigations of political unorthodoxy? Yes. But is that all? Can an artist be paralyzed except he be somewhat willing? . . .
>
> Is it quixotic to say that a time comes for an artist--and for all those who want and love theatre--when the world must be left behind? When, like some Pilgrim, he must consult only his own heart and cleave to the truth it utters? For out of the hectoring of columnists, the compulsions of patriotic gangs, the suspicions of the honest and the corrupt alike, art never will and never has found soil.[9]

In 1958, in a speech given for his colleagues entitled "The Shadows of the Gods," Miller pressed his point.[10] He severely criticized American dramatists for failing to bring down on their materials the ultimate questions concerning the survival of the human race. Unless they did so, he warned, the American theater was doomed to remain in a protracted state of adolescence. In contrast to the timid, superficial American vision he saw about him, Miller offered up a few touchstones for greatness. The writers he most valued for their daring to probe the hidden laws of the universe were Dostoievski, Ibsen, Aeschylus, O'Neill, and Chekhov.

Miller's choice of Chekhov is curious. Few playwrights seem farther removed from Miller's own stance and style; it was Ibsen, not Chekhov, from whom Miller had learned his lessons.[11] "I connected with Ibsen," he said,[12] and that connection has been much documented and demonstrated. But Miller also admired Chekhov, and some of the reasons for his admiration were familiar reasons.

> It is hard to imagine any playwright reading Chekhov without envying one quality of his plays. It is his balance. In this, I think he is closer to Shakespeare than any dramatist I know. There is less distortion by the exigencies of the telescoping of time in the theater, there is less stacking of the cards, there is less fear of the ridiculous, there is less fear of the heroic. His touch is tender, his eye is warm, so warm that the Chekhovian legend in our theatre has become that of an almost sentimental man and writer whose plays are elegies, postscripts to a dying age. In passing, it must be said that he was not the only Russian writer who seemed to be dealing with all his characters as though he was related to them. It is a quality not of Chekhov alone but of much of Russian literature, and I mention it both to relate him to this mood and to separate him from it.[13]

What separated Chekhov from the general Russian mode of warm, intimate characterizations was what Miller admired most, and that was Chekhov's overview of the social conditions in which his plays were set. Miller saw Chekhov's plays as social comments, and he cited Virshinin's farewell speech to Olga in Act IV of <u>The Three Sisters</u> as evidence:

> What else am I to say to you at parting? What am I to theorize about? (Laughs) Life is hard. It seems to many of us blank and hopeless; but yet we must admit that it goes on getting clearer and easier, and it looks as though the time were not far off when it will be full of happiness. (Looks at his watch.) It's time for me to go! In the old days men were absorbed in wars, filling all their existence with marches, raids, victories, but now all that is a thing of the past, leaving behind it a great void which there is so far nothing to fill; humanity is searching for it passionately, and of course will find it. Ah, if only it could be quickly. If, don't you know, industry were united with culture and culture with industry. . . . (Looks at his watch.) But, I say, it's time for me to go. . . .

"In other words," Miller explicated,

> these plays are not mere exercises in psychology. They are woven around a very critical point of view, a point of view not only toward the characters, but toward the social context in which they live, a point of view which--far from being some arbitrary angle, as we have come to call such things--is their informing principle. . . . When Chekhov, that almost legendary subjectivist, has Vershinin--and many others in his plays--objectifying the social questions which his play has raised, he is merely placing himself within the great tradition which set its works fully in view of the question of the survival of the race.[14]

Miller's reading of Vershinin's speech as "objectifying the social questions which [the] play has raised" is a somewhat singular interpretation. The speech occurs as Vershinin is waiting for Masha to appear so he can say a final good-bye. He is nervous, sad, and hurried, for he will be called away momentarily, and if Masha does not appear soon, he will have no chance at all to see her before he leaves. In the awkward, agonizing meantime, he carries on a perfunctory

conversation with Olga, making farewell pleasantries. "What am I to theorize about?" he asks her, mocking himself, and then he lapses into a brief repetition of his theme of the state of human existence in the future. Olga had never taken Vershinin's philosophizing very seriously, nor had anyone else, not even Vershinin himself. He usually delivered himself of his social prophecies when he had other, more pressing, considerations on his mind, and this time his mind is very far away from what he is saying. He keeps looking at his watch, talking out of habit, merely to fill up the time and to cover the pain of the moment. Vershinin's comments about society, here and elsewhere in the play, are more in the nature of a linguistic tic than of serious social comment.

Miller misread Chekhov. He was not alone. But few others shared his particular kind of misreading. Miller found Chekhov useful because his example demanded more of playwrights than was their wont; others found him useful because they felt his example demanded less.

John Van Druten was one playwright who was grateful to Chekhov for relieving him of the burden of finding and developing a plot. In an article in the New York Times, printed a few days in advance of the opening of I Am a Camera on November 28, 1951, Van Druten outlined in some detail his debt to Chekhov.

His forthcoming play was to be a mood play, he said, and the originator of that genre was Chekhov.

> Where did the mood play come in? I think that I caught one of the earliest glimpses of it in the description of a play which my parents saw at the London Stage Society around 1911. My mother told me--and she was an intelligent woman, well grounded in Ibsen and all the classics--that it was either completely insane, or else the whole audience was. It was by a Russian playwright, and it was called "The Cherry Orchard."
>
> Why was that play so different that it must have seemed as though it were written on a totally different tone-scale, so that neither form nor melody was apparent then, just as the music of Wagner, followed by Strauss, Debussy and Stravinsky, seemed incomprehensible to ears familiar with Handel, Gounod and Verdi? I can only think it was in the absence of plot or definitive message, of star parts or organized build, a conception of people seen only in their personal relationships, just as such and not for what theatrically emerged from them. . . .
>
> I can remember reading the first act of "The Cherry Orchard" many years later, and also the first act of Barker's "Madras House," and of their reminding me of the arrival at my London home of my smart and fascinating aunt from New York, and of the Sunday mornings at my grandmother's house in the London suburbs, and thinking that if that were all that was needed, maybe I could do it too.[15]

Maybe so. The test would seem to lie in the play that was prefaced by the apologia in the Times. I Am a Camera is an adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's Berlin Stories, a collection of short stories about Germany during Hitler's rise to power. If the play is Chekhovian, it is so only in a superficial and negative sense. There is, to be sure, no

tight, well-defined plot. The setting is another twilight era, this time the twilight of an amoral era for Germany. And the play dramatizes no particular theme, despite its setting. But I Am a Camera does not remind one very much of Chekhov, whatever Van Druten's claims. Those claims did invite a comparison, however, and John Gassner accepted the invitation by pointing out the difference between Chekhov's own plays and those of this followers. He wrote, apropos of I Am a Camera,

> In Chekhov, we find either a distinct development, as in The Sea Gull and The Cherry Orchard, in which a stalemate leads to a catastrophe, and one way of life is displaced by another; or we observe characters staging an intense struggle against an impasse before suffering defeat, as in Uncle Vanya and The Three Sisters. Stanislavsky was quite correct in opposing the notion that Chekhov's characters were utterly passive, and absolutely right in attributing an invigorating quality to their discontent, their explosions of rage at their torpid way of life, and their dreams of a better world. The pseudo-Chekhovians make much of the possibility of writing plotless plays . . ., but they tend to overlook the presence of essential conflict and progression in Chekhov's dramaturgy. They try to be artfully passive; he succeeded in being artfully active.[16]

Chekhov was, suggested Gassner, much more complex a playwright than Van Druten realized.

Gassner's point was well taken, for Van Druten had reduced Chekhov's dramaturgy to a single characteristic--the evocation of mood. Much of Van Druten's Playwright at Work, a handbook for dramatists, was a

defense of the Mood Play, and Van Druten suggested to young playwrights that there lay the new frontier of dramatic writing.

> The author who is telling me the basis of the play he wants to write may well have learned from Chekhov and from the newer imitations. He may not have a plot or a story, or if he has, those will seem unimportant to him. He may have only a mood, a thing of all most hard to describe or communicate other than through his actual writing. But if it has excited him, if he himself is deeply moved by it, then that will be apparent. He has in many ways the most difficult of all tasks, because the field is almost too clear for him. Working within limits is an easier thing than working with none. Sonnets, as G. K. Chesterton has said, are easier to write than other verse because they are more restricted; there is a severe framework to hold one in. Earlier playwrights have set the general mold, but the mood playwright is largely on his own. Yet he is moving the theater forward, where it needs to go, away from the story and plot play, altering and widening the shape of the proscenium arch. And that is all to the good.[17]

Because mood is "a thing of all most hard to describe or communicate other than through . . . actual writing,"[18] Van Druten could offer no guidelines for writers of Mood Plays other than the advice that they be sincere about what they were doing. "This is perhaps the beginning of a new kind of drama. Its rules are not yet formed. They depend on the depth and inner sincerity of the author's intention."[19] Van Druten also seemed to assume that strength of mood in a play existed in inverse proportion to strength of plot. Given the two alternatives, his

own choice was clear: "A play that was all atmosphere, with no plot at all, would be my preference; in any case, the smallest modicum of plot that can be thrown in to hold the play together."[20]

Although Van Druten viewed the Mood Play as "a new-born creature in the theater of the past thirty years,"[21] he offered, besides Chekhov, only two examples of the genre--Carson McCuller's The Member of the Wedding and Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie. Walter Kerr provided a much longer list.

In 1955, in his lively book How Not To Write a Play, Walter Kerr reviewed the state of American theater. There were, he announced, two methods of playwriting that ought to be avoided: the method of Ibsen and the method of Chekhov. Mr. Kerr's warning was based on the premise that "America is, at the moment, in possession of a highly unpopular theater."[22] The reason for the theater's unpopularity was simple: neither Ibsen nor Chekhov, the two models for American playwrights, were ever popular themselves. Both were high-brow intellectuals, whose plays were deliberately designed to please only minority tastes. Ibsen's plays were calculated to engender irritation and resistance, and Chekhov had never been popular outside the narrow confines of a prestige art theater. And despite a small, devoted following in America, Chekhov

"is almost without peer in his power to chill American audiences."[23] Nevertheless, "after Ibsen, Chekhov is the most widely imitated playwright in the contemporary theater, 'Chekhovities' the commonest complaint in the nation's playwriting courses."[24] The most conspicuous symptom of "Chekhovitis," Kerr went on to explain, was calculated inertia.

> We have made ennui almost a point of honor. The ennui originates, naturally enough, in our model. Chekhov was specifically concerned, as he clearly announced, with "disappointment, apathy, nervous limpness and exhaustion." What we forget is that these special characteristics were derived from, and intended to mirror, a given time, place, and state of mind; the moribund Russia of the nineteenth century. Russia itself has long since thrown off Russian inertia; only we continue to cling to it. . . .
>
> We are now embarrassed by the dramatic gesture. We do not wish to be thought capable of so gross and unliterary a lapse. Since event is suspect, our plays must be cautiously uneventful.
>
> We make our chaste intention clear at the beginning of the evening. Our plays--of the Chekhovian tradition--open in a timeless twilight, announcing at the outset that nothing will change. Characters move in longing, recoil in inhibition, freeze into paralysis. They dart at the universe in feeble exploration, make fainthearted protest, resign themselves to final frustration. The curtain falls on the twilight we knew at the first, on a world in which the promise of action has never existed, a world of perpetually suspended animation.[25]

Mr. Kerr proceeded to list the plays he had in mind: Arthur Laurent's The Time of the Cuckoo, Elmer Rice's The Grand Tour, Lillian Hellman's The Autumn Garden, William Inge's Picnic, Dorothy Parker and Arnaud

D'Usseau's Ladies of the Corridor, Terence Rattigan's The Deep Blue Sea, Robert Anderson's All Summer Long, Truman Capote's The Grass Harp, Horton Foote's A Trip to Bountiful, John Van Druten's I Am a Camera, and Carson McCuller's The Member of the Wedding. "Stand close to these plays," said Kerr,

> and they seem remarkably varied in style and background and feeling. Move back just a bit and you can begin to detect their common ancestry, their common inspiration.
>
> What binds them together is their commitment to stasis. To observe life carefully, you must make it stand still. To make life stand still, you must deal in the stillborn--in characters who are unable to change themselves, their relationships, or the world about them. You must, perforce, deal with Chekhov's disappointed, apathetic, or nervously limp.[26]

John Van Druten and Walter Kerr were basically agreed in their description of the newly fashionable Mood Play. Van Druten rejoiced that the new form was engendered by the famous Chekhov. Kerr grumbled that the new form was engendered by the unpopular Chekhov. Others discussed the new form quite apart from Chekhov.

In 1954 William Becker, writing for The Hudson Review, generalized about the spate of new plays that had recently run on Broadway. He was irritated. He had recently seen five productions: Horton Foote's A Trip to Bountiful, Calder Willingham's End as a Man, Louis Peterson's Take a Giant Step, Nathaniel Benchley's The Frogs of Spring, and Robert Anderson's Tea and

Sympathy. All of the plays were bad ones. What interested Mr. Becker was the fact that they were bad in such similar ways.

> It has become increasingly evident over the past three or four seasons that a wholly new set of formal dramatic values is in the process of being established on Broadway. . . . From the viewpoint of traditional dramatic criticism, the new values are largely negative: they imply a reduction of the medium, and not, for the most part, a reduction to fundamentals, but to an egregious preoccupation with what has seldom been anything but the most subsidiary or peripheral of dramatic values, namely, the "mood." The Mood Play is the first really identifiable new genre to emerge on Broadway since the demise of what used to be called "agit-prop" toward the end of the thirties; and if the new formula is unmistakably a sign of decadence, it is nonetheless worth observing, if only because it is a strictly indigenous product. It has as yet no relation whatever to anything in the current European theatre, and only the most accidental relations with the dramatic past anywhere.[27]

Pursuing the genesis of the Mood Play, Becker added,

> . . . It seems . . . likely that the new manner has come more by way of default than of anything so positive as conscious imitation. Partly the mood play reflects that general failure of nerve which now characterizes Broadway as a whole. But more importantly, it seems to reflect the absolute isolation of our writers from the past masters of dramaturgy. There is quite literally no place in New York (or anywhere in America for that matter) where a playwright can learn his craft by watching and absorbing over a long period of time the principles inherent in the great examples of it. The result is that would-be American playwrights--and producers, and even actors--scarcely know what plays have been in the past, what modes and devices they have relied on, what myriad formal possibilities exist for the drama, and perhaps most crucially, what the demands and limitations of the form are.[28]

The Mood Play, then, was not the result of any new attention paid to Chekhov; it was rather the result of an inattention paid to any playwright whatever.

Becker, Kerr, Van Druten and Miller--all were agreed on one thing. A relatively large percentage of the plays of the early Fifties were of a piece; they had similarly slender plots, static characterizations, and wistful moods. But while there was agreement on a common genre, there was none on a common genesis. Kerr and Van Druten assumed that Chekhov's example had effected the Mood Play. Miller saw Chekhov's example as a remedy to the Mood Play. Becker implied that a Chekhovian example would have precluded a Mood Play.

A closer look at one of the Mood Plays might help to illuminate the dispute, and Horton Foote's A Trip to Bountiful will serve as well as any because it bears the distinctive onus of appearing on the lists of both Mr. Kerr and Mr. Becker. The play was originally written as a television script for the NBC Television Playhouse. It was later revised for stage production, and opened at the Henry Miller Theater on November 3, 1953, where it sustained a modest run of thirty-nine performances.

The plot of A Trip to Bountiful is slender. In the first act we are introduced to the members of a small household in Houston, Texas. Jessie Mae Watts, the wife, is a vain, purposeless, frustrated woman who occupies her days by going to the hairdresser, reading movie magazines, drinking coca-colas, and nagging her mother-in-law. The elder Mrs. Watts finds herself in a trap that is both spiritual and physical; she cannot bear her daughter-in-law's continuous bickering any more than she can bear the confines of a small city apartment. Her one wish is to escape to the town of Bountiful and the family homestead where she once lived. At the end of the act, she manages to keep her pension check away from Jessie Mae's preemption and sneaks off to the bus station when the coast is clear.

Act II records Mrs. Watts' trip to Bountiful and the attempts of Ludie Watts and Jessie Mae to head her off. Much of the act takes place on the bus, where Mrs. Watts and Thelma, her nice young travelling companion, exchange sentimental and tearful life stories. Mrs. Watts' resolve to return to her birthplace is nearly foiled at the end of the act when Ludie and Jessie Mae enlist the police in their search, but a kind sheriff agrees to escort her to Bountiful, now a ghost town.

Act III is short and inconclusive. Ludie and Jessie Mae fetch Mrs. Watts away from the ruined homstead. She declares herself resigned, and returns with them to their city apartment.

There is, on the surface, much about A Trip to Bountiful that reminds us of Chekhov's plays. The action of the play returns, in the end, to the status quo. The mood is wistful and nostalgic. The plot is far less important than the characterizations. But the play seems, somehow, thin and wan when it is compared with Chekhov's plays.

The fact is that Chekhov's plays are not actually plotless. Things do happen to Chekhov's characters--suicides, duels, murder attempts, illegitimate pregnancies, and extra-marital affairs, to name a few. When Chekhov chose to push the large dramatic scenes into the wings, he did so not because he was abdicating all plots, but because he wanted the center of the stage to dramatize the emotions and behavior of people who lived through, or in spite of, rather than for the sake of, their plots. Mme Ranevskaya's behavior at her party is interesting because we know and she knows that an auction is taking place at the same time off stage. Her conversation, her silences, her attempts to remain true to her image of herself during those anxious hours of waiting are dramatic

because of the tension that exists between what is happening on stage and what is happening off stage. That kind of tension is not possible in A Trip to Bountiful, where nothing more happens off stage than on stage. The play does not extend itself into the wings.

Another, and perhaps the most important, difference between Chekhov's plays and A Trip to Bountiful lies in the complexity of characterization. Chekhov's characters are emotionally complicated people, and Chekhov was primarily interested in the way in which their emotions intertwined and fluctuated between harmony and discord. Sometimes a character needs from another a response or emotional reinforcement that is not forthcoming; sometimes a character perceives that another is blocking the fulfillment of his desires; sometimes several characters are united for a moment in shared excitement or common grief. The tension of characterization on Chekhov's stage is not a tension of sympathetic characters versus unsympathetic ones, but rather the more complex tensions that exist between people who are all somewhat sympathetic.

Horton Foote's characters are not complex enough for such emotional tensions to take place. The conflict in A Trip to Bountiful exists between Jessie Mae,

villain, and Mrs. Watts, heroine. Both have a single goal; Jessie Mae wants to keep the convenience of her mother-in-law's maid service and the bonus of her pension check, and Mrs. Watts wants to escape to Bountiful before she dies. Ludie Watts wants to avoid trouble, but whatever emotional conflicts his dilemma might entail are no part of the play. All the characters are thinly drawn, their conflicts one-dimensional. Horton Foote did try for a bit of irony in the characterization of Jessie Mae, who says to her husband at one point,

> Then why does she [Mrs. Watts] keep running off from a perfectly good home to try and get to some old swamp? Don't you call that crazy? I mean, she doesn't have to turn her hand. Hardly. We only have a bedroom and a living room and a kitchen. We're all certainly very light eaters, so cooking three meals a day isn't killing her.[29]

But the irony here is heavy-handed, and it reminds us very little of the irony of Chekhov's characters, whose inner lives are rich and fully drawn. Jessie Mae is a shrill termagant, nothing more, and her bewilderment over her mother-in-law's plight sounds dishonest and contrived.

A Trip to Bountiful seems most like a Chekhovian play in its evocation of a mood of nostalgia. Like the Prozoroff sisters, Mme Ranevskaya, and Gayeff, Mrs. Watts longs for a time long past, when life was happier

and more purposeful. Her longing is the one sustaining note throughout the play. It would seem that Horton Foote took very seriously John Van Druten's advice about beginning a play with only a mood in mind and nothing more.

It would be difficult, however, to imagine Chekhov's beginning a play in such a fashion. Perhaps the entire idea of Chekhov as the writer of Mood Plays is misleading. Nothing in Chekhov's notebooks or in his letters suggests that it was ever his intention to set down a single mood. Instead, he noticed the people around him. He jotted down gestures, names, phrases. He noted how people behaved under stress, how they accommodated themselves to boredom, how their imaginations fought with their circumstances. And he suggested in his letters to playwrights and actors that they not only develop a similar sensitivity, but that they learn how to make that sensitivity stageworthy. He said:

> People who carry grief in their hearts a long time and are used to it only whistle and often sink into thought.[30]
>
> When a men spends the least possible number of movements over some definite action, that is grace.[31]
>
> The father is without a weakness, without a distinct appearance; he does not drink, or smoke, or gamble, or fall ill. You must stitch on to him some attribute or other, so that the actor can have something to grasp.[32]

Depict a lonely man, and represent him as nervous only to the extent indicated by the text. Do not treat this nervousness as a separate phenomenon. Remember that in our day every cultured man, even the most healthy, is most irritable in his own home and among his own family, because the discord between the present and the past is first of all apparent in the family.[33]

The immense majority of people are nervous, you know: the greater number suffer, and a small proportion feel acute pain; but where--in streets and in houses--do you see people tearing about, leaping up, and clutching at their heads? Suffering ought to be expressed as it is expressed in life--that is, not by the arms and legs, but by the tone and expression; not by gesticulation, but by grace. Subtle emotions of the soul in educated people must be subtly expressed in an external way.[34]

Only he has no grief who is indifferent; and people who are indifferent and aloof are either philosophers or petty, egotistical natures. The latter should be treated negatively, the former,--positively.[35]

In the sphere of psychology, details are also the thing. God preserve us from commonplaces. Best of all is it to avoid depicting the hero's state of mind; you ought to try to make it clear from the hero's actions.[36]

Do not invent sufferings that you never experienced, and do not paint pictures you never saw, for a lie is even more annoying in a story than in a conversation. . . .[37]

You want to see more, to know more, to have a wider range. Your imagination is quick to seize and hold, but it is like a big oven which is not provided with fuel enough. One feels this in general, and in particular in the stories: you present two or three figures in a story, but these figures stand apart, outside the mass; one sees that these figures are living in your imagination, but only these figures--the mass is not grasped.[38]

Playwrights who wished to learn from Chekhov might have done well to have looked to his notes and letters. Had they done so, they might have seen his plays as more than plotless mood pieces. They might have joined Walter Kerr in a re-appraisal of Chekhov's plays.

Although he had declared Chekhov "almost without peer in his power to chill American audiences,"[39] Walter Kerr's own reactions thawed considerably as he began to suspect what Chekhov was really about. In Thirty Plays Hath November, Kerr traced the process of his revised judgment. "When I was very young," he recalled,

> I understood Chekhov, as indeed everyone did. He was a long neurasthenic sigh, accompanied by the flutter of falling leaves and rattled hands, by the night-music of imminent tears. His element was mood, and the mood was languid, an evocation of the inertia that suffocates. Poetic, of course, in the dapple of light from the trees that were doomed and in the ripple of unfocused conversation. But a still life, with everything in it already in the first faint brown stages of decay. If someone or something provoked a beginning smile now and again, it was not a smile that could delay the coroner; one knew that the servants were already storing the funeral baked meats in the hall.[40]

But Mr. Kerr's early understanding was jarred somewhat by two performances of Chekhov. In the 1942 production of The Three Sisters, Ruth Gordon's Natasha was disturbingly funny. So was Joseph Schildkraut's Gayeff,

in the 1944 production of The Cherry Orchard. Walter Kerr was unsettled. "That could not have been Chekhov's voice I thought I heard pleading to be released from such responsible sobriety."[41] But it was. Biographers David Magarshack and Earnest Simmons[42] and director David Ross confirmed Kerr's suspicion that Chekhov was to be believed when he said that his plays were comedies, and that the comic element of his plays lay in Chekhov's vision of his characters. Kerr began to realize that

> Chekhov does, very frequently, make it perfectly clear that nothing his characters say can really be taken at face value. As a rule, what they say can almost be taken at reverse value.[43]

Even when subsequent productions of Chekhov returned to the traditional assumption that the plays were solemn and gloomy, a wistful Mr. Kerr refused to recant,

> For I should still, in my bafflement and in the derangement of mind which overtakes me whenever those unbidden voices begin intruding upon the lachrymose night, like to see Chekhov plain, if only to discover whether or not he knew what he was doing. If he wrote tragedies, or somber mood pieces, he didn't know what he was doing. And I refuse to believe that.[44]

Nearly two decades after Mr. Kerr's first hesitant intimations of Chekhov's intentions, he was able to "see Chekhov plain." What he saw was Chekhov's ability to portray characters who were self-deluded. That, and not moody inertia, was Chekhov's secret.

> Now, if the self-deluded are bound to be amusing, Chekhov's amusement is always considerate. Chekhov pays his people the compliment of not exaggerating them--much. He does like them, and so tries to be faithful to them. He does, in his rueful and detached way, feel for them, idiots that they are; and so he does not throw them downstairs or beat them with sticks or make them moo too often. He suggests, perhaps, that there is very little he needs to do to them to accent their follies. If he simply lets them loose and keeps close to the truth, they will take care of themselves, making their own comedy as they rush or drift or skitter from mood to mood.
>
> Most comedy, nearly all that we are familiar with, arrives at its effect through exaggeration. A miser becomes monstrously greedy; a drinker becomes roaringly drunk; a hesitant man stammers and sputters until we can hear nothing else. Each of these things is, deep down, somewhat tragic or pathetic. But we are not permitted to see what is deep down because the surface is wrenched so wildly out of shape; the disporportion at the top is so emphatic that it seems, in its fantastic grossness, only funny.
>
> Chekhov's comedy is too considerate, too kindly, too honest in a way, for this sort of grossness. Chekhov has deflated the comic balloon somewhat and brought it back to a shape that is <u>almost</u> normal. Because he has done this, it is easy for us to mistake what he has done, to confuse a very delicate and controlled comic highlighting with the lifelike and somewhat more serious subject matter he means to be comic about. He has narrowed the gap between the preposterous and the pathetic; but he has made it perfectly clear to us which side of the gap he stands on.
>
> Standing there and smiling all the while, he reminds us of a truth; if you do not exaggerate comedy, you will see how sad it is.[45]

That truth remained elusive to mose American dramatists. Some, like Horton Foote, John Van Druten, and the other writers of low-pressure, reticent Mood Plays, wrote plays that resembled Chekhov's only casually and superficially. That resemblance was

based on a reductive and limited perception of Chekhov's art. Other American playwrights, like Joshua Logan and Lillian Hellman, were more directly indebted to Chekhov, and for different reasons. Despite all the talk about Chekhov's plotlessness, Joshua Logan borrowed from Chekhov the plot of The Cherry Orchard. And Lillian Hellman, who studied Chekhov's letters as well as his plays, borrowed a dramatic model for expressing some assumptions about life that she came to share with Chekhov.

CHAPTER IV

JOSHUA LOGAN: A CHERRY ORCHARD FOR AMERICANS

As early as 1930, Robert Littell, writing for Theatre Magazine, thought that "disguising The Cherry Orchard as a sterling American product" would be a "good joke" on the provincial American audience.

> Change the names, hire a soft-spoken negro for the old servant who dies so pathetically in the end, switch the cherry orchard to a magnolia grove, make the successful peasant Lopakhin over into a self-made poor white, bring in a few references to the Wa'h, hire actors who spoke pure Charleston, S. C., and you have a grand heart-breaking old play about the ruined South. The play itself is solid, natural, universal, irresistible, if you can wear down people's prejudice about all artistic products from the land of the Tsar, the beard, the soul, and the ikon.[1]

Robert Littell was one of several who noted the obvious analogy between Chekhov's Russia and the American South.[2] A play about the decay of a cultured, leisured aristocracy was usually assumed to be Chekhov's special property, and the concept of an American Cherry Orchard was one that festered for many years.

The play which was most clearly intended to be an analogue to The Cherry Orchard was The Wisteria Trees,[3] both written and first directed by Joshua Logan. In 1950, the year The Wisteria Trees opened on Broadway, Logan was at the peak of his directing career, but he was a relative novice as a playwright. And it was as director rather than as playwright that he was first exposed to Russia and Chekhov.

Logan was fond of recalling his youthful apprenticeship at the Opera Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, where he observed the great Stanislavsky at work. In 1931 he left Princeton in his senior year to accompany a fellow student, Charles Leatherbee, on a "genuine pilgrimage" to Moscow.[4] For six months, the two young students watched, rapt with admiration, as Stanislavsky painstakingly rehearsed his singers and actors. Evenings they attended performances of the Moscow Art Theatre. Logan especially remembered a performance of The Cherry Orchard, played by nearly all the members of the original cast of 1904:

> [It] was not only still full of tender, heartbreaking compassion but also to my surprise a wonderful earthy humor, which in most productions of the play is so muffled that all of its lustiness is gone.[5]

Their hopes and enthusiasms running high, Logan and Leatherbee informed Stanislavsky of their intention to establish a permanent repertory theater in America

which would duplicate the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavsky was not pleased. "You must not duplicate the Moscow Art Theatre," he cautioned.

> You must create something of your own. If you try to duplicate, that means that you merely follow tradition. You are not going forward. . . . Our methods suit us because we are this particular group of Russians here. We have learned by experiment, by change, by taking any concept of reality that has become worn and substituting something fresh, something always nearer and nearer the truth. You must do the same. But in your own way, not ours. . . . You are here to study, to observe, not to copy. Artists must learn to think and feel for themselves and find new forms. They must never be content with what someone else has done. You are American, you have a different economic system. You work at different times of day. You eat different food and your ears are pleased by different music. You have different rhythms in your speech and in your dancing. And if you want to create a great theatre, all these things must be taken into consideration. They must be used to create your own method, and it can be as true and as great as any method yet discovered.[6]

Logan's efforts toward an American Art Theater were dampened as much by the Depression as by Stanislavsky's words of caution, and he became instead a successful director on Broadway. Logan seemed to feel in this no betrayal of his former teacher. Eighteen years after he sat at the feet of Stanislavsky, he wrote in his introduction to the American publication of Building a Character:

> Today Stanislavski has been dead for over ten years. . . .
>
> I wish that I could have taken Stanislavski to see, for instance, Carmen Jones, and Death of a Salesman, Carousel, A Streetcar Named Desire, Born Yesterday, Oklahoma!, Victoria Regina, Our Town. I am sure he would have enjoyed them all, and marvelled that they could have been produced in such a short time. I believe he would approve of the vitality, enthusiasm and talent which our theatre people have today. And although he might sneer at the few purely commercial attempts that slip through and become successful, he would feel that New York is now producing much that is new and outrageously experimental. I think he would like us.[7]

It may have been modesty that prevented Logan from listing any of his own productions among those he was sure Stanislavsky would have enjoyed. It may also have been widsom. By 1950, Logan had an impressive number of hits to his credit: On Borrowed Time (1938), I Married an Angel (1938), Knickerbocker Holiday (1938), Mornings at Seven (1939), Stars in Your Eyes (1939), Two for the Show (1940), Higher and Higher (1940), Charley's Aunt (1940), By Jupiter (1942), Annie Get Your Gun (1946), Happy Birthday (1946), John Loves Mary (1947), Mister Roberts (1948), and South Pacific (1949). With the possible exception of Mister Roberts and South Pacific, all of these productions fall into the category of the "few purely commercial attempts that slip through and become successful," and although they all possessed the qualities that Logan cited as virtues--vitality, enthusiasm, and speed of production--

there is no indication in any of Stanislavsky's writings that he shared Logan's priorities. Harold Clurman, a student of a student of Stanislavsky, considered it ironic that Logan had been chosen to introduce their mutual mentor to the American public. "It is characteristic of the times," he grumbled, "that . . . [Building a Character] is presented to us now with an introduction by Joshua ("South Pacific") Logan, an extremely able director, whose work, however amiable and successful, cannot be said to exemplify the Stanislavsky tradition."[8]

Although Logan's direction did not seem to be much inspired by the spirit of Stanislavsky, his playwriting attempt was inspired by his trip to Moscow. Three factors coalesced into the making of The Wisteria Trees--Logan's desire to turn playwright, a Moscow memory, and a personal tragedy for Helen Hayes.

Shortly after launching South Pacific on Broadway for what promised to be a long and successful run, Logan looked around for new worlds to conquer. It was then, he said, that "I decided to do something I had wanted to do for a long time--write a play on my own."[9] Logan had, in fact, written two plays before The Wisteria Trees, but he wrote neither of them by himself. He had collaborated with Thomas Heggen, author of the novel Mister Roberts, in adapting it for the stage.

He had also collaborated with Oscar Hammerstein in forging the libretto for South Pacific from James Michener's Tales of the South Pacific. By experience and apparently by inclination, Joshua Logan was an adaptor and a collaborator, and he remained true to his bent, even when writing "a play on my own." The Wisteria Trees is an adaptation of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard, written by Logan in collaboration with his audience, with Helen Hayes, and with Chekhov himself.

The term adaptation is a variously defined term. Something more than a translation, something less than an original play, an adaptation may involve the paraphrase of a script, a search for equivalent effects from one dramatic idiom to another, or the re-working of an old plot within a contemporary system. Adaptations had become fashionable by the Fifties, and few of the classics remained untouched. The French playwrights, particularly, fancied novel interpretations given to ancient stories. American adaptors were inclined to find their sources elsewhere. "During the last five years," noted Kappo Phelan,

> we have had the "adaptation" stretched, it would seem, to the farthest limit. We have had plays based on the novel, the biography, the report, the magazine article, and the "idea of;" we have had plays "suggested by;" and we have had plays from plays and plays from movies and plays from the

> radio cereal. [sic.] I don't think however that any of these strange adjustments out of the immediate past can possibly top Joshua Logan's program explanation concerning his present piece starring Helen Hayes.[10]

The subtitle Logan had chosen for his new play was indeed a "strange adjustment": "An American Play . . . Based on Anton Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard." Although the subtitle avoids a genre label, it does emphasize Logan's intention to Americanize the Russian prototype. In an advance notice for the New York Times, Logan explained the progress of his idea and its connection with one of his favorite actresses:

> One day two years ago, she [Helen Hayes] said to me, "I'd like to do 'The Cherry Orchard.'" I had always thought that Chekhov's play is as much the story of Louisiana's plantation life as it was that of the great Russian estates.
>
> We agreed that I was to try to transpose the Russian play to my home state. Parallels were obvious. In both countries slavery had been abolished at about the same time. The decline of power in the landed gentry of both countries took place during the same years. The agonies of change are universal, we felt.[11]

Elsewhere he added:

> I remembered a beautiful production of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard that I had seen when I was in Russia, and I had always wanted to adapt it to a similar American background--the South after the Civil War. So I wrote The Wisteria Trees, drawing heavily on my own childhood in Louisiana.[12]

The final writing of the play was spurred by Miss Hayes's domestic tragedy. On September 22, 1949, her nineteen-year-old daughter died. Her many friends

mourned with her, and Logan was asked to provide a play as therapy. He explained,

> I always had had Helen Hayes in mind for the leading role, but at first she wasn't interested. Then, with tragic suddenness, her daughter Mary died of polio. Nedda [Mrs. Logan] and I went to see her that night. We found her sitting alone, and we stayed with her until she was able to go to bed. A few weeks later, I got a call from her husband, playwright Charles MacArthur, who said, "It's important for Helen to work. Do you think you can get The Wisteria Trees ready for production this year?" I drove myself to do it, and we opened it on Broadway that spring.[13]

If there was any irony about adapting a vehicle for ensemble acting into a starring vehicle for a leading lady, Logan did not seem to be aware of it. Almost from the beginning, the play was a joint project between author and star.

At first glance, The Wisteria Trees seems an ingenious duplication of The Cherry Orchard, for the characters and situations are fairly accurate approximations of their originals. The setting throughout the play is the children's parlor of the once elegant Andree estate on Wisteria plantation, now fallen into disrepair. The French windows of the parlor open onto a grove of wisteria vines that have grown across the gallery outside and have entered the room. The action begins just before dawn on an April morning near the turn of the century. Illuminated by lamplight on the darkened stage, Dolly May, the black maid who duplicates

Dunyasha, discusses with Martha, the Varya of the play, the anticipated arrival of the train bearing Lucy Andree Ransdell and her seventeen-year-old daughter, Antoinette, from Paris. Gradually the stage fills up with other parallel characters. Yancy Loper is a poor white who, like his prototype Lopahin, has become rich. He too carries with him a fond childhood memory of the kindness of the lady of the house:

> My daddy threw an empty corn-whisky bottle at me and smashed me in the face--give me a nose bleed. Miss Lucy dragged me in here . . . right here . . . used to be a washstand there . . . and she bathed my face with rose water. "Don't cry, little poor one," she said, "you're gonna live."[14]

Epihodoff, the Andreev family retainer whose life is a self-fulfilling prophecy of misfortune, is replaced by Henry Arthur Henry, the black house servant who is nicknamed "Mister Misery." And Trofimoff, the perpetual student and former tutor of little Grisha, who speaks loftily of a golden future, is replaced by Peter Whitfield from Tulane University, writer of protest poetry, and former tutor of Lucy's son, Lee. Semyonoff-Pishtchik, the neighboring landowner in The Cherry Orchard, finds his parallel in Bowman Witherspoon, whose estate is also saved at the end of the play. Chekhov's Charlotta, androgynous ventriloquist and governess of Anya and Varya, becomes black Cassie, Antoinette's nurse and travelling companion to Paris.

The Frenchified Yasha is duplicated by Jacques, who wishes to be back in Paris, and with reason. Antoinette explains:

> Mama took him over there to fetch for her and he had the French people fetchin' for him. The French people think Negroes are--exotic.

Finally, old Fiers becomes old Scott, the faithful slave who looks after his "little white nuisance," Gavin Leon Andree, and "couldn't take time off to get 'mancipated."

The duplication of characters in the two plays is thus complete. Impoverished Russian landowners become post-bellum Southern plantation owners, peasant merchants become rich "turkeynecks," and emancipated serfs become emancipated blacks.

The exposition and central action of the two plays are also parallel. Like her Russian counterpart, Lucy Andree Ransdell had married a ne'er-do-well who died from drinking. She then fell in love with another man, with whom she fled to Paris in an agony of guilt after her young son drowned. There she lived with him until he left her for another woman. When the play opens, she is returning to the family estate, fetched home by Antoinette and Cassie to face the impending crisis of bankruptcy. The play involves the family's ineffectual, unrealistic attempts to avert the crisis, and, at the end of Act II, Yancy Loper announces that

he has purchased the estate at auction. He echoes Lopahin when he exults:

> Tell me I'm drunk--tell me I'm crazy! Little Yancy, who had to run around nekkid over there 'till he was eight years old, owns the place where his pappy wasn't even allowed in the kitchen with the blacks!

Act III takes place in the empty children's parlor in winter, as the displaced family prepares to leave the old homestead. Gavin Andree has taken a position in a bank, Cassie has found another home in need of a nurse, Martha will become housekeeper for another family, and Lucy will go back to Paris to "tie that stone around my neck and go down for the last time." Their leavetakings are accompanied by the sound of axes cutting down the wisteria vines.

For all its deliberate parallels, The Wisteria Trees is strangely unlike The Cherry Orchard. Some of the differences between the two plays are differences in plot, for Logan saw fit to make several deletions and additions. The most important of these involve the love relationships in the play.

Chekhov rarely wrote of requited love, and his potential lovers--Nina and Trepleff, Sonia and Astroff, Lopahin and Varya--remain just that. Logan preferred to honor the stage tradition requiring nice young men and pretty young girls to marry, and thus he sends Peter and Antoinette off together at the end of the

play. He even provides them with an income. In a triumph of hope over doubt, Antoinette has secretly sent one of Peter's poems to a newspaper, which has agreed to print it. She confesses:

> You were paddlin' the boat and I was reading William Blake's poetry to you. You suddenly said he was expressing what had been the matter with you all your life . . . doubting everything. You even doubted that your dinner-table jingles were any good. And I suddenly doubted that you were actually there in front of me. And there we were --both sittin' in the boat, riddled with doubt-- us, not the boat--so I read the poem again. It said:
>
> He who doubts from what he sees
> Will ne'er believe. Do what you please.
>
> So I decided to send your jingles to the Times-Picayune.

She adds confidently,

> They'll want as many more as you'll write--as long as they're funny.

Such facile confidence is voiced by some of Chekhov's characters too, but it is always undercut by Chekhov's gently ironic portrayal of them. Here, however, no authorial vision undercuts or reverses Antoinette's belief that confidence conquers all, for that belief was Logan's as well. He recalled for the readers of Look magazine that he had helped Mary Martin regain her self-confidence when she appeared in the London production of South Pacific without her original co-star, Ezio Pinza:

> She was frightened--and it showed in our rehearsals. I knew that if we opened with Mary in this state there would be trouble.
>
> Although she was avoiding me, I went to her dressing room and forced her to listen. I told her she was the best actress in the world for this role. I told her of similar doubts that had nearly destroyed my own creative work in the past. Suddenly, some lines by William Blake surged up from my memory. I recited them to her:
>
> He who doubts from what he sees
> Will ne'er Believe, do what you Please.
> If the Sun & Moon should doubt,
> They'd immediately Go out.
>
> Mary turned the words over in her mind for a moment. Then, she half smiled. She said quietly, "Let's rehearse." In a matter of minutes, she was Mary Martin again. The following Christmas, she sent me the pillow with the Blake poem on it. She had spent hours in her dressing room embroidering it for me.
>
> Those lines of Blake's have helped me many times in my life. I learned them as a boy in the little Louisiana town of Mansfield, where I was raised. I had plenty of reason to doubt myself in those days.[15]

No Blake poem surfaces to rescue Martha and Yancy. Martha desperately wishes to marry Yancy, and Lucy Ransdell sets the stage for Yancy to propose marriage. The short, abortive scene between Martha and Yancy is almost an exact translation of Chekhov; the difference comes later. Chekhov did not explain Lopahin's failure to propose marriage to Varya. It is possible that Lopahin himself did not know why he could not act, and Chekhov never betrayed his reticence or analyzed his inhibitions. Logan, in contrast, chose to make explicit what Chekhov had allowed to remain one of several implicit possibilities: Yancy Loper does not marry Martha because he is in love with Lucy.

LOPER

Miss Lucy, I couldn't do what I promised because . . .

LUCY

Why, Yancy, why?

LOPER

Well, you see I got all stirred up--so I went outside. I saw somethin' out there I never saw before in my life. I saw them trees covered with long purple blossoms. And, Miss Lucy, they was the most beautiful things in the world.

LUCY

What are you talkin' about, Yancy? This is December. They won't have blossoms 'til April.

LOPER

Miss Lucy, I was lookin' at 'em in April, I reckon, because--they'll still be standin' there. I'm not going to cut 'em down. You can have 'em. You can have 'em forever.

LUCY

Yancy!

LOPER

And you can live in this house forever.

LUCY

But it's your house, Yancy.

LOPER

That's right. But it can be our house, Miss Lucy. Our trees.

(He looks at her pleadingly, desperate. LUCY looks back, seeing that he means it and that possibly it could all come true. She cannot speak.)

We'll prune 'em back like they was when you was a little girl and we'll spread white oyster shells thick along that driveway--all the way down to the river. We'll paint these old Corinthian columns white--'til they're gleamin'. This'll be one of the greatest places that ever was. I'll even make it better than it was before. (LUCY still looks at him) I'll make the money to do it, Miss Lucy. That's easy for me, makin' money. And with you here still, as the lady of this house, as my . . . (He is overcome by the picture of what might happen) Good God Almighty, Miss Lucy, I'll own this state! Everybody will fight to get asked to dinner with us, and to meet you . . . and me. We'll have 'em all workin' for us, Miss Lucy. That's what I saw when I looked at them trees. That's why they was

> covered with purple flowers in December. Do you want 'em, Miss Lucy? Do you want them . . . and me? 'Cause I go with 'em, you see.
>
> LUCY
>
> Yancy, oh, Yancy . . . if I'm hearin' what I hear, thank you. But aren't you bein' sentimental? I'm not right for you, Yancy.
>
> LOPER
>
> You're the only one that's ever been right for me. That's been the trouble. I didn't know it. I didn't even know why I bought this place--but I knew just now. I bought it for you. You're what I need. And this old place needs you, too. The only chance it's got is with you in it.

Lucy refuses. She tells Loper to cut down the wisteria vines. He replies:

> I wish you hadn't washed away that nosebleed. It would have been easier for me if you'd let it go on bleedin'. (He strides out into the gallery and calls to the workmen) Come on, everybody, let's cut 'em down. Let's go, you turkeynecks. Give me one of them axes. Here, you men, give me one of them axes and follow me.

Thus the axing of the vines becomes psychologically motivated; it becomes a gesture of Loper's retaliation for the hurt he has received. The sound that, for Chekhov, had embraced the pathos and the irony of the entire play has been reduced to a single meaning.

Logan's habit of reduction, of pinning down to a single gesture what Chekhov had left implied or mysteriously allusive, goes a long way toward explaining the disappointingly prosaic quality of The Wisteria Trees. A few additional examples may suffice. In

Act I of The Cherry Orchard, Fiers is serving coffee to Lyuboff before she retires for the night. She says,

> Thank you, Fiers, thank you, my dear old friend. I'm so glad you're still alive.
> FIERS: Day before yesterday.
> GAYEFF: He doesn't hear well.
> LOPAHIN: And I must leave right now.

Fier's inappropriate response to Lyuboff's somewhat blunt but well-meaning remark kills its potential sentiment, and then is allowed to die itself. The conversation glances off one consciousness, then another. Chekhov let it happen and then let it be.

Logan changed the scene slightly in The Wisteria Trees.

> LUCY
> Where's my coffee? Thank you, Scott. Thank you, my sweet old rock of Gibraltar. I'm so glad you're still alive.
> SCOTT
> Day before yesterday.
> LUCY (To GAVIN)
> What?
> GAVIN
> He doesn't hear well.
> LUCY
> Oh. (To SCOTT) Day before yesterday.
> SCOTT
> Dat's right.
> LUCY (Turning to MARTHA)
> I wonder what we're talkin' about.
> LOPER
> Miss Lucy, you did something for me once. Now you're in trouble and I'm going to do something for you.

LUCY
My troubles are over, Yancy. I'm back in this house.
(SCOTT places a taboret for LUCY'S coffee cup. She pats his arm)
SCOTT
Day before yesterday.

In Logan's hands, Scott's remark is noted, mimicked, labeled as a joke, and then repeated. Lucy's line "I wonder what we're talking about" insures the laugh that Logan felt the line deserved. Scott's repetition of "Day before yesterday" gives the line the specific function of signalling a habitual, senile, linguistic reflex. Logan's changes in this scene are characteristic of his changes throughout the play; he is heavy-handed and specific where Chekhov is light-handed and allusive.

Logan was equally heavy-handed and specific when he replaced Chekhov's cherry orchard with his wisteria vines.[16] Chekhov's cherry orchard, as symbol, embraces the entire play. It symbolizes a way of life that is passing, and it has a different meaning and worth for each of the characters in the play. Logan's wisteria vines have a more specific and didactic symbolic function. The vines do more than prettily exist; they are also destructive. Yancy Loper exclaims:

> Trees! Stop callin' 'em trees! They're just old vines that climbed up around young live oaks and choked 'em to death. They couldn't stand up for themselves if they didn't have those live oaks

> inside of them. Last year one of them grew right through the side of the carriage house, and now one's wrapped itself around one of your famous Corinthian columns like a bo' constrictor and squashed it--so stop callin' 'em trees! Stop treatin' 'em with respect! They certainly ain't treatin' you with any!

Thus the wisteria trees are not only symbols of an old order, but they impose a negative judgment about that old order as well--a judgment that Chekhov never made.

Some of the differences between The Wisteria Trees and The Cherry Orchard arise not so much from plot changes and from the heavy-handed prosaic realism as from contrasting methods of characterization. Whereas Chekhov had written his play for a group of actors, Logan's play was intended to be a starring vehicle for Helen Hayes. Accordingly, Logan plumped the role of Lucy Andree Ransdell and reduced the roles of the other characters. His singular focus is apparent from the very beginning. Chekhov brings nearly all his characters--Lyuboff, Anya, Charlotta, Varya, Gayeff, Semyonoff-Pishtchik, Lopahin, Dunyasha--on stage at once. The stage directions accompanying Lyuboff's first entrance indicate that "all pass through the room." In the clamor and confusion of their arrival, no one is singled out; in fact, we cannot immediately distinguish one character from another. The focus is on the entire household.

Conventionally, stage characters enter one by one or in pairs, and are, in one way or another, introduced as they enter. Logan eschewed Chekhov's helter-skelter staging in favor of the more conventional method of getting his characters on stage. Lucy enters alone. The stage directions read: "Lucy Andree Ransdell enters. She is dressed in a smart traveling costume. She is elated by her return but deeply moved by various familiar objects in the room." After her solo moment in the spotlight, Lucy proceeds to introduce the other characters as she greets them. The technique is not forced; it seems natural that Lucy, after an absence of five years, should repeat each name as she connects it with the face before her. But it is a technique far more contrived than Chekhov's.

The spotlight never leaves Lucy for very long. In the ballroom scene that occurs simultaneously with the auction off stage, Chekhov gave some of the ironic stage business to Charlotta, who entertains the guests with card tricks, ventriloquism, and sleight-of-hand performances. While these divertissements are taking place, Lyuboff is increasingly silent, and her silence eloquently speaks for her growing anxiety. Logan gave the corresponding divertissements to Lucy. In an impromptu performance for two little visiting children, she entertains them with a song about Froggie and

Miss Mouse. The song is charming, but its chief dramatic function seems calculated to highlight the winsome talents of Miss Hayes.

The roles of the other characters are reduced in inverse proportion to the role of Lucy Andree Ransdell. That process of reduction was achieved largely by eliminating the rambling soliloquies and surface chatter that revealed to us the pretensions and self-conceptions of Chekhov's characters. As far as we can tell, Logan's minor characters have no inner lives; they exist for their service to the plot. John Mason Brown, in an interesting comparison between the Russian and the American psyche, suggested that Logan's inattention to the inner lives of his characters was not so much an oversight as a requirement of his subject matter.

> Although Southerners were then, as they are now, capable of strong emotions, they did not share the Russians' passion for introspection. If they fed their minds on memories and dreams, they were, I suspect, Anglo-Saxon enough to be reticent about life with a capital "L." Climate may have made them languid. Cheap labor, which had once been slave, may have made them indolent. Living on the bitter diet of defeat may have left them maladjusted and contributed to their melancholy. But, unless present-day Southerners are a totally different breed, which I doubt, and unless my memories of the older generation mislead me, the South's men and women who correspond to Madame Ranevsky and her intimates did not plunge into metaphysical depths. Wisely, gaily, or ruefully, they prattled on about the surface of subjects. They were happier when

> discussing people, clothes, food, or events than abstract ideas. Theirs was a fierce family or sectional pride. It was the conditions of their life, past or present, which interested them more than the exploration of their psyches. Their troubles were many, but the "soul" in the Russian sense was not one of them.
>
> Chekhov's people were different. Passive as their outward lethargy may have been, their inward activity was unceasing. A critic such as Matthew Josephson may, in current fashion, dismiss "the mysterious Slavic soul" as a form of blague, but to Chekhov's characters this same "soul" was a matter of constant concern. Their preoccupation with it supplies a special energy to the most becalmed of Chekhov's speeches.
>
> His plays substitute interior action for outward happenings. Although his people may be trivial, life in its largest sense speaks through them. Gay as they can be, and gay as they must be to preserve the comedic richness of Chekhov's sorrowful scripts, at heart (more accurately, in those "Slavic souls" of theirs) his characters are sad. In oversimplified terms, the intensity which distinguishes their sadness from that of their Southern counterparts can perhaps be suggested by comparing the sheer sorrow of "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground" (which is accepted as being Southern) with the fateful, almost electric melancholy of "The Volga Boat Song."
>
> The vibrancy which underlies the seeming languor of Chekhov's Russians is missing in "The Wisteria Trees." Mr. Logan cannot be blamed for this. His Southerners, as I have come to realize, would be Russians if they possessed it. Yet the lack of it is sorely felt. All the fine talents involved in the production cannot compensate for its absence.[17]

The absence of Chekhov's special method of characterization helps to explain yet another major difference between the two plays--the difference in the way the two authors achieve their comic effect.

Chekhov had great difficulty trying to convince Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko that his play was comic. Even though he firmly labeled it "A Comedy in Four Acts," they insisted upon reading it as a drame. No matter how the play is produced, however, even in the melancholy productions that persisted long after Chekhov's protestations were forgotten, there is much about it that makes us laugh. In fact, much of the play is farce. "Farce," says Styan,

> which prohibits compassion for human weakness, and tragedy, which demands it, are close kin. The truth is that The Cherry Orchard is a play which treads the tightrope between them, and results in the ultimate form of that special dramatic balance we know as Chekhovian comedy.[18]

"That special dramatic balance" is achieved by Chekhov's superb control over the flux of mood in the play. A rising sentiment is smothered by a neat inconsequence, and a farcical bit is offset by a glancing irony. The play continuously hovers between farce and pathos, caricature and tragedy, whim and philosophy, irony and parody.

More specifically, however, "Chekhovian comedy" is a matter of another kind of balance--the balance between Chekhov's vision of his characters and their vision of themselves.[19] Much of the humor of The Cherry Orchard is contained in the portraits of the servants. Dunyasha and Yasha, for example, both

conceive of themselves as urbane sophisticates. Dunyasha calls attention to her white hands and her delicacy. She has developed nerves and a fastidious distaste of cigars. Yasha, the object of her infatuation, behaves according to his idea of swashbuckling bon vivant. Both ape their social superiors in vulgar, ludicrous parody, and their clandestine trysts are broadly comic caricatures. Epihodoff, the suitor Dunyasha has abandoned, thinks of himself as a tragic hero. But his melancholy laments and tentative offers to commit suicide are offset by his clumsy pratfalls and pathetic displays of learning.

The other characters in the play, though less broadly comic than the servants, are nevertheless comic in the same way--they are equally self-deceived. Gayeff, like the perpetually astonished Pishtchik, is a great innocent child, and his efforts to save the orchard are all the more ridiculous for his complete sincerity and trust in them. "We'll pay the interest. I am convinced of that--" he swears, as he pops a hard candy into his mouth. That the urgent and practical matter of the fate of the orchard should be entrusted to a man who sucks candy, plays imaginary games of billiards, apostrophizes bookcases, and submits passively to the fussy attentions of old Fiers, is funny indeed. During the course of the play,

Gayeff learns nothing, either about himself or about the world around him, and the irony of his future is lost on him. He gaily announces in Act IV:

> Yes, indeed, everything is fine now. Before the sale of the cherry orchard, we all were troubled, distressed, then when the question was settled definitely, irrevocably, we all calmed down and were even cheerful--I'm a bank official. I am a financier now--Yellow ball into the side pocket, anyway, Lyuba, you look better, no doubt about that.

Lyuboff Andreevna is no more perceptive than her brother. She conceives of herself as feminine and charming, and that she is. But her situation requires more of her, and she is not equal to those requirements. She does have moments of self-revelation, but these moments never add up to any total revelations or any reversals. "The musicians came at an unfortunate moment and we planned the ball at an unfortunate moment--" she admits in Act III, but adds, "Well, it doesn't matter."

Trofimoff, the young visionary who carries on his thin shoulders the burden of the social comment of the play, speaks much that is true. In another play, Trofimoff might be the norm against which the other characters might be judged. But Trofimoff is forbidden that stature, for he too has pretensions, and, like Alceste, his truisms sound more like bombast than like reasoned discourse. Coming as they do from

a squeaky-voiced young man who has never worked in his life, Trofimoff's arguments for social progress through labor merely evoke indulgent smiles from stage audience and theater audience alike.

Lopahin is the best candidate for the normative character in the play. He, after all, does the work that Trofimoff merely talks about, and he has fewer pretensions than the other characters, for he is neither introspective nor self-indulgent. Chekhov emphasized to Stanislavsky that Lopahin was to be played sympathetically:

> Lopakhin is a merchant, of course, but he is a very decent person in every sense. He must behave with perfect decorum, like an educated man, with no petty ways or tricks of any sort. . . . In choosing an actor for the part you must remember that Varya, a serious and religious girl, is in love with Lopakhin; she wouldn't be in love with a mere money-grubber. . . .[20]

It is only as a lover that Lopahin is comic, and his excruciating discomfiture in the presence of Varya is both pathetic and amusing.[21]

Each of Chekhov's characters, then, approaches his situation from a limited moral and philosophical perspective. The naive, the innocent, the foolish, and the earnest--all address themselves to a potentially tragic situation, but we smile because our vision of them is so different from their own. The comedy of

The Cherry Orchard stems from the disparity of those visions.

That source of humor was not available to Mr. Logan, who took his characters at their own value. Peter Whitfield, for example, like Trofimoff, articulates the social criticism in the play. But Peter is no poseur whose overly earnest idea of himself as visionary undercuts the vision itself. Trofimoff launches into the rhetorical idiom of a speechmaker the moment he approaches his favorite topic; Peter speaks directly and personally. He even admits to confusion, which immediately makes him uncomic. We laugh at rigidity or obtuseness, not at honest confusion. Peter speaks for himself and for his author when he says,

> We're changing, like some lazy, prehistoric animal shedding its old skin. The only trouble is, there's no new one grown yet, and we don't even know what kind we need. And if anybody asks questions, that's treason. I could be tarred and feathered for just what I'm saying now. The Negroes do our singing. It's all right for a man to breed dogs, but he better not play the piano or he might be called a sissy, which means among other things a hermaphrodite. And you know we're lazy. We've stuffed ourselves with delicious food prepared by strong, black hands, and it's made us sleepy. And who wants to listen to all this? That little magazine of mine was fifty cents, and I reduced it to a quarter, but if anybody would have bought it I would have sold it for a penny. It wasn't any good because--you're right, Mister Gay--I don't know what I think. I hardly ever saw my father or my mother. We were all brought up in the kitchen, weren't we? How's this for the dinner table?

> (Quoting)
> Lucky little Southern chillun
> Have two mothers, white and black.
> While Mummy's in the parlor
> They're with Mammy in the back!
> I had one. Her name was Amy Lane. She weaned me at the kitchen table, picked me up when I fell down, slapped me when I was bad. I didn't even know she was black. I thought her skin was made out of purple velvet, and there was a place between her shoulder and her arm that was soft and warm and aromatic, and I could sleep there better than anywhere. Then they stopped me from eating in the kitchen. I don't know what's right or wrong--or good or bad. Do you?

There is no double vision here; Peter's confusion is Logan's as well. "I was raised in the Deep South, and I never quite comprehended my feelings about Negroes," Logan confessed.

> I was reared by a Negro nurse, Amy Lane. She was my second mother, the queen who ruled the back areas of the house, those permissive places where I was happiest. She loved me and nurtured me. Then, one day, I was told she couldn't eat with me or ride in the same railroad car with me. This is a guilty agony that all decent Southerners carry inside of them.[22]

The double vision is lacking from Logan's portrayal of his other characters as well. In most cases, it is lacking first of all because Logan spent no time attending to the inner lives of the characters, so that we have no sense of their self-concepts against which to measure their objective "reality." But even Lucy Ransdell looks at herself in precisely the same way that Logan would have us see her. Her expository speech about her past sins, for example, is far more

honest and self-reproachful than is Lyuboff's corresponding speech. Lyuboff Andreevna says:

> Oh, my sins--I've always thrown money around like mad, recklessly, and I married a man who accumulated nothing but debts. My husband died from champagne --he drank fearfully--and to my misfortune I fell in love with another man. I lived with him, and just at that time--it was my first punishment--a blow over the head: right here in the river my boy was drowned and I went abroad--went away for good, never to return, never to see this river again--I shut my eyes, ran away, beside myself, and he after me--mercilessly, brutally. I bought a villa near Mentone, because he fell ill there, and for three years I knew no rest day or night, the sick man exhausted me, my soul dried up. And last year when the villa was sold for debts, I sent to Paris and there he robbed me of everything, threw me over, took up with another woman; I tried to poison myself--so stupid, so shameful--And suddenly I was seized with longing for Russia, for my own country, for my little girl--(Wiping away her tears) Lord, Lord, have mercy, forgive me my sins! Don't punish me any more! (Getting a telegram out of her pocket) I got this today from Paris, he asks forgiveness, begs me to return--(Tears up the telegram) That sounds like music somewhere.

Lucy says:

> I'm being punished. Not Gay--me! I've been willful. When it came to gettin' married, I defied everybody. Our blood was runnin' thin so I decided to change it. I married an up-and-coming lawyer, and then found his one ambition was to be lord of a plantation and drink all the whiskey in the world. So . . . I filled his glass 'til it runnethed over. Before he died he used to bring some strange, crude men around for poker. There was an arrogant one that . . . well, after my lawyer husband died, those times I went to New Orleans to see the opera, I didn't see the opera . . .
>
> GAVIN
>
> Lucy, honey, that's all over.
>
> LUCY
>
> Gay, please! Even you'll admit I was punished then, Yancy. While my little son was showin' me how well he could swim, the river swallowed him up

in front of my eyes. These trees turned yellow, the river turned black. I flew the coop! I took a boat for Europe, but not too fast for him. He was standin' in my cabin with a big, white smile. "Not so fast, Honey--you need someone to take care of you." God save me, it sounded good! So I gave him some money and he bought me a villa near a place he knew called . . . Monte Carlo. Then he got sick and I nursed him for three years.

GAVIN

Why didn't you send for me, Lucy?

LUCY

Oh, Gay, darling! The villa was sold to pay for the doctors, and he was well, so we went to Paris--a beautiful city, Yancy, with great, wide boulevards--and the most exquisite punishment of all. One morning while I was asleep he unlocked my dresser drawer and took Mama's diamonds--and then he went to live with a lady we'd met. A few days later he came knockin' at my door, but I had a new strength. My daughter was there. I'd almost forgotten I had one. She brought me back home where I thought I'd be safe. And you say I've never committed a sin--that I've never been punished? (She breaks down. To cover her tears she takes her handkerchief from her purse and realizes that she has a cablegram. She holds it up) He's sittin' at our little cafe under the chestnut tree. (Music can be heard faintly) He's sick again. He needs me. Do I hear music playin'?

The content of the two speeches is virtually the same, but the tone is different. Lyuboff's remorse is sincere enough, but it seems a sincerity that is self-indulgent. "Lord, Lord, have mercy, forgive me my sins!" has a rhetorical ring to it. Lyuboff's speech is effective characterization before it is effective exposition. Lucy's confessions, in contrast, are more straightforward, neither blurred nor compromised by any feeling that she is sentimental about her own misgivings. Her speech is effective exposition before

it is effective characterization. Later in the play, Lucy reinforces for us the clarity of her own perception. "Antoinette," she says, "you work out a way to live, do you hear me? Figure out what I did, and then for the love of God, do something else." And still later:

> I'm going to tie that stone around my neck and go down for the last time.
>
> GAVIN
>
> Are you doing it because Antoinette doesn't need you any more and I. . . .
>
> LUCY
>
> Gay . . . that's just an excuse! I'm what old Scott says . . . I'm shiftless. I would have gone anyway. I can't help it. Oh, God, save me. . . .

Lucy, unlike Lyuboff, is not self-deceived. None of Logan's characters is; they are all just as perceptive about themselves as their author is. And no more so.

Because Logan failed to catch the comedy that is inherent in the double layer of perception operative in Chekhov's play, he had to find his humor elsewhere. He did so by giving his characters lines calculated to make the audience laugh. These lines are not an intrinsic part of characterization, but rather are imposed on the characters from outside themselves, in the manner of stand-up comedians. In Act I, when Lucy first sees her old neighbor, she exclaims,

And Bowman Witherspoon, you old Methodist!

WITHERSPOON

Baptist!

LUCY

What's the difference?

In the same scene, Cassie delivers her set speech:

WITHERSPOON

Cassie, what did you think of Paris?

CASSIE

Oh, it got a lot of parks, but they all too laid out for me. And there's marble statues of nekkid men all over the place--most of 'em's called Apollo! Miss Lucy says, "Isn't they beautiful statues, Cassie!" (To ANTOINETTE) Didn't she? (ANTOINETTE nods) And I says, "Miss Lucy, I dressed and undressed your little son Lee before he got drowned in the river, and afore that I dressed your little boy cousins--all ages! Honey, these here Apollos ain't no recreation for me!"

Similar jokes and comic bits are scattered throughout the play. The characters often seem to be feeding one another lines, with one eye on the audience's reaction. It is the same kind of humor that worked so well in Mister Roberts and South Pacific--the set-pieces of situation comedy--and it is the kind of comedy that is created in exactly the opposite way from Chekhovian comedy. Logan figured out what lines would make people laugh and then created characters to speak those lines. Chekhov created characters first, allowed them to talk out of their own self-concepts, and the comedy resulted naturally.

Logan's comments about the writing of his play help to illuminate many of the differences between The

Wisteria Trees and The Cherry Orchard. It was Logan's habit to write with his mind on his audience, putting things together during rehearsals and trial runs. The initial writing of The Wisteria Trees was hurried and the re-writing process was hectic. Before its New York opening, the play was taken on a pre-Broadway tour where each new audience presented Logan with new problems. In Boston, for example,

> except for polite applause, there was no reaction whatsoever from the audience. We could have expected the same silence from people listening to a two-hour funeral oration. What had happened?
>
> We were confused by the reaction of the audiences. The audiences were confused, too. The play tried to follow the exact form of Chekhov's play and the audience did not accept it as an American story for today's audience.
>
> After talking to Helen, I decided to re-do the whole thing, keep all of the material and tell the same story, but find a form easier for an American audience to follow emotionally. Leland [Hayward] booked an extra three weeks out of town and we got to work.
>
> Practically every line in the play that Helen and the cast had to say was transposed or turned backward, and each night she faced an audience with visions of pages pasted together, lines scratched out, scenes reversed in order. They had to keep two plays in their minds: the one they were playing that night and the one they were re-creating during the day. . . .
>
> By the last three performances in Boston, all the major changes had been made, but the play was too long and the new version had not had enough rehearsal, so that on the opening night in New Haven it faced another confused and dissatisfied audience.
>
> By the end of the week in New Haven we had a chance to cut a bit and the play was beginning to take shape, but at this point the friends who had seen the play in Princeton arrived. The hardest blow of all came from them. We somehow expected

> people to be angry that "The Cherry Orchard" had been changed, but these friends became enemies because I had changed "The Wisteria Trees."[23]

In Philadelphia it was Helen Hayes who made the changes. Sensing something wrong in the first act, she and Logan went over the script line by line until she singled out a speech that she found difficult to perform. Logan promptly cut the speech from the first act and re-instated it later in the play. The next day, he reported, there was new life and new confidence in the members of the cast.[24]

Logan's method of playwriting contrasts sharply with Chekhov's method later in his life. "Three years I spent writing 'The Cherry Orchard' . . ."[25] Chekhov wrote to Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1903, and his letters during that three-year period document the slow, measured, thoughtful process of gestation that took place until "the play was completed in my head."[26] Once the play was completed, it was not to be changed. When actors asked Chekhov how certain lines were to be interpreted, Chekhov responded with some astonishment, "Why, I have written it all down."[27]

Logan had a totally different set of priorities. In his essay "The Art in Yourself" he stated that

> the author may . . . have to make a lifesaving sacrifice. Certain lines are dear to him; the actor has tried them in various ways; something is still wrong. Perhaps it's the actor's voice or face or personality which doesn't fit with the lines. At this point the author must be persuaded to cut or rewrite the lines in order to make it easier for the actor to project the author's scene. Any agreement is worth while if it is made for the sake of clarifying the play for the audience. All really great authors are ruthless with their work. No word is sacred. Every second of every line must be heard, seen, understood, felt, shared by the audience. Confusion may seem artistic but it is fatal.[28]

Unfortunately, Logan's own mix-and-match method of playwriting only guaranteed the fatal confusion he thought to avoid. The Wisteria Trees is, in the words of one critic,

> a vast vulgarization of a great play in which nothing matches. . . . One example of the mish-mash will suffice. In the "Cherry Orchard" the character of the heroine's brother is that of an ineffectual, endearing, but pompous man given to delivering speeches on every score. In the "Wisteria Trees" Mr. Logan's version of this figure has no speeches at all, although his effect remains the same. While he wanders in practical silence through Jo Mielziner's marvelously lighted set, he is everywhere lovingly, laughingly greeted with the fact that he talks too much.[29]

Other examples might be added. The judgment against the landowners implied by the symbol of the wisteria vines is suppored nowhere else in the play. In fact, Logan's less-than-sympathetic characterization of Yancy Loper argues against that judgment. And throughout the play, the narrative Logan borrowed from Chekhov fails to bolster his more limited vision.

The people whom Logan was accustomed to pleasing were the people who filled the musical theater, and it was with them in mind that he wrote The Wisteria Trees. But the audience that came to see The Wisteria Trees was not always comprised of the same people who applauded Mister Roberts and Charley's Aunt, and Logan was candid in recording his dismay over the new percentage of critical intelligences who awaited each opening curtain. His advice to anyone else who might try to adapt a beloved classic for popular consumption was simple:

> If you decide to base a play of your own on a masterpiece, try and find some tryout towns in America that are not also centers of learning where that masterpiece is taught in classrooms and its strong, young converts are being turned out by the hundreds. Don't go to Princeton, Boston or New Haven, and if you do, remember I warned you. Masterpiece lovers of the world are lying in wait for you there.[30]

At the end of the pre-Broadway run, Logan was apprehensive, hoping that New York audiences would contain no "masterpiece lovers."

> The Chekhov scholars seem to have dwindled, I am happy to say. Where did they go? Maybe the University of Pennsylvania and Haverford and Bryn Mawr spend more time on Ibsen. Maybe they can't be seen in the shadows because of the glow that comes from Helen Hayes. Maybe they're moved to New York and are waiting for me there.[31]

They were. It was too much to expect that the New York theater should be unaware of Chekhov.

The Wisteria Trees opened at the Martin Beck Theater on March 29, 1950, in the wake of a flurry of advance publicity. Almost from its inception, the play had been inextricably linked with Helen Hayes and also with her late daughter, Mary MacArthur. Shortly after Mary's death, her theater friends had initiated the Mary MacArthur Fund for Polio, and on February 6 an intensive campaign was launched by the fund-raisers to sell tickets and get donations for the preview performance of The Wisteria Trees, originally scheduled for March 7. Tickets for the regular performances were first sold by a private sale to some 8,000 people who had been mail-order patrons for Mister Roberts.[32] Before long, the Martin Beck Theater had to construct a second box office to handle the orders for tickets,[33] and when the opening of the play was delayed from March 8 to March 29 so that Logan could finish polishing the script, the box office had to exchange $90,000 worth of tickets.[34] By the time The Wisteria Trees finally arrived on Broadway, it was, from a commercial point of view, an assured hit.

It was not so from a critical point of view. Most critics were wary. Those who praised the play did so faintly, and for one of three reasons: many

were pleased to see Helen Hayes restored to the theater after a two-year absence, some felt the play was not as bad as it might have been, and a few--those who interpreted The Cherry Orchard as a brutally hopeless drama--found The Wisteria Trees pleasant and wholesome by comparison. Brooks Atkinson was one of the critics in the latter category, and his remarks about The Wisteria Trees seem predicated on a singularly harsh reading of The Cherry Orchard. Though he acknowledged that "Mr. Logan's drama is no masterpiece," it was, he felt, "one of the most absorbing plays of the season in its own right and by comparison with its renowned predecessor."[35] Its renowned predecessor, according to Atkinson, was a hopeless play, full of cruelty and spite, and peopled by lonely, temperamental egoists. The Wisteria Trees, on the other hand, was pretty, gentle, and disarming. For example,

> In that casual but horrifying scene [the last scene in which Fiers is left behind] Chekhov epitomized the barbaric egotism and shiftlessness of the cultivated people he was writing about. Mr. Logan has conspicuously departed from "The Cherry Orchard" formula by not attempting to write a counterpart to that scene. On the basis of the nature of his characters in "The Wisteria Trees," it would be unthinkable. Doubtless there is a streak of cruelty in all aristocracies, and for that matter in every group culture, but Mr. Logan's amiable futilitarians are not insensible in their personal relations.

Atkinson concluded: "Chekhov is hopeless. Mr. Logan is not. And that is the fundamental reason why 'The Wisteria Trees' is a new American play and not an American version of 'The Cherry Orchard.'"[36]

Relatively few other critics were able to see The Wisteria Trees as "'a new American play' and not an American version of 'The Cherry Orchard.'" John Mason Brown called it

> a work haunted by a masterpiece. It not only has to live up to "The Cherry Orchard" but to live it down. In other words, it starts off its supposedly independent life as handicapped as the son of a great father.[37]

Accordingly, most critics concentrated on comparing the two plays. The natural place to begin such a comparison was, of course, with the point of comparison within the plays themselves--the analogy between Russia and the American South. Many critics seemed surprised to find that the analogy proved to be less pointed than they might have expected. Atkinson observed:

> The analogies between Russia and the deep South at the end of the last century are startling--including the liberation of the Russian slaves in 1961 and the American slaves in 1963. But now that we have "The Wisteria Trees" for exact comparison, it is evident that the analogies are factual only. In spirit, old Russia and the old South are about as unlike as possible, and spirit is the animating force of a society.[38]

Joseph Wood Krutch found the analogy not so much false as redundant:

> I see no very compelling reason why "The Cherry Orchard" should be re-written, since Chekhov wrote it pretty well to begin with. Shifting the scene to a Southern plantation is dangerously close to what Hollywood calls a "gimmick," and if it be argued that the transition is easily made, that means only that the original play had a certain universality which ought to be as evident in one version as the other.[39]

That universality, however, was not especially evident in Logan's version. Whatever it was that made The Cherry Orchard ring true sounded hollow in The Wisteria Trees, and nearly every critic articulated some degree of disappointment. Harold Clurman called the play "a memory of a memory of a memory,"[40] Robert Garland wrote in the Journal American that the characters "do not break my heart as they broke my heart as Russians,"[41] and the reviewer for Time sadly judged that "what is heard at the end is the sound of the ax hacking the heart out of The Cherry Orchard."[42] Richard Watts of the New York Post spoke for the majority of critics when he pronounced The Wisteria Trees "neither good Logan nor good Chekhov."[43]

The often bewildered disappointment with which most critics received the play may perhaps be explained by noting the two assumptions that Mr. Logan brought to his enterprise. The first was that The Cherry

Orchard is a play about the dispossession of an estate. Such an assumption is far too mere. It is like saying that Oedipus Rex is a play about a plague. Chekhov's talent lies in his ability to project his realistic situation beyond itself into poetic symbol and universal meaning. The subject of The Cherry Orchard, therefore, reaches far beyond the selling of an orchard; it is no less comprehensive than

> time and change, and their effects wrought on a representative group of people. . . . But in feeling for this, Chekhov knows that the realism of the chosen convention can dangerously narrow his meaning until it seems too particular and finally irrelevant. He thus works hard to ensure that his play projects a universal image, giving his audience some sense that this microcosm of the cherry orchard family stands, by breadth of allusion and a seemingly inexhaustible patterning of characters, for a wider orchard beyond.
>
> The cherry orchard is a particular place and yet it is more. It represents an inextricable tangle of sentiments, which together comprise a way of life and an attitude to live. . . . An audience finds that the orchard grows from a painted backcloth to an ambiguous, living, poetic symbol of human life, any human life, in a state of change.[44]

When he transplanted the Russian orchard to American soil, Mr. Logan duplicated the frame of the play, but he missed the universal rumblings and the poetic overtones. Thus his duplication is disappointing not so much because the analogy is false, but because Logan's reading of the original was superficial.

Logan's second assumption concerned the nature of his American audience. One irate patron asked the obvious question in a letter to the New York Times: "The reason for doing 'The Wisteria Trees' is that both Helen Hayes and Mr. Logan have always wanted to do 'The Cherry Orchard.' Well, why didn't they?"[45] Logan's implied answer seemed to be that Americans would have too much difficulty with The Cherry Orchard; when writing the play he confessed he was looking for a "form easier for an American audience to follow emotionally."[46] The presumption behind any adaptation is that people understand only what is immediately recognizable to them; the presumption behind Logan's particular adaptation is that Americans also need their reality served up in a familiar, conventional fashion. And so, in his ministrations to the masterpiece, Logan gave the American public a cherry orchard tailored to their sensibilities and theatrical expectations.

Logan was not altogether wrong in his estimation of his audience. The Wisteria Trees ran for 165 performances and was briefly revived five years later. No production of The Cherry Orchard in America had ever lasted beyond 96 performances. Despite its modest success, however, The Wisteria Trees seems a curious response to the advice Logan

had received from Stanislavsky nineteen years earlier: "You must create something of your own. If you try to duplicate, that means that you merely follow tradition. You are not going forward."

CHAPTER V

LILLIAN HELLMAN: THE CHEKHOVIAN GARDEN

Until 1951, there was nothing very Chekhovian about any of Lillian Hellman's plays. Quite the contrary. Her first six plays had earned for her the reputation of a vigorous, uncompromising moralist whose plots were so well made and decisive they leaned dangerously toward melodrama. Ever since little Mary's lie led inexorably to a suicide and a damaged life in The Children's Hour, Miss Hellman pointed a stern finger at depravity and compromise. Her specialty was evil. She was, said John Gassner, "our hanging judge of the American theatre."[1]

When The Autumn Garden opened at the Coronet Theater on March 7, 1951, the critics had every right to expect an exposé of yet another category of evil-doers. But the play did not fulfill their expectations, and the reviews reflected their surprise. The advance notice in the New York Times of February 25, 1951,

alerted the public with its headline: "Lillian Hellman Drama Foregoes a Villain."[2] Shortly after the play opened, John Mason Brown spoke for a majority of critics when he noted that

> in many ways "The Autumn Garden" is unlike any of Lillian Hellman's previous works. The same muscularity of mind, the same command of authentic dialogue, the same willingness to face unpleasant people as they are, the same instinctive awareness of the theatre's needs which have always animated her writing are present. But the mood, the tone, the flavor, the point of view and hence the means employed are so different from those of "The Children's Hour," "The Little Foxes," "Watch on the Rhine," and "Another Part of the Forest" that it is no overstatement to say that a new Miss Hellman has emerged.[3]

Critical reaction to the "new Miss Hellman" was mixed. Although most agreed that the new play was a fine one, many reviewers were sorry to lose the old Miss Hellman. The opening-night review in the New York Post was nostalgic:

> Gone is the tremendous dramatic vigor that has made Lillian Hellman's plays among the most emotionally and intellectually dynamic in the history of the American theater, and in its place is a quiet introspection that is almost bleak in its cold disregard of melodramatic excitement. To a certain extent this brooding contemplation marks an advance in the author's writing, substituting a new quality of mature deliberation for the sometimes febrile intensity of her earlier plays. But I suspect that the cost she pays for that maturity is a little excessive. Her new play needs some of her old-time bite.[4]

The New York Times echoed this ambivalence. Brooks Atkinson acknowledged that

> in most respects this is Miss Hellman at the peak of her talents--observant, sympathetic, honest and alert. Nothing is forced. Everything is lucid. In the circumstances, it seems ungrateful to add that "The Autumn Garden" is a little platitudinous. Like the characters whom it admirably describes, it is boneless and torpid.[5]

Several months after the opening-night flurry, John Gassner spoke retrospectively for all the critics: "We did not feel at ease with [the play], as if it called for self-appraisals we are usually reluctant to make."[6]

When the critics cast about for ways to describe the unfamiliar Hellman play, several of them compared it with Chekhov. Some qualified this comparison by suggesting that the similarity was accidental. Brooks Atkinson wrote that "'The Autumn Garden' is perhaps unintentionally in the Chekhov tradition,"[7] and John Gassner was even more tentative:

> It has been suggested that Miss Hellman tried to write like Chekhov and failed. If this is true at all, it is so only very superficially. It is true that she attempted a more contrapuntal and unplotty technique than had been her wont. But the style was Hellman's, not Chekhov's in the least.[8]

John Mason Brown, however, found the new Hellman style less a matter of accidental echoes than of a deliberate switch in dramaturgic mentors:

> For the first time in her distinguished career she has, so to speak, turned her back on Ibsen and moved into the camp of Chekhov. To the casual reader such a shift in allegiance may seem unimportant. To the theatre-minded, however, it represents a change in attitude, method, and purpose of the utmost significance. Were an old-guard Republican to become a New Dealer or vice versa; were a Catholic to turn Campbellite or a Campbellite to make the trip to Rome, the about-face could not be more complete.
>
> Ibsen and Chekhov were irreconcilables in their approaches to the drama. Their differences were sufficiently fundamental to be described as a schism rather than a disagreement. Yet their influences have been so far-reaching that, though Chekhov in recent years has proved to be the more beckoning, each still has his following and the two of them can be said to divide serious prose dramatists into Montagues and Capulets.[9]

Whether or not Miss Hellman's defection into the camp of the Chekhovites was deliberate remains a matter for speculation; she herself was silent on the matter.[10] There is, however, ample, albeit indirect, evidence that she had Chekhov somewhere in mind when she wrote the play. She had on occasion expressed her awareness of the limitations of the well-made-play formula, limitations which she had learned to work within and now, for the first time, virtually abandoned in favor of the looser Chekhovian form. She had also studied Chekhov, and she articulated her admiration for the man and his plays in 1954 in her edition of The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov. Finally, and most importantly, The Autumn Garden itself

attests to an indebtedness. The dramatic techniques of the play are similar to those of Chekhov, and the play's basic structure parallels that of Uncle Vanya.

In 1942, in the Introduction to the publication of her first four plays, Miss Hellman sought to answer the charges leveled against her that her plays were too well-made and that they were melodramas. Part of her defense consisted of a description of playwriting according to Ibsen:

> The theatre has limitations: it is a tight, unbending, unfluid, meager form in which to write. And for these reasons, compared to the novel, it is a second-rate form. (I speak of the form, not the content.) Let us admit that. Having admitted it--a step forward, since most of us are anxious to claim the medium by which we earn a living is a fine and fancy thing--we can stop the pretentious lie that the stage is unhampered. What the author has to say is unhampered: his means of saying it are not.[11]

By the time she wrote The Autumn Garden, Miss Hellman seemed to have modified her views about the limitations of the theater. In an interview with Richard G. Stern in 1959 she discussed the ideas for her new play, Toys in the Attic. During the course of the interview, Stern recalled that

> the other day you were talking about Autumn Garden and, in one sense, you summed up that play very briefly. At least you gave its technical source: you said you wanted to write a novel in theater form, and then you talked about the subject matter of the play as if it were a sort of after-effect of the technique.[12]

In many respects, The Autumn Garden is a "novel in theater form"; certainly there is nothing "tight, unbending, unfluid or meager" about the play. Rather, it is loose in structure, it bends easily, it is fluid, and it is diffuse and dense. For Miss Hellman, such qualities were entirely new, and they reflected a second look at the inherent limitations of the theater. They may also have reflected a second look at the world. She said in 1965:

> You write as you write, in your time, as you see your world. One form is as good as another. There are a thousand ways to write, and each is as good as the other if it fits you, if you are any good. If you can break into a new pattern along the way, and it opens things up, and allows you more freedom, that's something.[13]

In the light of her work just after the completion of The Autumn Garden, it is logical to assume that the "new pattern along the way" was, for her, the pattern of Chekhov.

Miss Hellman's edition of Chekhov's letters both reflected and contributed to the spate of Chekhov scholarship that was taking place in the Fifties. Much of the impetus for this scholarship was the publication of the twenty-volume complete works of Chekhov, published between 1944 and 1951 in Moscow. The last eight volumes of the Soviet edition were devoted to Chekhov's letters, and their publication was promptly followed by several smaller editions of

selected letters. In 1953 Louis Kronenberger, general editor of a "Great Letters Series" for Farrar, Strauss and Company, asked his old friend Lillian Hellman to edit a new collection of Chekhov's letters. Her task was to select and arrange the letters, which had been translated by Sidonie Lederer, to write an introduction, and to write biographical notes between the chronologically arranged sections.

Miss Hellman's introduction and biographical notes are interesting for two reasons: they tell us a great deal about Chekhov, and nearly as much about Miss Hellman's feeling of affinity between herself and Chekhov, for her own preferences prejudiced her interpretations of the man and his works. In 1953 there were enough interpretations of Chekhov to warrant her acknowledgment of "the Chekhov controversy, the Chekhov legend":

> People see in him what they wish to see; even if they have to ignore his words; or, more frequently, they ignore the dates on which the words were written. Some critics see Chekhov as a political radical, a man who desired the overthrow of a rotting society. Other critics see him as a non-political man, an observer of the scene, a writer who presented the problem but refused to give the answer. Still others see a man who, far from criticizing anything or anybody, was only saddened by a world that destroyed the delicate and punished the finely made. None of these points of view is the truth, although each has in it something of the truth.[14]

The truth that Lillian Hellman saw was a man who suited her own tastes. A severe, uncompromising observer of life herself, she found and admired the same qualities in Chekhov. She admired him for his "tough, unsentimental . . . mind" and for his refusal to articulate the reality he saw in euphemistic terms.

> Intelligence for Chekhov meant that you called a spade a spake: laziness was simply not working; too much drink was drunkenness; whoring had nothing to do with love; health was when you felt good and brocaded words could not cover emtpiness or pretensions or waste. He was determined to see life as it was.[15]

Such a man as this, a man tailored after Miss Hellman's own fashion, would not have written pale, wispy dramas. Nor, in her opinion, did he. Miss Hellman took strong issue with what she considered to be the irresponsible interpretations of his plays that began with Stanislavsky.

> Until now we seldom see a Chekhov play that is pure Chekhov. Most of us, therefore, do not know the plays. We know only something that we call "Chekhovian," and by that we mean a stage filled with sweet, soupy, frustrated people, created by a man who wept for their fate. . . .
>
> Chekhov fought long and hard against this interpretation of his plays. He lost the battle and he knew it, but, fortunately, he could not have known that it would still be lost fifty years later.[16]

Although Miss Hellman did not propose an alternate interpretation of Chekhov's plays, she did set down

certain guidelines. The plays, she felt, were not to be viewed as pessimistic.

> I do not understand the pessimistic theory. I know of no writer who ever made it more clear that he believed in the future. There is every difference between sadness and despair. . . . It has been forgotten that Chekhov said The Seagull and The Cherry Orchard were comedies. . . . The Cherry Orchard is sharp comedy.[17]

She also held to the minority opinion that Chekhov did judge his characters. She felt that "Chekhov makes it very clear that the lovable fools in The Cherry Orchard are not even worth the trees that are the symbols of their end."[18] Miss Hellman's assumption says more about herself than it does about Chekhov; it was by no means clear to most Chekhov critics that Chekhov felt thus about his characters, but it is not surprising that it would seem so to the "hanging judge of the American theatre."

Miss Hellman also made judgments about the comparative merits of the plays. Ivanov "is not a good play, but it is a remarkable picture of upper-class nineteenth century society."[19] The Three Sisters, on the other hand, "is a great play. It is a greater play than Uncle Vanya which, to me, is a greater play than The Cherry Orchard. But all three plays are of such importance that no easy and quick summary should be made of them."[20]

The importance of the three plays for Hellman herself can be inferred from her admiring, even wistful, description of Chekhov's craftsmanship.

> Sometimes we go to a play and after the curtain has been up five minutes we have a sense of being able to settle back in the arms of the playwright. Instinctively we know that the playwright knows his business. Neatness in design and execution is, after all, only the proper use of material, but it has a beauty of its own. It is exhilarating to watch a good workman at work, to see each detail fall into useful place, to know that the shortest line, the smallest stage movement, has an end in view and is not being used to trick us or deceive or pull fashionable wool over our eyes. It is then that we say to ourselves, this writer knows what he is doing, he has paid us the compliment of learning his trade. To such writers, in whatever field they be, we give our full attention and they deserve it.
>
> It is that way with Chekhov.[21]

From a playwright whose own forte was "neatness in design and execution," this was high praise indeed. It is no wonder that the Chekhov according to Hellman is very much like the Hellman influenced by Chekhov.

There are several ways in which the Chekhovian influence can be evinced. For many critics and playwrights, Chekhov was inextricably associated with his most popular play, The Cherry Orchard, and the term Chekhovian with a specific dramatic conflict--the replacement of an established aristocracy by a burgeoning bourgeoisie. Shaw assumed this when he wrote Heartbreak House. So did the critic of the New York Journal American, who responded to the opening performance of

The Autumn Garden by noting that "there was a distinct note of Chekhov sounding through the proceedings. . . . In fact I would not have been surprised to hear those woodsmen hacking at the cherry trees as the final curtain fell."[22] It would, in fact, have been most surprising to hear hacking of any sort, for the play has nothing whatever to do with orchards or with changes in any social order. Miss Hellman made no attempt to write an American Cherry Orchard, for she did not feel that any clear analogy could be made between the American South and the Russian situation. "It is not easy," she said,

> to understand nineteenth century Russia. Few of us know the language or have roots in it. . . . Even late in the century--a period close to us everywhere else in the Western world--Russian life and Russian thought seem to spring from sources more mysterious than seventeenth century England or France or Italy. Hamlet is closer to us than Papa Karamazov. We walk through the doors of Elsinore, but we have to be shoved into the Karamazov house, even though the doors were put into place by a man no older than our own grandfather. The agony of Othello could be our agony, but the agony of Raskolnikov is not ours and we give ourselves over to it with an effort. The space between America-Europe and Russia has always been wide.[23]

Miss Hellman's reluctance to make analogies was unusual. Matthew Josephson, for example, had introduced The Personal Papers of Anton Chekhov by observing that

> the Russian soul is no more mysterious than the soul of a dweller in the suburbs of London or Brooklyn. . . . [Chekhov's] world was predominantly that of the middle-class in late nineteenth century Russia; and how much alike are the middle-classes in all lands.[24]

It is likely that Miss Hellman's extensive visits to Russia in 1944 and 1945 had cautioned her against such easy assumptions. "Russians puzzle us, we puzzle them," she wrote from Moscow in her 1944 diary.[25]

The Autumn Garden, then, reflects a Chekhovian influence that is far broader than the duplication of a specific situation found in The Cherry Orchard. It reflects instead a middle-aged, Chekhovian vision of life. (Chekhov was always middle-aged.) It embodies a loose, free handling of plot and character. And if it resembles any of Chekhov's plays in basic structure, that play is Uncle Vanya. The critic who expected to hear the sound of the woodsman's ax at the close of The Autumn Garden had more reason to expect the curtain line, "We shall rest."

The structure of Uncle Vanya is relatively simple: at the beginning of the play some rather ordinary people who are gathered in the Voinitsky country home engage in domestic rituals and articulate from time to time their intimations of the waste of their lives. Vanya, the resident manager and uncle of the heir to the estate, cries:

> I don't sleep nights because of disappointment, and anger that I so stupidly let time slip by, when now I could have had everything that my old age denies me![26]

Astroff, a neighboring landowner and doctor, complains:

> And life itself is boring, stupid, dirty . . . it strangles you, this life. . . . My feelings somehow have grown numb. There's nothing I want, nothing I need, nobody I love. . . .

And Sonia, hopelessly in love with Astroff and aware of her own plainness, comforts herself with hard work and with the hope that one day Astroff will notice her.

Into this situation have come Sonia's father, Professor Serebriakoff, and his beautiful young wife, Elena. Their presence serves as a catalyst for the others; between the time of their arrival and departure, the other characters are energized to take slight risks that test their original analyses of their conditions. They discover that what they had thought was true, but had hoped was only a rationalization or a temporary deferral of their desires, really <u>is</u> true. The controlling dramatic question of the play, then, is this: What effect does the visit of Serebriakoff and Elena have upon the visited? The answer to that question is the typically Chekhovian kind of recognition.[27] For each of the major characters, illusion and intimation harden into reality. Nothing changes; the status quo is merely clarified and reinforced.

As catalytic agents, Serebriakoff and Elena are passive, indolent characters. They do very little, but the little they do is enough to shock the people around them into a brief surge of hope and desire, and to motivate them to summon up enough energy to risk the consummation of their desires. Elena's mere presence is disturbing. Her exquisite beauty unsettles Astroff and Vanya and reminds Sonia of her own plainness, but she also tampers slightly, idly, with the status quo. With curiously ambivalent motives, she offers to ask Astroff about his intentions concerning Sonia. Sonia has qualms.

> SONIA: . . . No, uncertainty is better. . . . After all, there is hope--
> ELENA: What is it?
> SONIA: Nothing.

Elena's confrontation with Astroff brutally quells Sonia's uncertainty and precludes any chance that Astroff will change his mind in the future. Sonia's fate is sealed.

Elena also contributes to the sealing of Astroff's fate. He had declared himself incapable of love, and had hoped it was not so. But after his abortive attempt at passion with Elena, he resigns himself to his former, loveless life. His parting kiss with her is quite without passion. "Finita!" he

says, as he prepares to take up once more the life he had led before his brief infatuation.

Vanya is also infatuated with Elena, but it is his brother-in-law Serebriakoff who energizes him into action. It is Serebriakoff's crotchety presence that leads Vanya to the realization that he has been exploited, and it is Serebriakoff's outrageous proposal to sell the estate that turns Vanya into would-be assassin. But both shots he fires at the professor miss their mark, and Vanya crumples in frustration. His attempt at retribution ends in farce.

At play's end, the equilibrium of the beginning is recomposed. Serebriakoff and Elena have not changed; the professor's life will continue as it has always been, and Elena never had any intention of changing anything about herself. And though the other characters have been sufficiently aroused by their presence to hope that something about their lives could be changed--Sonia had allowed Elena to force Astroff's hand, Astroff had dared an attempt at love, and Vanya had dared to assert his rights--all of these tentative risks are abortive. Their energy unequal to their hopes, they return, a bit more soberly and conclusively, to the anodynes that have always sustained them--Astroff to his vodka, his trees, and his rhetorical hopes for the future; Sonia to her work and her

rhetorical faith in a contentment beyond the grave; and Vanya to his neglected accounts. To Vanya's question "What am I to do?" Astroff answers, "Nothing." His answer articulates the recognition of the play.

The Autumn Garden repeats the basic pattern of Uncle Vanya. The play takes place in the Tuckerman boarding house, a hundred miles from New Orleans. "The house serves a symbolic function," observes Marvin Felheim in his discussion of the play,

> just as do the houses of Madame Ranevsky in The Cherry Orchard, of Sorin in The Seagull and of the Prosorovs in The Three Sisters. It is the old house to which cling many memories but which has grown somewhat shabby with the passage of time; it is the autumn garden where flashes of brightness only emphasize the proximity of wintery sterility.[28]

Assembled in this house at summer's end are a collection of guests and friends of the owner, Constance Tuckerman. Nearly all of them are middle-aged. The kind of recognition that Chekhov had all his life associated with the human condition was one that occurred to Miss Hellman later in life, and her characters reflect her own discovery. She explained to an interviewer,

> These people I've created are, you will observe, my own age. . . . Here is what I think happens to many people at this time of life. . . . You come to a place in your life when what you've been is going to form what you will be. If you've wasted what you had in you. it's too late to do much about it. . . . [However] If you are inwardly a serious person . . . in the middle years it will pay off.[29]

With one exception, the characters in the play have wasted what was in them, and the play dramatizes their discovery that "it's too late to do much about it."

The play begins with an uneasy Chekhovian stasis. Each character has a sense that his life is not all it might be, but has a tentative plan or a vague hope that it might be changed. General Griggs does not like his wife, and he believes that he intends to leave her to begin his life over again. Rose Griggs understands her husband even less then he understands her, and she hopes that by her refusal to acknowledge his weary discontent, their problems will disappear. Frederick Ellis and his mother, Carrie, are involved in a cloying relationship of emotional dependence, temporarily threatened by Frederick's disproportionate admiration for a mysterious writer, Mr. Payson. They have sensible plans, however; they will leave together on a six-month tour of Europe, after which Frederick will marry Sophie, Constance Tuckerman's niece. Constance Tuckerman has been living for twenty years on the romantic, idealized memories of her old beau, Nick Denery, memories which have aestheticized her loneliness, and have prevented her from finding a more tangible substitute in her old friend and annual guest, Edward Crossman. Crossman, the Astroff of the play, has responded to the disappointment he believes he

feels by settling himself into a posture of cynicism and alcoholic withdrawal. All the characters assume that either their plans will change their lives or that the compromises they have made in their lives are temporary.

Into this situation come the anticipated guests, Nick and Nina Denery, who function as the catalytic agents in the play. Like Professor Serebriakoff and Elena, the Denerys are emotionally bankrupt. Nick is a second-rate artist and a second-rate man who buttresses his sense of worth by a repetitive series of extra-marital affairs. These affairs hurt Nina, but she has a neurotic need to loathe as well as to love her husband. Both recognize the inadequacies of their relationship, but neither has sufficient energy to change it. Their function in the play is similar to that of Serebriakoff and Elena: their problems are not central to the play; they merely serve to bring into focus the illusions of the others.

Like Elena, Nick tampers with the status quo. But Nick is a professional meddler. His own image of himself as a charming fellow and his need to bolster his ego make his disinterested dabbling with the lives of others a psychological requirement. Nick touches everyone. He tells Sophie that she is "cute" and tries to encourage her to flirt with him. He tells

Constance that Crossman has confessed an undying love for her. He informs Carrie Ellis about the unsavory reputation of Mr. Payson. And he advises Rose about how to handle her husband's request for a divorce. "Oh, you are enjoying yourself so much here," remarks Nina, who has observed his machinations many times before. "I've seldom seen it this hog-wild. . . . You're on a rampage of good will."[30]

The dramatic question of the play is essentially the same as that of Uncle Vanya: What effect do the visitors have upon the visited? And the answer is also the same. Each character, during the course of Nick's visit, recognizes that the life he had been living but had hoped might be changed, will never change.

Not all the characters are capable of making their own recognitions; some have it done for them. Both Carrie and Frederick Ellis believe that they have only temporarily postponed Frederick's marriage to Sophie, but old Mrs. Ellis knows better. She tells Sophie:

> Frederick meant what he said to you [that he will come back for Sophie]. But I know them both and I would guess that in a week, or two or three, he will agree to go to Europe with his mother and he will tell you that it is only a postponement. And he will believe what he says. Time and decisions melt and merge for him and ten years from now he will be convinced that you refused to marry him. And he will always be a little sad about what could have been.

SOPHIE: Yes. Of course.
MRS. ELLIS: Carrie never will want him to marry. And she will never know it.

General Griggs is capable of articulating his own recognition. Early in the play he had confided to Crossman,

> There are so many things I want to do that I don't know which to do first. Have you ever thought about starting a new life? . . . I want to go somewhere now and study for a few years, or--. . . . Anyway, sit down by myself and think. . . . I'll start tame enough: I've written my sister that I'd like to stay with her for a month or two.

All of his modest plans are predicated upon his leaving Rose. But when, at the end of the play, he is told that Rose's medical condition precludes an immediate divorce, he is relieved: "I am not any too sure I didn't partly welcome the medical opinion that made it easier for me to give up." For Griggs, there will be no reversals, no peripetia, and he devotes a long, weary speech (written by Dashiell Hammett) to his recognition of this fact.

> So at any given moment you're only the sum of your life up to then. There are no big moments you can reach unless you've a pile of smaller moments to stand on. That big hour of decision, the turning point in your life, the someday you've counted on when you'd suddenly wipe out your past mistakes, do the work you'd never done, think the way you'd never thought, have what you'd never had--it just doesn't come suddenly. You've trained yourself for it while you waited--or you've let it all run past you and frittered yourself away. . . . I've frittered myself away, Crossman.

Crossman understands. He, too, has frittered himself away, and when the chance he had been waiting for actually comes, he is forced to realize that he does not have the energy to seize it. His temporary escapes have become reality. Constance, after confronting for the first time in her life the fact that Nick Denery is a "shabby fool," asks Crossman to marry her. He replies:

> I live in a room and I go to work and I play a game called getting through the day while you wait for night. The night's for me--just me--and I can do anything with it I want. There used to be a lot of things to do with it, good things, but now there's a bar and another bar and the same people in each bar. When I've had enough I go back to my room--or somebody else's room--and that never means much one way or the other. A few years ago I'd have weeks of reading--night after night--just me. But I don't do that much anymore. Just read, all night long. You can feel good that way.
>
> CONSTANCE: I never did that. I'm not a reader.
>
> CROSSMAN (As if he hadn't heard her): And a few years ago I'd go on the wagon twice a year. Now I don't do that anymore. And I don't care. (Smiles) And all these years I told myself that if you'd loved me everything would have been different. I'd have had a good life, been worth something to myself. I wanted to tell myself that. I wanted to believe it. Griggs was right. I not only wasted myself, but I wanted it that way. All my life, I guess, I wanted it that way.
>
> CONSTANCE: And you're not in love with me, Ned?
>
> CROSSMAN: No, Con. Not now.

Like Chekhov's Astroff and Sonia, Crossman and Constance are finally aware that what might have been will never be. They face their future stoically: "Let's have a nice dinner together, just you and me and go to the movies."

By creating several characters who are thus capable of comprehending and synthesizing their experiences, Miss Hellman went a step farther than Chekhov. Chekhov's characters rarely analyze their own situations so accurately, and when they do, their analyses are undercut by an action, another speech, or the force of the play as a whole. For Chekhov's characters, self-delusions are replaced by other delusions or they become momentarily transparent, but they are never completely exposed or understood by the characters themselves. Sonia, Astroff, and Vanya are introspective, but they are incapable of serving as their own analysts. In contrast, one critic accurately observed,

> The Autumn Garden has the relaxed Chekhov method without his unifying lyrical mood--his sense that if people delude themselves, life itself is delusive. Actually Chekhov cuts deeper than Miss Hellman because, being a realist rather than a moralist, he very seldom grants his characters the ability to face the truth about themselves.[31]

If moralists are the opposite of realists, Miss Hellman remained a moralist. She knew this about herself, and her comments about her first play, The Children's Hour, are equally valid for The Autumn Garden: "I am a moral writer, often too moral a writer, and I cannot avoid, it seems, that last summing-up."[32] The last summing-up in The Autumn Garden is entrusted to Griggs and Crossman, who thus become Hellman's raissoneurs. The famous Chekhovian reticence, which precluded judgments, theses, and final denouements, was a quality which Hellman never quite captured, either for herself or for her characters.

She did, however, capture many of the techniques that contributed to the "relaxed Chekhov method." Although she made into a thesis the vision that Chekhov had allowed to remain an inconclusive suggestion, the nature of that thesis demanded that she revise her techniques of plotting and character-drawing.

If it is true that, for many people at least, life will not change, it follows that a play which dramatizes this condition will contain no peripetia. Thus, for the first time in her career, Miss Hellman turned away from the crises that had dominated the

third act of each of her previous plays. Instead she presented nine loosely connected character studies. There is no clear sequential progression of events in the play but rather a theme, demonstrated by its effect on the individual characters. For none of these characters, with the exception of Sophie, is there any dramatic confrontation or reversal; there is only the slow erosion of hope that leads each of them, in a downward movement, to a recognition.

Several critics found such parallel recognitions repetitive and overdone. Walter Kerr felt that his dissatisfaction with the conclusion of the play lay in Miss Hellman's

> determination to handle it in multiples. That six or seven characters, only loosely related, would become emotionally petrified in precisely the same way is inescapably pat; the parallel construction leads to an unavoidable and all too forseeable repetition of scenes in the last act; and the very lack of variety or balance in the case histories offends our sense of proportion. What may be demonstrably true of one man is not always statistically true of the species; it is Miss Hellman's bad luck that the species itself seems defeated by eleven o'clock, an impression which the audience is obviously reluctant to approve.[33]

One suspects that even Mr. Kerr might have been more willing to accept the Chekhovian truth about the species if Miss Hellman had donned the Chekhovian reticence about stating that truth--if she had allowed

it to remain a probability, rather than hammering it home with her characteristic vigor and insistence.

In one respect, however, she did adopt a more reticent attitude toward plotting. At several points in the play, we get the impression that she deliberately walked away from big scenes. Frederick's confrontation with Mr. Payson, Rose's visit to the doctor, and Carrie's talk with Frederick--these scenes might have provided, in another play, a critical moment of decision. But they are not dramatized on stage; they are merely reported or alluded to after they take place. For the new Miss Hellman, what happened was not nearly so important as the effect of what happened on characters who had already been defined. And it was toward those definitions that Miss Hellman directed most of her energies.

The stimulus for Chekhov's oblique method of building a scene had come from his primary interest in the inner lives of his characters. Sometimes wistful, sometimes despairing, sometimes hopeful, his creatures' inner lives are as turbulent as their outward lives seem becalmed. Each psyche moves through its own separate labyrinth, and the indirect dialogue reflects that separateness.

In theory at least, Miss Hellman had long been aware that such indirection was verisimilar. In 1942

she said, "People in life, I told myself, don't always make the direct answer, or follow the immediately preceding thought."[34] There was little about her early plays, however, that dramatized this observation. She had never lingered long enough over her characters' inner lives to ask why their answers to each other were indirect or why they failed to follow the immediately preceding thought. Instead, she tended to see her characters as the embodiments of ethical norms. She admitted that in Days to Come she had conceived of her characters in balanced pairs--each leading character has a counterpart who is his ethical opposite.[35] Typically, her characters demonstrate their virtue or their depravity by their outward actions. Regina Giddons, Mary Tilford, and Teck de Brancovis are what they are because of what Miss Hellman has them do. We do not really know how they got to be that way. Nor do we know how they see themselves.

People rarely see themselves in clear-cut ethical terms. It is logical, therefore, that as Miss Hellman shifted her focus somewhat from her characters' objective actions to their subjective feelings about themselves, her judgments about them were correspondingly softened. It follows too that the dialogue she employed was looser, marshalled less firmly toward a dramatic crisis. She never actually

captured the elusive Chekhovian dialogue, but The Autumn Garden does give us, for the first time in the Hellman canon, the impression that the characters are left to their own devices.

In Act I, the six characters gathered in the Tuckerman living room are having their after-dinner coffee. None of them qualifies as a protagonist; they comprise an ensemble in which each member has equal dramatic value. Their conversation, though more pointed than the typically languid Chekhovian dialogue, meanders from topic to topic. The links between the topics are present, but they are linguistic rather than thematic links; the conversation moves more by free association than by the requirements of the action. As they speak, the characters reveal the personal problems which occupy most of their energies and attention. Rose Griggs, for example, is bewildered and unhappy by her husband's sudden decision to divorce her. She has always conceived of herself as a charming and loveable Southern belle, and has developed no resources beyond those which must have been at one time functional for a New Orleans debutante. Her image of herself is reflected in her speech patterns. She has developed a linguistic eccentricity--a habit of cryptically referring to everything in pronouns--and she finds this habit quite adorable. When old Mrs.

Ellis sharply calls her attention to her unnecessary ambiguity (Chekhov would not have done this; he would have allowed Rose's ambiguous remarks to pass unchecked by any other character), Rose giggles, "I know. It's a naughty habit. Ben has been telling me for years." Rose's reference to her annoying mannerism as "naughty" is a clear indication that she has no intention of modifying it, and that she considers Mrs. Ellis's criticisms to be part of a game. In that, she is partially right. Mrs. Ellis is one of the tart old ladies of which Miss Hellman was so fond, but there are indications in the play that Mrs. Ellis is also playing a role--the role of tart old lady. After Rose pirouettes and preens, unsuccessfully trying to force a compliment from her husband, she turns to Crossman to suggest playfully that he is becoming more of a hermit as he grows older. The motif of approaching old age, introduced thus early in the action, is kept alive throughout the play. Rose seems carefree as she addresses Crossman, for she is momentarily ensconced in her girlish posture, but her compulsive prattling suggests the terror that will surface later in the play. Mrs. Ellis spares Crossman an answer to Rose's conversational gambit by ringing an unexpected change on the topic of old age: "Happiest year of my life was when my husband died. Every month was

springtime and every day I seemed to be tipsy, as if my blood had turned a lovely vin rosé." Her daughter Carrie's response is understated and casual: "You're lyrical, Mother." The potentially explosive topic is allowed to die. Other topics take its place--Frederick's interest in his friend's manuscript, his engagement to Sophie, the Ellis' financial arrangements, the mysterious Mr. Payson's unsavory books, Sophie's coiffeur. As one topic after another is introduced and dropped, we have the sense that each character has a story of his own, a story which is parallel rather than inter-dependent with the others. Such character-drawing is essentially novelistic. The technique confirms Miss Hellman's stated intent to "write a novel in theater form," an experiment first attempted by Chekhov.

The single character in The Autumn Garden who belongs to a different dramaturgic idiom is Sophie, Constance Tuckerman's seventeen-year-old niece, who serves a bonne à tout faire in the boarding house. Sophie never becomes a part of the ensemble; everything about her is different. She speaks with a soft German accent and she speaks in aphorisms:

> I think perhaps you worry sometimes in order that you should not think.
>
> . . . You make the simple things--like going to sleep--so hard, and the hard things--like staying awake--so easy.
>
> Don't you think people often say other people are tough when they do not know how to cheat them?

As her speech indicates, Sophie has no illusions and she never deludes herself. She does not find her present situation satisfactory, but she keeps a sharp eye out for realistic solutions to her dilemma. At the beginning of the play, she is engaged to marry Frederick Ellis, fully aware of the fact that she does not love him, that he is emotionally tied to his mother, and that he is very probably a homosexual. She patiently explains to her aunt:

> I do not wish to go on with my life as it has been. I have not been happy, and I cannot continue here. . . . Please allow me to do what I wish to do, and know what is best for me. And don't look in such a way. Frederick and I will have a nice life, we will make it so.

The romantic, sentimental Constance is dismayed and puzzled by her attitude, but for Sophie it is perfectly reasonable. Her description of her own behavior is an honest one: "I do the best I can." She adjusts her circumstances as those circumstances change. When Nick Denery compromises her reputation by spending the night in her bed, her own reaction is purely pragmatic.

"I will speak whichever way you think most fits the drama, Aunt Constance."

For the other, more clearly Chekhovian, characters in the play, there are recognitions but no peripetia. For Sophie there is no need for a recognition, but there is a peripety. Her situation changes at the end of the play. She is quick to see how she can turn Nick Denery's indiscretion to her own advantage, and she suggests to Nina Denery that five thousand dollars would be suitable amends. They agree to call it blackmail. With characteristic honesty, Sophie says,

> But I will not accept it [the five thousand dollars] as largesse--to make you happy. We will call it a loan, come by through blackmail. One does not have to be grateful for blackmail money, nor think of oneself as a charity girl.

The five thousand dollars provide the means for a more satisfactory solution to her situation than a marriage to Frederick, and Sophie leaves the stage singing a cheerful French song. Constance, watching her, says, "She's happy. That's good. I think she'll come out all right, always." The line is literal description; nothing in the play undercuts it. Sophie is no sister to Chekhov's Sonia or Irina or Nina.

In a narrow sense, however, she is half-sister to Chekhov's Natasha. Although Chekhov's primary focus

was on the inner lives of his characters, he did make a few exceptions. Natasha is one of those exceptions. She is characterized from the outside; we observe what she does, but we are given no indication that she has any inner struggles. Sophie is also characterized objectively. As far as we can tell, she has no inner life whatever. Thus she remains outside the collective pathos that envelopes the other characters.

Because both Natasha and Sophie deal with reality on their own terms, they represent norms against which the other characters can be measured. The difference between them is, of course, the author's attitude toward those norms. Chekhov clearly did not like Natasha, although even she does not remain outside his understanding embrace. Miss Hellman, on the other hand, seems to endorse Sophie's carpe diem approach to life, and to offer it as an alternative to the stasis which paralyzed the other characters. Her endorsement, however, was not without a certain ambivalence, and several reviewers of the play singled out the character of Sophie for criticism. In his opening-night review, Brooks Atkinson said the part "lacks the frankness of the rest of the writing."[36] Several days later he elaborated:

> I do not understand the character of the niece. For two acts she is soft and reticent, but then she suddenly emerges as the most cunning, hard-headed person in the plays. It is as though she came to life only when Miss Hellman needed her.[37]

Harold Clurman, director of the play, promptly responded to Atkinson's criticisms in a letter to the drama editor of the New York Times.

> Sophie is pivotal to the play not only in terms of story but in terms of content. In her modest way, she represents a typical "contemporary" European point of view, an attitude which is impatient with philosophical generalizations, "ideals" which are merely verbal, and states of mind that are not founded on concrete facts. When Sophie is offered monetary help, she resents the idea that she is being offered charity. She realizes that in a pseudo-sentimental way she is merely being bought off by "nice people" who live useless lives and who have made a career of getting around the scrapes they constantly create, people so "genial" that they were apparently able to have a good time in Paris while the Nazis occupied it. So Sophie with bitter humor uses the ugly word "blackmail," while the lady whose whole life has been a messy compromise puts on noble airs.[38]

Clearly, Clurman saw Sophie as a foil to the rest of the characters. "Against these people," he wrote elsewhere,

> Miss Hellman pits the half-European Sophie, a normal girl who wants only to do an honest job back in the grim environment of her native land, where things are not pretty or "good," but concrete, unromanticized, real. Miss Hellman does not make a heroine of this girl; in fact, she makes her rather sharp, shrewd, decently matter-of-fact and not above taking advantage--with a certain humor and pride that some might mistake for cynicism--of the folly of the sentimentalists around her.[39]

The directorial interpretation seemed to reflect the authorial intent, for Miss Hellman had expressed her belief that "if you've invested yourself in life, you're pretty certain to get a return. . . . The play isn't meant to say that people can't do anything about such emptiness as embodied by the other characters. It is meant to say the opposite--they can do a great deal with their lives."[40] Sophie's solution to her problem does, however, seem a curious way of dramatizing the fact that people "can do a great deal with their lives," and Miss Hellman's optimism was lost on many viewers. One of them wrote in disgust to the Times:

> There is not one redeeming character in "The Autumn Garden," including the refugee girl. A play of this sort, if it is to make its point that there are hopeless, helpless individuals in the world in desperate need of salvation from their lifelong misconceptions about everything, needs a standard in the form of at least one character that is truly "different" so that a contrast may be effected. But as it is, the audience was confronted with nothing but a stageful of sad-sacks slowly sinking in their collective quicksand.[41]

Ironically, the play as interpreted by the disgruntled patron is far more Chekhovian than Hellmanesque.

Of all her plays, The Autumn Garden was Miss Hellman's favorite.[42] Her audience, though appreciative, was less enthusiastic, and the play had a modest run of 102 performances. When critics looked for the cause of such modesty, they suggested that although the new

play was probably superior to its predecessors, it fell short of its mark. That mark was bona fide Chekhov. Thus the consensus of opinion was somewhat paradoxical: a Chekhovian Hellman was superior to a melodramatic Hellman, but to have missed the Chekhovian magic was to have sacrificed her wonted popularity.

Speaking as a critic rather than as a director, Harold Clurman said that even though "Lillian Hellman's The Autumn Garden is the most deftly constructed, the most maturely thought, the most scrupulously written play produced here in a long time,"[43] the play suffered by comparison with Chekhov's plays.

> If it has a limitation, it is a philosophic or spiritual limitations which is part of her objectivity. The author is just with her characters; she sees them with a certain smiling asperity, an astringent, almost cruel, clarity. But she is unable to reveal in their weakness that which still makes them part of what is blessed and great in life. The blunderers in Chekhov are brothers in our nobility even as in our abjectness. The characters in The Autumn Garden are our equals only in what we do not respect about ourselves. Miss Hellman refuses to be "metaphysical," poetic or soft. She will not embrace her people; she does not believe they deserve her (or our) love. Love is present only through the ache of its absence. Miss Hellman is a fine artist; she will be a finer one when she melts.[44]

Speaking as a director rather than as a critic, Lee Strasberg offered an alternative explanation for the qualified success of the play. He felt that it

was Clurman, and not Hellman, who had missed the Chekhovian note. The play was performed, he argued,

> in a style more suited to the earlier plays. The characters ceased to exist when they left the stage. When they returned, their reappearance seemed unmotivated. The characters described their experiences rather than re-creating [sic.] them. They seemed to "act" rather than to live. An almost "Chekhovian" environment was needed to be created, one that would permit a sense of continuous action with the characters continuing to live and behave after their dialogue stopped. The setting would have had to be more open to permit action to go on while other people were speaking, and thus to create a kind of symphonic orchestration of the behavior and the attitudes of the people. A production visualized along these lines would have served to bring out the inherent humaneness of the characters (it has been pointed out that, rare for a Hellman play, there were no downright villains in the piece) and their inability to act would have been dramatized on the stage.[45]

Strasberg's remarks serve to remind us that Chekhov had not worked in isolation; however much he had disagreed with Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko, he had usually conceived of his plays in collaboration with the members of the company that performed them. One can only speculate what the success of The Autumn Garden might have been if Olga Knipper had played the role of Constance Tuckerman and Stanislavsky the role of Nick Denery.

AFTERWORD

Eric Bentley once observed that "the public . . . takes from an author what it craves and leaves the rest alone. What we call 'the influence of an author' is likely to be the influence of one famous fragment of him."[1] Chekhov's influence on American theater consisted of several such "famous fragments." He was known, variously, as the man who wrote The Cherry Orchard, the poet of despair, the father of the Mood Play, the rebel without a plot, the ironist who smiled at life's futility, the painter of extended portraiture, the comic with a strange sense of humor. That some of these fragments were more famous than others, or that some precluded others, was not, ultimately, important. Nothing obligated the American theater to come to a final decision about Chekhov, nothing, that is, except a few vaguely disquieted critics who wished for the matter to be settled one way or another. In the absence of any Quintessence of Chekhovism, Eric Bentley wrote in 1946,

> The rebels of the theater know their Chekhov and love him; it is another question whether they understand him. Very few people seem to have given his work the careful examination it requires. Handsome tributes have been paid Chekhov by Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko, and Gorky, among his countrymen; and since being taken up by Middleton Murry's circle thirty years ago, he has enjoyed a high literary reputation in England and America. The little book by William Gerhardi and the notes and obiter dicta of such critics as Stark Young and Francis Fergusson are, however, too fragmentary and impressionistic to constitute a critical appraisal. They have helped to establish more accurate general ideas about Chekhov's art. They have not inquired too rigorously in what that art consists.[2]

Bentley was speaking about critics, of course. Artistic influence, however, is not always the bedfellow of rigorous inquiry. A fragment will sometimes do quite as well as a whole, and a partial understanding, or even a misunderstanding, of the work of one playwright may serve to stimulate another.

Thus it was with the American playwrights who were, in one way or another, influenced by Chekhov. Each settled on a fragment that he admired and found useful. John Van Druten sought, and found in Chekhov, a release from the technical restrictions imposed by Ibsen and his followers. Arthur Miller admired Chekhov for undertaking the moral and social obligations that fell to playwrights. Joshua Logan became intrigued with a specific dramatic situation that Chekhov had

created. Lillian Hellman found in Chekhov a dramatic formula for expressing a sobering life view.

But the fact is that no single American playwright ever wrote a truly Chekhovian play. There seemed to be something about Chekhov's assumptions that remained incomprehensible to the American mind, and the history of American critical responses to Chekhov is replete with periodic attempts to name or describe the difference between the American and the Russian psyche. Two such attempts are especially perceptive. In 1966, Wilfred Sheed wrote, apropos a production of Ivanov:

> The melancholy fascination which neurasthenia and paralysis of the will used to hold for Russian writers under the later Tsars is difficult for Americans to share or cope with. American actors do not know how to project these wistful psychic states and American audiences do not know how to enjoy them. The actors tend to put too much verve into their gloom, too much editorial comment; and the audiences ask themselves, what is it all for? Is it social criticism, or what?
>
> Chekhov, Turgenev and Gogol have all been recent victims of this divergence of zeitgeists. The fact is that bourgeois consciousness has many mansions, and we are not really at ease in this one yet. We dig bumbling and compulsion and hard-core frustration; but sheer stasis, simple inability to move--these arthritic pleasures of a senile society have been denied us so far, and American productions tend to transform them into something else.[3]

Three years later, after returning from a visit to Russia, Arthur Miller offered a different, but compatible, explanation:

> We [Russians and Americans] both share an absolute faith in progress, which is to say that man's fate is to go from worse to better, and we are as one in believing that the benefits of progress must be spread among all the people. So we are both very eager to know what a person "does," how much he makes, what sort of house he lives in. The Russian conversation, however, soon gropes toward fundamental attitudes, states of mind, the nature of the person rather than his occupation, and this is something we do not know how to talk about; it verges on "philosophy," which to most normally educated Americans is what history was to Henry Ford--"bunk." It is perhaps the basic reason why Chekhov, for example, is so hard to perform outside Russia, and especially difficult in the United States. To us, the characters seem vague, disconnected from one another, strangely abstract rather than real. We are much more interested in what a thing is, how it works, and very little interested in what it means. We are the triumph of technology. The irony is that the Russian aspires to hard, materialistic, dialectically sound explanations of processes--the American style--when in fact he is extraordinarily quick to idealize and to reach for general principles. Nothing could be more alien to the American.[4]

But was it, ultimately, Chekhov's nationality that removed him from easy grasp? Was the Russian mind more alien to Americans than, say, the Norweigian mind, or the German? Maybe so. But Chekhov may have been a difficult model for Americans not so much because he was the quintessential Russian, but rather because he was the consummate sophisticate.

Chekhov's sophistication is his truest signature. He was both worldly-wise and subtle about it. He was able to create his characters, let them reveal themselves without being heavy-handed about it, and then let them be. The ability to "let be" is perhaps the

key to his sophistication, and it was the one characteristic that eluded American dramatists. Arthur Miller, who never claimed Chekhov as a model, came close to it when he allowed his self-deluded salesman to bungle his way across the stage. But Miller could not let Willy Loman be. He was earnest and conscientious about the meaning of his character and, like Linda Loman, he demanded that attention must be paid this man, as if his creating the character at all were not attention enough. It is difficult to imagine Chekhov's sitting down to hammer home the meaning of Lyuboff Andreevna's difficulties. Chekhov spoke softly; his touch was light. He never over-simplified his characters or his materials, nor did he seem to feel he had to underscore his ideas. He trusted his characters, which is to say that he trusted his own artistry, and he trusted his audience. "When I write," he said, "I count upon my reader fully, assuming that he himself will add the subjective elements that are lacking in the telling."[5]

American playwrights in the Fifties seemed to have little intention of allowing very much to remain "lacking in the telling." Perhaps they took the measure of their audience, and realized that American playgoers could not be trusted to provide the "subjective element." It is even more likely that they were themselves too earnest, too strident, too hopeful,

too ingenuous--in a word, too unsophisticated--to approximate the Chekhovian restraint.

One of them may have realized this. In 1955, in response to a questionnaire asking, "What, in your opinion, are the most important trends in American Playwriting?" Arthur Laurents answered: "The realization that the Ibsen era is over and that Chekhov was a genius not to be imitated."[6]

NOTES

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]Winston Burdett, "Mr. Carnovsky Says a Word for Idealism in the Theater," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 17 February 1935, p. 22.

[2]Clifford Odets, "Some Problems of the Modern Dramatists," New York Times, 15 December 1935, Sec. 2, p. 3, col. 4.

[3]Stark Young, "New Talent," The New Republic, 29 May 1935, p. 78.

[4]Robert Garland, "Clifford Odets Sees a Growing Maturity," New York World-Telegram, 14 December 1935, Sec. 2, p. 16.

[5]John Van Druten, "Mood of the Moment," New York Times, 25 November 1951, Sec. 2, p. 3, col. 5.

CHAPTER I: THE CHEKHOV SIGNATURE

[1]Ronald Hingley, Chekhov: A Biographical and Critical Study (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1950), p. 206.

[2]Maurice Valency, The Breaking String (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 249.

[3]Emile Zola, "Naturalism on the Stage," in The Experimental Novel and Other Essays (New York: The Cassell Publishing Co., 1893), p. 124.

[4]Letter to Maria Keseleva, 14 January 1887, in The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov, ed. Lillian Hellman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1955), p. 20.

[5]Letter to Alexei Souvorin, 30 May 1888, in Hellman, pp. 54-55.

[6]For a brief, helpful overview of the Russian theater in Chekhov's day, see Valency, The Breaking String, pp. 3-47.

[7]Scribe's well-made-play formula is described as follows in Oscar Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), p. 371:

> "Often used as a term of derision, the well-made play merely perfected dramatic devices which had been current since the time of Aeschylus: careful exposition and preparation, the cause-to-effect arrangement of incidents, the building of scenes to a climax, the use of withheld information, startling reversals, and suspense."

[8]Letter to Alexei Souvorin, 21 November 1895, in Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and Other Literary Topics by Anton Chekhov, ed. Louis S. Friedland (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), p. 146.

[9]Anton Chekhov, Best Plays by Chekhov, trans. Stark Young (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), p. 154. Stark Young's translations of Chekhov's plays were perhaps the most popular and influential of all the translations available to the American public.

[10]Anton Chekhov, Ivanov, trans. Ariadne Nicholaeff (Longon: Heinemann, 1966), p. 59.

[11]Letter to Alexei Souvorin, 30 December 1888, in Friedland, p. 138.

[12]Letter to Alexander Chekhov, 24 October 1887, in Friedland, p. 130.

[13]Letter to Alexei Souvorin, 30 December 1888, in Friedland, p. 140.

[14]See Chekhov's conception of the role, reported in J. L. Styan, Chekhov in Performance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 38.

[15]Styan, p. 153.

[16]Charles W. Meister, "Comparative Drama: Chekhov, Shaw, Odets," Poet Lore, 55, No. 3 (Autumn 1950), 249.

[17]Letter to Alexei N. Pleshcheyev, 4 October 1889, in Friedland, p. 63.

[18]Matthew Josephson, "Introduction," The Personal Papers of Anton Chekhov (New York: Lear Publishers, Inc., 1948), p. 22. Josephson suggests that Chekhov deliberately suppressed his own political views: "Intellectuals like Chekhov, in effect, lived according to a double standard. On the one hand they were convinced that the structure of their society was rotten and their governments' policies demented. On the other hand they knew that their rulers were all-powerful and they pretended to conform in order to survive."

[19]Styan, p. 246.

[20]William Archer, Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1934), pp. 227-28. Archer defines the obligatory scene as follows:

"An obligatory scene is one which the audience (more or less clearly and consciously) forsees and desires, and the absence of which it may with reason resent. On a rough analysis, it will appear, I think, that there are five ways in which a scene may become, in this sense, obligatory:--

(1) It may be necessitated by the inherent logic of the theme.
(2) It may be demanded by the manifest exigencies of specifically dramatic effect.
(3) The author himself may have rendered it obligatory by seeming unmistakably to lead up to it.
(4) It may be required in order to justify some modification of character or alteration of will, too important to be taken for granted.
(5) It may be imposed by history or legend."

It was assumed by most drama critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries--Brunetiere, John Howard Lawson, Francisque Sarcey--that the concept of the obligatory scene was a sound one, applicable to all good playwriting.

[21]Letter to Alexander Chekhov, October 1887, in Friedland, p. 129.

[22]Letter to Alex. P. Chekhov, 11 April 1889, in Friedland, p. 170.

[23]Valency, p. 146.

[24]Eric Bentley, "Craftsmanship in Uncle Vanya," In Search of Theater (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 347.

[25]Hingley, p. 80. Nastroenie is usually translated as mood or atmosphere.

[26]David Magarshack, Chekhov: A Life (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1952), pp. 371-72.

[27]Letter to Alex. P. Chekhov, 8 May 1889, in Friedland, p. 171.

[28]Henrik Ibsen, "Hedda Gabler," in Drama, trans. and ed. Otto Reinert (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), pp. 426-27.

[29]Valency, p. 230.

[30]See Robert W. Corrigan, "Introduction," Six Plays of Chekhov (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), rpt. in Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism, ed. Travis Bogard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 93-95. Corrigan discusses the tendency of Chekhov's characters to aestheticize life.

[31]Styan, p. 247.

CHAPTER II: CHEKHOV ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

[1]"'Sea Gull' Droops at the Bandbox," New York Times, 23 May 1916, p. 9, col. 1.

[2]Gertrude Besse King, "Cherry Orchard," The New Republic, 26 June 1915, p. 207.

[3]Philip Littell, "Books and Things," The New Republic, 17 June 1916, p. 175.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p. 278.

[6]Christine Edwards, The Stanislavsky Heritage (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 232.

[7]Ibid., p. 233.

[8]Stark Young, "The Moscow Art Theatre," The New Republic, 28 February 1923, p. 20.

[9]Ludwig Lewisohn, "Players from Moscow," The Nation, 14 March 1923, p. 312.

[10]John Corbin, "Russian Despair and English Tragedy," New York Times, 4 February 1923, sec. 7, p. 1, col. 1.

[11]John Corbin, "Russian High Comedy," New York Times, 23 January 1923, p. 18.

[12]John V. A. Weaver, "Re: Moscow Art Theatre," New York Times, 11 February 1923, Sec. 7, p. 1, cols. 5-6.

[13]John Mason Brown, "Escapes from a Formula," Theatre Arts Monthly, January 1927, p. 10.

[14]J. Brooks Atkinson, "Anton Chekhov," New York Times, 11 March 1928, Sec. 8, p. 1, col. 1.

[15]"The Cherry Orchard," New York Times, 8 November 1928, p. 26, col. 8.

[16]J. Brooks Atkinson, "View of a Masterpiece," New York Times, 10 April 1929, p. 32.

[17]A notable exception was Robert Allerton Parker, who alone insisted that Chekhov was "revealing the eternal irony of human existence. . . ." "Moscow's Art Theatre Visits New York," The Independent, 3 February 1923, p. 98.

[18]Atkinson, "Chekhov in English," New York Times, 6 March 1928, p. 20.

[19]Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "The Cherry Orchard," The Catholic World, April 1929, pp. 79-80.

[20]Atkinson, "Random Revivals," New York Times, 18 November 1928, Sec. 9, p. 1, cols. 2-3.

[21]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Chekhov's World," The Nation, 2 October 1929, p. 366.

[22]Stark Young, "Two Special Openings," The New Republic, 9 October 1929, p. 205.

[23]Atkinson, "Generalities of a Genius," New York Times, 16 April 1930, p. 26.

[24]Brown, Two on the Aisle (New York: W. W. NOrton & Company, Inc., 1938), p. 91.

[25]Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 29 March 1938, p. 19, col. 3.

[26]David Magarshack, The Real Chekhov (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1972), p. 13.

[27]Young, "Plays and Problems," The New Republic, 13 April 1938, p. 305.

[28]Brown, Broadway in Review (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950), p. 232.

[29]Guthrie McClintic, "Directing Chekhov," Theatre Arts, April 1943, p. 212, passim.

[30]"Three-Star Classic," Time, 21 December 1942, p. 45.

[31]Brown, Broadway in Review, p. 24.

[32]"Star Piece," Newsweek, 4 January 1943, p. 64.

[33]John Gassner, "The Russians on Broadway," Current History, February 1943, pp. 548-49.

[34]Krutch, "The Three Sisters," The Nation, 2 January 1943, pp. 31-32.

[35]Lewis Nichols, "The Play," New York Times, 22 December 1942, p. 31.

[36]Mary McCarthy, Mary McCarthy's Theatre Chronicles, 1937-1962 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1963), p. 57.

[37]Wolcott Gibbs, "Retreat from Moscow," The New Yorker, 2 January 1943, p. 32.

[38]McClintic, p. 215.

[39]Kappo Phelan, "The Cherry Orchard," Commonweal, 11 February 1944, p. 420.

[40]Nichols, "Uncle Vanya," New York Times, 19 May 1946, Sec. 2, p. 1.

[41]Richard Hayes, "The Expense of Spirit," Commonweal, 20 April 1956, p. 76.

[42]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The Nation, 10 November 1956, p. 415.

[43]Eric Bentley, "Theatre," The New Republic, 21 March 1955, p. 22.

CHAPTER III: "CHEKHOVITIS" IN THE FIFTIES

[1]Stark Young, "Two Special Openings," The New Republic, 9 October 1929, p. 205.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Emory Lewis, Stages: The Fifty-Year Childhood of the American Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), pp. 75, 78.

[4]John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston), p. 129.

[5]Brooks Atkinson, "Dramatic Material," New York Times, 4 January 1953, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 1.

[6]Arthur Miller, "Many Writers: Few Plays," New York Times, 10 August 1952, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 1.

[7]Atkinson, "Dramatic Material," p. 1.

[8]Miller, "Many Writers: Few Plays," p. 1, col. 2.

[9]Ibid., col. 3.

[10]Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods," Harper's, August 1958, pp. 35-43.

[11]A minority opinion is voiced in Vernon E. Johnson, "Dramatic Influences in the Development of Arthur Miller's Concept of Social Tragedy," Diss. George Peabody College for Teachers, 1972. Johnson argues that several of Miller's plays, and especially A Memory of Two Mondays, show the influence of Chekhov.

[12]Miller, "The Shadows of the Gods," p. 37.

[13]Ibid., p. 38.

[14]Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[15]John Van Druten, "Mood of the Moment," New York Times, 25 November 1951, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 7, and p. 3, col. 4.

[16]Gassner, Crossroads, p. 146.

[17]John Van Druten, Playwright at Work (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 39.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., p. 67.

[20]Ibid., p. 89.

[21]Ibid., p. 36.

[22]Walter Kerr, How Not To Write a Play (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 1.

[23]Ibid., p. 33.

[24]Ibid., p. 32.

[25]Ibid., pp. 101-02.

[26]Ibid., p. 104.

[27]William Becker, "The New American Play," The Hudson Review 6 (Winter 1954), 578.

[28]Ibid., p. 587.

[29]Horton Foote, "A Trip to Bountiful," in Harrison Texas (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), p. 230.

[30]Letter to O. L. Knipper, 2 January 1901, in Letters of Anton Chekhov, ed. Avrahm Yarmolinsky (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 388.

[31]Letter to Maxim Gorky, 3 January 1899, in Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and Other Literary Topics by Anton Chekhov, ed. Louis S. Friedland (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), p. 86.

[32]Letter to A. S. Souvorin, 23 January 1900, in Friedland, p. 176.

[33]Letter to V. E. Meierkhold, n.d., in Friedland, p. 184.

[34]Letter to O. L. Knipper, 2 January 1900, in Friedland, p. 186.

[35]Letter to Alex. P. Chekhov, 8 May 1889, in Friedland, p. 171.

[36]Letter to Alex. P. Chekhov, 10 May 1886, in Friedland, p. 71.

[37]Letter to Alex. P. Chekhov, 6 April 1886, in Friedland, p. 70.

[38]Letter to O. L. Knipper, 2 January 1900, in Friedland, p. 186.

[39]Kerr, How Not To Write a Play, p. 33.

[40]Kerr, "That Furtive Fellow Chekhov," in Thirty Plays Hath November (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 146.

[41]Ibid., p. 148.

[42]David Magarshack, Chekhov: A Life (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1952), and Earnest Simmons, Chekhov: A Biography (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962).

[43]Kerr, "That Furtive Fellow Chekhov," p. 150.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Kerr, "The Comic Country of the Blind," in Thirty Plays Hath November, pp. 158-59.

CHAPTER IV: JOSHUA LOGAN: A CHERRY ORCHARD FOR AMERICANS

[1]Robert Littell, "The Russians Are Coming," Theatre Magazine, June 1930, p. 19.

[2]Robert Brustein suggests that the analogy might work in the other direction. The Cherry Orchard, he notes, bears many surface resemblances to Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon, written on the eve of the Civil War. Thus, Chekhov's play may itself be part of a larger tradition; it might even be literary parody. Brustein says: "I am not suggesting that Chekhov was familiar with Boucicault's play. But the materials are conventional enough, and Chekhov certainly knew the popular French 'mortgage' melodramas which Boucicault used as his models, for they were the staples of the commercial Russian stage." The Theatre of Revolt (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 168.

[3]See N. Bryllion Fagin, "In Search of an American Cherry Orchard," The Texas Quarterly, 1, No. 3 (Summer-Autumn 1958), 132-41. Fagin lists several plays other than The Wisteria Trees which he considers to be attempts to create another Cherry Orchard: Thomas Wolfe's Mannerhouse, Paul Green's The House of Connelly, Clifford Odets' Paradise Lost.

[4]Joshua Logan, "Introduction," Building a Character, by Constantin Stanislavski, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), p. xiii.

[5]Ibid., p. xix.

[6]Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

[7]Ibid., p. xx.

[8]Harold Clurman, "Stanislavski in America," The New Republic, 22 August 1949, p. 21.

[9]Joshua Logan, "Recovery from Fear," Look, 19 August 1958, p. 74.

[10]Kappo Phelan, "The Wisteria Trees," Commonweal, 28 April 1950, p. 69.

[11]Joshua Logan, "All Helen's Fault," New York Times, 26 March 1950, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 6.

[12]Logan, "Recovery from Fear," p. 74.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Logan, The Wisteria Trees (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 9-10. All further references to the play will be cited from this edition.

[15]Logan, "My Greatest Crisis," Look, 5 August 1958, p. 54.

[16]A letter in the New York Times, 22 October 1950, Sec. 4, p. 4, col. 4 noted that wisteria is misspelled; the proper spelling is wistaria.

[17]John Mason Brown, "Louisiana Chekhov," Saturday Review of Literature, 15 April 1950, pp. 36-37.

[18]J. L. Styan, Chekhov in Performance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 245.

[19]See Jacqueline E. M. Latham, "The Cherry Orchard as Comedy," The Educational Theatre Journal, March 1958, pp. 21-29, rpt. in Herbert Goldstone, ed., Chekhov's Cherry Orchard, Allyn and Bacon Casebook Series (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965), pp. 142-52.

[20]Letter to Stanislavsky, 30 October 1903, in Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and Other Literary Topics by Anton Chekhov, ed. Louis S. Friedland (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), p. 159.

[21]Latham, "The Cherry Orchard as Comedy," pp. 146-47.

[22]Logan, "Recovery from Fear," p. 70.

[23]Logan, "All Helen's Fault," Times, Sec. 2, p. 3. cols. 3-5.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, 2 November 1903, in Friedland, p. 161.

[26]Letter to Stanislavsky, 5 February 1903, in Ronald Hingley, The Oxford Chekhov (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), III, 318.

[27]V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, My Life in Russian Theatre, trans. John Cournos (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1936), p. 63.

[28]Logan, "The Art in Yourself," in Directing the Play: A Source Book of Stagecraft, eds. Toby Cole and Helen Krick Chinoy (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953), p. 216.

[29]Kappo Phelan, Commonweal, p. 70.

[30]Logan, "All Helen's Fault," Times, Sec. 2, p. 1, cols. 6-7.

[31]Ibid., p. 3, col. 6.

[32]Lewis Funke, "'The Wisteria Trees' Benefits From Old Merchandising Idea--Other Items," New York Times, 29 January 1950, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 4.

[33]"Harrison Yields Reins of Comedy," New York Times, 7 February 1950, p. 22, col. 1.

[34]Louis Calta, "'Wisteria Trees' Delays Premiere," New York Times, 18 February 1950, p. 8, col. 1.

[35]Brooks Atkinson, "The Wisteria Trees," New York Times, 9 April 1950, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 1.

[36]Ibid., cols. 1, 3.

[37]Brown, "Louisiana Chekhov," p. 38.

[38]Atkinson, Times, 9 April 1950, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 2.

[39]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," The Nation, 15 April 1950, p. 354.

[40]Harold Clurman, "Theatre," The New Republic, 10 April 1950, p. 22.

[41]Robert Garland, "A Favorable Decision But Not a Knockout," New York Journal American, 30 March 1950, rpt. New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, XI, 320.

[42]"New Play in Manhattan," Time, 10 April 1950, p. 68.

[43]Richard Watts, Jr., "With Chekhov in the Deep South," New York Post, 30 March 1950, rpt. New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, XI, 322.

[44]Styan, Chekhov in Performance, p. 241.

[45]Arthur Harris Friedman, "Drama Mailbag," New York Times, 16 April 1950, Sec. 2, p. 3, col. 7.

[46]Logan, Times, 26 March 1950, Sec. 2, p. 3, col. 3.

CHAPTER V: LILLIAN HELLMAN: THE THE CHEKHOVIAN GARDEN

[1]John Gassner, "Entropy in the Drama," Theatre Arts, September 1952, p. 16.

[2]Harry Gilroy, "Lillian Hellman Drama Foregoes a Villain," New York Times, 25 February 1951, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 2.

[3]John Mason Brown, "A New Miss Hellman," The Saturday Review, 31 March 1951, p. 27.

[4]Richard Watts, Jr., "Lillian Hellman's Latest Drama," New York Post, 8 March 1951, rpt. New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, XII, 326.

[5]Brooks Atkinson, "Lillian Hellman Dramatizes Middle-Aged People in 'The Autumn Garden,'" New York Times, 8 March 1951, p. 36, col. 2.

[6]John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960), p. 132.

[7]Atkinson, Times, 8 March 1951, p. 36, col. 2.

[8]Gassner, "Entropy," p. 73.

[9]Brown, "A New Miss Hellman," p. 27.

[10]Richard Moody, Lillian Hellman: Playwright (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1972), p. 227. Moody asserts: "She [Hellman] had not been reading Chekhov prior to writing The Autumn Garden. . . ."

[11]Lillian Hellman, "Introduction," Four Plays (New York: Random House, 1942), p. x.

[12]Richard G. Stern, "Lillian Hellman on Her Plays," Contact 3, 1 (1959), 114.

[13]John Phillips and Anne Hollander, "The Art of the Theatre I, Lillian Hellman: An Interview," The Paris Review, Winter 1965, p. 72.

[14]Hellman, The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov, ed. Lillian Hellman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1955), pp. xx-xxi.

[15]Ibid., p. xix.

[16]Ibid., p. xxiv.

[17]Ibid., pp. 5, xxv-xxvi.

[18]Ibid., pp. xxv-xxvi.

[19]Ibid., p. xiii.

[20]Ibid., p. 204.

[21]Ibid., p. 90.

[22]John McClain, "Play at Coronet Beautifully Set," New York Journal American, 8 March 1951, rpt. New York Theatre Critics' Reviews, XII, 325.

[23]Letters, p. xi.

[24]Matthew Josephson, "Introduction," The Personal Papers of Anton Chekhov (New York: Lear Publishers, Inc., 1948), p. 9.

[25]Hellman, An Unfinished Woman: A Memoir (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 137.

[26]Anton Chekhov, "Uncle Vanya," Best Plays by Chekhov, trans. Stark Young (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), p. 81.

[27]This interpretation is shared by several Chekhovian scholars, but is stated most effectively, perhaps, by Eric Bentley, "Craftsmanship in Uncle Vanya," In Search of Theater (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).

[28]Marvin Felheim, "The Autumn Garden: Mechanics and Dialectics" Modern Drama, September 1960, p. 192.

[29]Gilroy, Times, 25 February 1951, Sec. 2, p. 1.

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[32]Hellman, "Introduction," Four Plays, pp. xiii-ix.

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[35]Ibid.

[36]Atkinson, Times, 8 March 1951, p. 36, col. 2.

[37]Atkinson, "Autumn Garden," New York Times, 18 March 1951, Sec. 2, p. 1, col. 2.

[38]Harold Clurman, "Director's Explanation," New York Times, 22 April 1951, Sec. 2, p. 3, col. 6.

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[41]Lewis Howard, "The Drama Mailbag," New York Times, 13 May 1951, Sec. 2, p. 3, col. 7.

[42]Phillips and Hollander, "The Art of the Theatre," p. 68.

[43]Clurman, Lies Like Truth, p. 47.

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[45]Lee Strasberg, "Introduction," Famous Plays of the 1950's (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 18-19.

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[1]Eric Bentley, "Theatre," The New Republic, 21 November 1955, p. 30.

[2]Bentley, "Craftsmanship in Uncle Vanya," In Search of Theater (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 342-43.

[3]Wilfred Sheed, "Paralysis of the Will," Commonweal, 27 May 1966, p. 283.

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[5]Letter to Alexei Souvorin, 1 April 1890, in The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov, ed. Lillian Hellman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1955), p. 99.

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