

Anton Chekhov:the Characterization And Interpretationof A Historical Figure For The Stage

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ANTON CHEKHOV:
THE CHARACTERIZATION AND INTERPRETATION
OF A HISTORICAL FIGURE FOR THE STAGE

by

ALAN J GALLANT
B.A. University of Maine, 2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
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in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the execution of the monograph role of “Anton Chekhov” in the original one-act play, *An Evening with Anton Chekhov*. The play script, rehearsal and public performances of the piece are all self-generated by the candidate, with the proper assistance of the thesis committee. This written thesis serves as the completion of the thesis project, and includes analysis of several key areas of the development of the script and thesis role.

This document includes the original script with endnotes and a structural analysis. Social and historical background of the character, Anton Chekhov, a real person, is presented. This background includes the history as it pertains to Anton Chekhov and the national mindset in pre-revolutionary Russia. This background is integral in not only the development of the character, but also of the script which supports the character. Much of what is contained in the script is from correspondences, anecdotes, and written material from and about Anton Chekhov. These materials will be used as interpretive tools in the development of the character, and includes clues to physical appearance and personality. The character analysis contained herein is, in part, a reflection of these historical and environmental concerns. In addition, external and internal portrayal and the means used to achieve them are discussed. These means include physical and vocal techniques for the stage in conjunction with the use of emotional recall, behaving “as if,” and being emotionally and energetically present for the acting partner.

Since this is a “one man show,” the acting partner will take the form of the audience as other or confidante. This phenomenon, and its effect on the performance, is included in the written

thesis. The acting approach in execution of the monograph will also be reflected in a journal, which will contain a record of the successes, challenges, choices and adjustments made in the rehearsal/performance process. Included among these will be the various adjustments made in order to achieve a higher level of spontaneity in movement and transition, and how this semi-improvisational approach aided in adjusting to each unique audience in performance.

Analysis will be provided by members of the committee. Dr. Julia Listengarten and Mark Brotherton will submit performance analysis, while the committee chair, Dr. Donald Seay will also provide rehearsal reports. Script work on *An Evening with Anton Chekhov* will begin in October of 2005, with rehearsals commencing on February 6, 2006. Two performances will be given at the Black Box theatre on the campus of UCF on Monday, February 27, and Tuesday February 28, 2006.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born in the southern port town of Taganrog, in Russia. He was of peasant stock. The year of his birth, 1860, coincided with the abolition of serfdom, in Russia.

Chekhov was born in the latter era of the Tsars, where society was stratified from the lowly serfs to the merchants and, finally, to the nobility. Young Anton grew up in poverty with four brothers and a sister. His father, Pavel, was a stern, overly religious disciplinarian who beat his children as a matter of practice and his mother, Evgenia, was a sensitive nurturer. In spite of his poor surroundings in Taganrog, Chekhov was sent to the best schools and was exposed to art, theatre, and the literary classics from an early age. His love affair with the theatre began early, and, as a schoolboy, he once played the governor in Gogol's *The Inspector General*.

In spite of the fact that Taganrog was somewhat in decline, Chekhov attended the local theatre, which still drew some of the touring stars of opera, music, and the theatre. Life was difficult for young Anton, who worked long hours in his father's dreary grocery, and he must have drawn solace from what cultural excursions he could manage. He spent over two years in Taganrog without his family, after his father had to flee to Moscow to avoid debtor's prison in 1876. Upon graduating from the Taganrog Russian School, he joined his family in Moscow and began his career as a medical student. It was during this time that the writing he had begun as a child began to flower, and Chekhov first sold short stories and sketches to the local papers. He considered himself a doctor and a scientist first, and this attitude showed itself in the observational qualities in his work.

When Chekhov won the Pushkin prize in 1888, his writing began to take a more prominent role in his life. The public, both in Moscow and in Petersburg, began to recognize his work. By this time, the tuberculosis he had contracted, probably while still in medical school, began to influence him. As his successes in literature increased, his health gradually worsened. In spite of his almost cavalier attitude (at times) about the disease, he surely must have known that his life would be shortened by it. His own brother Nikolai, who died in 1889, was a victim of the disease. In spite of growing fame and worsening health, Chekhov maintained his medical practice for quite some time. In the early 1890s, he opened a clinic on his estate at Melikhovo, to treat victims of typhus, tuberculosis and other illnesses. He traveled to the penal colony on the frigid island of Sakhalin, in the interest of conducting a census there.

When he was advised to cease travel and practicing medicine after a bad pulmonary hemorrhage in 1897, Chekhov's response was to write his greatest works for the stage, associate himself with the Moscow Art Theatre and continue to travel throughout Europe, when his health allowed. By the beginning of the 20th Century, Anton Chekhov had amassed a reputation as one of the great literary and dramatic artists of his time. He helped found realism in those disciplines, and used his medical acumen and the scientific method as his writing criteria. Though he is known to us today as a great author and playwright, his life was not so defined.

His adult life was filled with activities related to his sense of social responsibility. He built schools, lobbied for famine relief, organized and funded libraries, and ran his country estates day-to-day. He cared for his immediate family his whole adult life, and they would have had a much meaner existence without him. At times, Chekhov was relegated to the warmer climate of

places like Nice and Yalta, where he settled to save his lungs and to write. Even near the end of his life he traveled to his beloved Moscow, surely knowing her chilly embrace would mean his end. He tended to individual tuberculosis patients in those years, even while his lungs were shattering under the strain.

I have always thought of Anton Chekhov as a man who was driven. He was compelled to move forward, not just because of his desire to create but also by his feeling for justice, his responsibility to his professions and, finally, his ever-sharpening awareness of his own limited time. Yet, he fell in love in his latter days, and married the actress Olga Knipper in 1901.

Although he was somewhat ambivalent (and sometimes hostile) toward the acting profession, he considered Olga a fine actress and wrote roles in his plays for her. A confirmed old bachelor in his forties, Chekhov approached marriage as a long distance proposition. Olga was frequently away acting and he was often forced to remain at Yalta for his health and his work. In spite of this odd arrangement, their letters are evidence enough that they adored one another. When he died in 1904, he was on a rest cure in Badenweiler, Germany. Olga was there- he made her laugh, he drank champagne, and then he was gone. Yet, through his works, he lives still.

My journey of creating a living Anton Chekhov, from what he wrote and from myself as a performer, began in late 2004 when I first chose to use his life as a template for my thesis monograph. My idea was to combine his personal history with the skills I have learned here at UCF. To bring to life a figure of history, with ostensibly little cultural and experiential connection to me, would require a great deal of work and contemplation. In view of this, I also decided to write the script, the better to research and live within the image and person of

Chekhov. The image was a matter of finding as much direct correspondence, physical description and biographical information as possible. Finding a connection to the person has first been about the common experience of humans under certain conditions.

Physically, Chekhov was often in pain or ill in his later years. For this, I would use a combination of sense memory and physical experimentation with weight and breathing. His feelings called for me to behave “as if” I were living his memories and feelings, and finding common ground through emotional recall and parallel experience. Appropriate costume would add to the sensual experience of a 19th Century man. In addition, I felt that it would help my process of “getting in Chekhov’s skin” to adapt a Russian accent useable for the American stage. Chekhov’s point of view, whether social, personal or political was another matter. I have always had a respect and affinity for his egalitarian views when it came to the rights of individuals. Using this as my connective spine, I found it easy to understand and find empathy with his other views. He always aspired to be fair and just, and this was an attractive aspect of Chekhov for me. Chekhov also had some early experience with acting and this, along with his love of the theatre, is close to my own affinities. Chekhov is also writer, and I have found some gratification in my own writing.

As an actor I have wanted, for quite some time, to take what Chekhov left us on the pages of his books and letters and bring those words, and him, to some sort of life. It’s been done before, you know. Aside from the hundreds of stories and innumerable sketches and articles he wrote, he left a handful of plays, like a challenge, for us all to get our own hands on. Others, like Michael Pennington, have written their own Chekhov monographs. My purpose in assuming this

challenge was simple. I wanted to understand who Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was and express that understanding in my portrayal of him. In my own way, I wanted to touch what he felt, how he lived, what was important to him, to find what his pains and joys were. I'd like to think, in the process of condensing his essence into one hour of stories and anecdotes and bringing him to life through the crafts of body, mind and soul, that I was touched by *him*.

CHAPTER TWO: SCRIPT

The following is the script used in the production of *An Evening with Anton Chekhov*, with the addition of endnotes. The endnotes mark the use of biographical resources where they were referred to in the script. Additionally, there are numerous references to individual correspondences, second person anecdotes, and introductory remarks from various sources. This script should be considered the skeletal frame of what eventually became a performance. Of particular challenge was the creation of a dynamic life between the lines of the play. The highs and lows of life, recalled by Chekhov in the piece, were the basis for further exploration into the deeper feelings and impulses that only performance of the character can express.

An Evening with Anton Chekhov

By

Alan Gallant

Alan Gallant
3900 S Lake Orlando Pkwy
Orlando FL 32808
alanguallant@gmail.com
407-927-4039

(As the lights come up, the audience sees a room, and strains of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* can be heard. On the SR side of the stage is an arm chair; a fainting couch or bed is US and toward C; on the SL side of the stage, and slightly US of the arm chair, is a writing table and stick chair. The table has various papers and books. A moment passes, and, as the music fades, Chekhov enters with papers.)

A. C.

(He is somewhat agitated, he shakes the papers.)

Rubbish! It's all Rubbish! My house is all set, but my muse is upset: Well, my house is not so good, either, my apologies! Welcome. I'm not doing any writing and I have no desire to work. I need to breathe another sort of air; I feel so indolent here in the south! Dr. Altschuler keeps telling me to stay here, in a warmer climate, but I think of travel and Moscow. I enjoy the bachelor life, but, right now, I miss my wife. I'm in bad spirits most of the time, not because of my lungs, or Moscow or missing Olga; it's the letters my friends and acquaintances send me. My letters have to console people or lecture them or snarl with them like fighting dogs. I get many letters about the student events at University in Moscow - from students and adults. What's more, I have visits from students who have been expelled.ⁱ The talk there among the students is about equal treatment of women and Jews, of better educationⁱⁱ and always, always of overthrowing the government. I was never much for revolution, but very much for equality. Are any of you students?

- As long as our boys and girls are still students, they're honest and good, they're our hope, they're Russia's future; but as soon as those students have to stand on their own and grow up, our hope and Russia's future goes up in smoke, and all that's left on the filter are rapacious public officials, thieving engineers,ⁱⁱⁱ and cottage -owning doctors . . . how do you like my cottage? When I was young, I set my eye on owning one. I rented for awhile, then, I bought Melikhovo,^{iv} close to Moscow. Moscow- the center of my first real successes. My love of medicine began there, the public idea of my being something of an artist - even now, my thoughts are there. Here, there are long days, frustration at my writing, an estate to manage, peasants to care for . . . the bacillus in my lungs has driven me here, to Yalta, but at least I am not in (He spits the word out, in half – mock disgust.)*Petersburg!* Over the years, my work, my reputation and my peace of mind have been assaulted in *Petersburg*. Ah, in truth, it's the plays they didn't like. After *The Seagull* opening failed so miserably there, I swore that I would never write another play, not in 700 years!^v Forgive me, if my complaints make me seem something of a curmudgeon. I tend to be alone - these days - more often than not. But in spite of my solitary life here, I do like people. I don't trust groups, but I have faith in individuals. I see salvation in individuals scattered here and there, all over Russia, be they intellectuals or peasants, for they're the ones who really matter, though they are few. No man is a prophet in his own country, and the individuals I've been talking about play an inconspicuous role in society^{vi vii} . . .

(He fumbles in his pocket for his pince-nez)

Let me get a better look at you - my apologies- it's torture for me to be without glasses.^{viii} There. . . Konstantin Alexeiev at the Art Theatre in Moscow mistakes the way I look through my glasses for standoffishness, arrogance.^{ix} Though it isn't true, I haven't corrected him.

Oh, you may know Alexeiev by another name, Stanislavsky. He changed the name to protect his family reputation. That's how it is with actors. As a whole, they are seventy-five years behind the development of Russian society. They are vulgar people, wholly eaten up by self-importance.^x Oh dear, you're not actors, are you? Let me explain: I think it was seeing the great Eleonora Duse at a young age that spoiled me for most actors since.^{xi} Still, I married one. My Olga, my Knipschiz, who wisely spends a great deal of her time playing at the Art Theatre, and leaves her old bachelor to himself. I find her performances enchanting. I have written roles for her, I think it's serious. In fact, my friends, I have loved the theatre my whole life.^{xii} Love is a complicated thing.

(Assessing his guests, he tries another tack.)

Which of me have you come to see? There is more than one, you know, at least according to the critics, writers, actors and directors who, I dare say, have made a career of me and my work. People have called me a crank, an amateur, a failure, even, God forbid, something of an artist. Mostly, the pronouncements have done me no harm and it is more my hemorrhoids, my stomach or my lungs that have given me what sleepless nights I have. I have been reading critics who write about my stories for twenty-five years, and I can't remember a single useful comment, haven't heard a single piece of good advice. Wait . . . there was one occasion when Skabichevsky, a well-known literary critic, impressed me; he wrote that I would die drunk, under a fence!^{xiii} (He chuckles.)

The critics and people in general took awhile to come around to my stories. Still, sometimes they still try and figure out what I am doing or, barring success in discovering that, they vilify or

exalt me. Fortunately, they no longer frighten me! The people I am afraid of are the ones who look for tendentiousness between the lines. They are determined to see me as either liberal or conservative. Do you know what that's like? I am neither liberal, nor conservative, nor gradualist, nor monk, nor indifferentist. I would like to be a free artist and nothing else, and I regret God has not given me the strength to be one. I hate lies and violence in all of their forms ... Pharisaism, dullwittedness and tyranny reign not only in merchant's homes and police stations. I see them in science, in literature, among the younger generation. That is why I cultivate no particular predilection for policemen, butchers, scientists, writers or the younger generation. I look upon tags and labels as prejudices. My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love and the most absolute freedom imaginable, freedom from violence and lies.

Such is the program I would adhere to if I were a major artist.^{xiv} I am less an artist and more a scientist, a recorder of events. That is how and why I write. In recent years, some people have expressed an interest in knowing more about my life. I'm afraid they are bound to be disappointed. I cannot write about myself, only about what I have learned, experienced, observed. I suffer from a disease called autobiographobia. (He tries to get some mileage from this.) Auto-bio-grophobia? . . . Ehh. To read any particulars about myself, and, worse still, to write them down for publication is a real torment to me. (There is a significant pause.) Still, you are kind enough to be here, so I give you a few facts, and I can do no more.

(He moves DS, isolated, as if giving a recitation - he breaks this convention as the following description progresses)

I, Anton Chekhov, was born on the 17th of January,^{xv} 1860, in Taganrog, 650 miles from Moscow. I studied first at the Greek School of King Constantine's Church, then at the Taganrog Grammar School. In 1879 I entered the Moscow University, in the faculty of medicine. I do not remember for what reason I chose medicine; but I did not regret my choice afterwards. While still in my first year I began to publish in the weeklies and dailies, and these pursuits assumed a permanent, professional character. In 1888 I was awarded the Pushkin prize. In 1890 I went to Sakhalin in order to write a book on our convict settlement there. Not counting law reports, reviews, notices and everything that I wrote day-to-day for the papers, I have written and published over three hundred printed folios, including stories and novels. I have also written plays for the theatre. The study of the medical sciences have considerably widened the range of my observations, and enriched me with knowledge. My acquaintance with the scientific method has always kept me on my guard, and I have tried wherever possible to take the scientific data into consideration; and where this was impossible, I have preferred not to write at all.^{xvi} So, then:

Medicine is my lawful wedded wife, and literature my mistress. My friend and publisher Alexei Suvorin once advised me not to chase after two hares at once and to forget about practicing medicine. I don't see what's so impossible about chasing two hares at once even in the literal sense. Provided you have the hounds, the chase is feasible. In all likelihood I am lacking the hounds (in the figurative sense), but I feel more alert and more satisfied with myself when I think of myself as having two occupations instead of one. When one gets on my nerves, I spend the night with the other. This may be somewhat disorganized, but then again it's not as boring, and

anyway, neither one loses anything by my duplicity. If I didn't have medicine, I'd never devote my spare time and thoughts to literature. I lack discipline.^{xvii}

It's true- I've got an idea for a play and a title for it (The Cherry Orchard, but that's still a secret) and I'll most likely settle down to writing no later than the end of the month, provided of course, I'm well.^{xviii} And my Ukrainian laziness doesn't get the better of me. And I can find the energy and the time. Relative fame in my later years has brought a great deal of visitors to my door. So I am being constantly interrupted - cruelly, nastily, meanly. I have the play in mind, it has taken shape and form, it begs to be put on paper, but the moment I touch the paper, the door opens and some swine comes crawling in uninvited^{xix} . . . present company excepted.

The truth of the matter is, I don't practice medicine with any regularity anymore - and can't write more than half a page at a time.^{xx} The doctors diagnosed pulmonary apical lesions a few years ago and have ordered me to change my way of life. I can understand the diagnosis but not the change, because it is almost impossible. They ordered me to live in the country, but living permanently in the country presupposes constant fussing about with peasants, animals and the elements in all their forms, and it is as difficult to avoid cares and anxieties in the country as to avoid burns in hell. But still I have tried to change my life as much as possible, and I no longer practice medicine in the country. It has been both a relief and a great deprivation for me. I am to give up all my district duties and buy a dressing gown, and bask in the sun, and eat and eat. My doctors have ordered me to eat about six times daily, and they are indignant at finding I eat so little.^{xxi} I have taken creosote for the lungs- ehh! - and Koumiss, a disgusting concoction of fermented mare's milk, for putting on weight. Would you like a vodka? So would I! But I'm

afraid I have nothing stronger than Koumiss, and I wouldn't offer that to a pig for fear of upsetting its stomach! However, drinking Koumiss I've gained as much as ten pounds and my cough has grown much weaker, but all the same I'm left with the same dull sound beneath the clavicle. ...^{xxii}

Well, enough about how I will, no doubt, eventually come to an end. Let me tell you a little more of how Anton Pavlovich Chekhov came to be. There is peasant blood in me. Yet here I am- all dressed up in a waistcoat and black shoes ... but you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.^{xxiii} (He chuckles.) My grandfather was a serf who bought his freedom before the abolition of serfdom in 1860, the year I was born. My father was a shopkeeper, a grocer, in Taganrog. Taganrog is a southern port, a typical provincial town built on a hill. I remember as a child wandering among the taverns and shops, noting there was not a single sign without a spelling mistake!^{xxiv} Beyond the hills, our little town was surrounded by steppe. I love the Don Steppe. At one time it was like home to me and I knew every little gully. There's a little boy in a story of mine who passes across a steppe on a hot summer day:

“Yegorushka suddenly heard a soft singing; somewhere at a distance a woman was singing, and it was difficult to tell where and in what direction. The song was subdued, dreary and melancholy, like a dirge, and hardly audible, and seemed to come first from the right, then from the left, then from above, and then from underground, as though an unseen spirit were hovering over the steppe and singing. Yegorushka put his arms round his knees and leaned his head on them. . . . The burning sun scorched the back of his head, his neck, and his spine. The melancholy song died away - then floated again on the stagnant stifling air. The rivulet gurgled

monotonously, the horses munched, and time dragged on endlessly, as though it, too, were stagnant and had come to a standstill. It seemed as though a hundred years had passed since the morning. Could it be that God's world, the chaise and the horses, would come to a standstill in that air, and, like the hills, turn to stone and remain for ever in one spot? Yegorushka raised his head, and with smarting eyes looked before him; the lilac distance, which till then had been motionless, began heaving, and with the sky floated away into the distance . . . It drew after it the brown grass, the sedge, and with extraordinary swiftness Yegorushka floated after the flying distance. Some force noiselessly drew him onwards, and the heat and the wearisome song flew after in pursuit. . . Yegorushka bent his head and shut his eyes . . . “^{xxv}

A writer should write what he knows. As a child, I knew and loved the steppe. I also knew poverty and hard work. I did not love it so much. Working for my father was hard, and one could easily give way to the drudgery of everyday existence, allowing the spiritual to give way to the material. But, in the shop, I found the company of cooks, policemen, cab drivers, fishermen, teachers and sailors. I learned the language of their occupations, many of which would come in handy in my writings. Although work held me back two years in grammar school, my time in the shop was a real education. Wasn't it, Papasha?

(He settles on a photograph of his father.)

My Papasha, Pavel Egorovich Chekhov, was not a good businessman.^{xxvi} He was a pious, strict, obsessively religious man.^{xxvii} I respected him as a son should respect a father, but you know I have never been able to forgive him for beating me when I was a child.^{xxviii} Anyway, in 1876, while I was still at school, he was forced to leave Taganrog to take up residence in Moscow, to

avoid going to prison for the debts he had incurred. My mother, Evgenia, joined him there, where my brothers Alexander and Nikolai, who had rebelled against Papasha and left home, were attending University.^{xxix} The rest followed, my brothers Mikhail and Ivan, my sister Maria. I remember, after Papasha and the others had left, I stayed in our old house. It was strange being a tenant, living with the new owners who gave me only the corner of a room in which to live. It was an unfortunate, but necessary arrangement, one that allowed me to finish school and move on to University. To Moscow!

We were very poor in those first years in Moscow. I first began selling my writing during this time - are any of you writers? In my opinion, when you have written a story, you should cross out its beginning and end. That is where we writers most often lie.^{xxx} So, the money I was bringing in from short stories and comic sketches soon placed me above my father as head of the family, with a great deal of help from Maria, my loyal Masha. Masha has continued on with me to this day. Shh! I don't want her to hear us talking about her! I never understood why she never accepted the offers of the young men. She has never married, and I suppose her loyalty to me has a great deal to do with that. In truth, a part of me was always glad she didn't. I don't know what I would have done without her.^{xxxi} Anyway, I viewed my limited success as a writer as good fortune, but my studies in medicine and a career as a doctor remained first in my eyes. It was not until I won the Pushkin prize in 1888 that I began to consider my writing to be a worthwhile pursuit.

Of course, I was very lucky to get the prize. If I were to say it didn't excite me, I'd be lying. Of course - and of this there can be no doubt - I did not owe the prize to myself. There were young writers who were better and more needed than myself. Korolenko, for example, who was quite a good writer and an honorable man, and would have been awarded the prize if he had submitted his book. It was the writer and poet Yakov Polonsky who first thought of nominating me for the prize, before he had even laid eyes on me! Fortunately, he had laid eyes on my stories. Alexei Suvorin, who had some years before given me benefit of publication in his paper, *New Times*, backed Polonsky up and sent my collection of stories *At Twilight* to the Academy of Sciences in *Petersburg*.^{xxxii} All right, that's one good thought for *Petersburg*!

(He casually moves toward a cigar he has noticed in the ashtray
on the writing table.)

Even though I had written many stories and several plays by this time, I had not considered writing as a calling, and certainly not above that of medicine. Since passing exams in 1884, I had been Doctor Chekhov. You know, even today I sometimes think that everything I have written, everything I received the prize and other acknowledgments for will probably live no more than ten years after me in people's memories. And why should they? That's today's writers! They're nice, they're talented, you're delighted by them, but at the same time you can't forget your desire for a smoke.

(He contemplates the cigar)

Science and technology are now going through a period of greatness, but for writers, this is a precarious, sour, dreary period, and we ourselves are sour and dreary. ... We truly lack a certain

something: if you lift up the skirts of our muse, all you see is a flat area. Keep in mind that the writers we call eternal or simply good, the writers who intoxicate us, have one highly important trait in common: The best of them are realistic and describe life as it is, but because each line is saturated with the consciousness of its goal, you feel life as it should be in addition to life as it is, and you are captivated by it.^{xxxiii} For this we have Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. And a good thing, too, I suppose.

But what about me? I describe life as it is, and stop dead right there. I wouldn't lift a hoof if you lit into me with a whip! The Leftist critic Mikhailovsky once said of my work, "Chekhov treats everything equally: a man and his shadow, a bluebell and a suicide ...here oxen are being driven and there the post is being delivered ...here a man is strangled and there people are drinking champagne."^{xxxiv} And why not? I suppose, my writing is the antithesis of the authorial viewpoint that we see so much of these days. I record, simply and scientifically, the events in my stories.^{xxxv} I have neither immediate nor remote goals. I have no politics, I don't believe in revolution, there is no God, I'm not afraid of ghosts, and I am not afraid of death or blindness. No one who wants nothing, hopes for nothing and fears nothing can be an artist.^{xxxvi} But he can write. And observe. Right now I am observing this cigar – I want to light it and smoke it, but no. Masha will smell it!

Anyway, when people speak to me of what is artistic and what anti-artistic, of what is dramatically effective, of realism and the like, I am at an utter loss, I nod to everything uncertainly, and answer in banal half truths that aren't worth a brass farthing.(He shrugs.) I divide all works into two categories. Those I like and those I don't.^{xxxvii} Whether or not I am

qualified to speak of things artistic, I do know this: It is not the writer's responsibility to present his facts soaked in his own personal point of view. It is not the writer's responsibility to answer his own questions.

(This last statement – and the vigor in which it is given, causes him to have a little coughing fit. This affects his breathing throughout the next section.)

My life is quite another matter. My health has been the question since I first noted symptoms of tuberculosis after graduating from University. I was quite happily ignoring the question until circumstances forced me to take notice a few years ago. It's an unpleasant business discovering blood you've coughed into a handkerchief. I have not entirely regained my health, but I'm getting along. I'm doing better this year than last.^{xxxviii}

(A good-natured chuckle explodes into more coughing.)

That is a lie, my friends. Yes. Lying is like alcoholism. A liar will lie with his dying breath. An aristocrat and the fiancée of a girl who is the friend of our family - tried to shoot himself to death. The fiancée's father, a general, hasn't gone to the hospital to visit his son and won't go until he learns how society has reacted to the attempted suicide.^{xxxix} So much for denials. The truth is, I am faced with the prospect of not growing old. Or, at least, any older. You know, if a lot of cures are suggested for a disease, it means that the disease is incurable.^{xl} To live in order to die is not very amusing, but to live knowing you will die before your time is completely ridiculous.^{xli} Just a few years ago my father died, suddenly. In spite of all that had occurred between us, it came as a shock- and a reminder. My brother, Nikolai.

(He picks up a photograph of his brother.)

In 1889, he died of alcoholism and tuberculosis. His was the long, slow self-inflicted fading of a man in his dissipated youth. What a waste! He was an artist, and, for a time, contributed to the Moscow weeklies and journals. When this happened, my successes were just beginning. The plays were a struggle, but the stories were there. Anyway, I decided it was time to look to my science, to give back to the profession that I had been neglecting. And, as happened to me from time to time, I felt the need to travel, to get away . . . to run away? Perhaps.

I decided to take my census of the Island of Sakhalin, the Russian Penal colony, located in the cold of the Northern Pacific. Sakhalin is a place of unbearable suffering, the sort of suffering only man, whether free or subjugated, is capable of. The people who work near it - or on it - have been trying to solve problems involving frightening responsibility . . . they are still trying. I'm sorry I'm not sentimental, or I'd say that we ought to make pilgrimages to places like Sakhalin the way the Turks go to Mecca.^{xlii} The whole project took six months. Half of this was expended in traveling the thousands of miles to the island, which is located off the northeastern coast of Russia. I traveled by train, coach, cart, and ship.^{xliii} Some of the overland travel was rough, and I was not always well. Imagine the effect on a case of hemorrhoids^{xliiv}, for example. What a pain in my arse! When I arrived, I went around to each of the settlements, stopped at each hut, and talked with each person. I used a filing card system for purposes of the census, and made accounts of about ten thousand convicts and settlers. I was particularly successful in the children's census.^{xlv} The situation of Sakhalin's children and adolescents is quite extraordinary. I saw starving children, I saw thirteen-year-old kept women, and pregnant fifteen-year-olds. Girls start practicing prostitution at the age of twelve, sometimes before the onset of

menstruation. Churches and schools exist only on paper; children are educated by their milieu and the penal colony environment . . . terrible- terrible.

Of course I can't solve the child question. But it seems to me that charity and the surplus left from prison and various other funds will never get anything done; I would prefer it if government funds were involved.^{xlvi} I hope that my book, *The Island of Sakhalin* will shed some light on the matter. It is not my duty, however, to answer all the questions raised by Sakhalin. I am a writer and a scientist, not God, or a government official. I will say that since my island experience, my writings have shown symptoms of *mania sachalinosa*.^{xlvii} This is a disease of my own creation; it makes me question the meaning of life.

I sometimes preach heresies, but I haven't once gone so far as to deny that problematic questions like those posed by Sakhalin have a place in art. In conversations with my fellow writers I always insist that it is not the artist's job to try to answer specialized questions. Don't you feel it is bad for the artist to take on something he doesn't understand? And so if any author were to boast to me that he'd written a story from pure inspiration without first having thought over his intentions, I'd call him a madman.^{xlviii}

But then, he could as well call me a madman. Take a look, for example, at my career in the theatre! First let me say that, in spite of my love of the theatre from an early age, when I write a play, I feel uncomfortable, as if somebody is poking me in the neck. Worse yet when the play is actually produced! The *Petersburg* opening of my play *The Seagull* in October of 1896; how about that! The whole sordid affair began with the acceptance of the play by the Imperial

Alexandrinsky Theatre in August. In October, I attended rehearsals, which dismayed me no end. The actors were stamping about in the old grand style, despite my suggestion to play the characters more naturally. The actors refused to learn their lines. I contemplated stopping the production, but it was too late to do so. The only ray of light for me was the actress playing Nina - Vera Kommissarzhevskaya- and she was a late replacement.^{xlix} After the performance, that night and the following day, people kept assuring me that my characters were all idiots and that my play was dramatically unsound, and so on and so forth. I was embarrassed and chagrined, and left Petersburg filled with all sorts of doubts.¹ At least I had expected the play to fail. But you know, when I got home I got word from that the second and third performances had been successful. I received several letters, both signed and anonymous, that praised the play and berated the critics. Though I resolved to return to playwriting, I can admit to you that I was hurt and irritated by the experience, even physically.

The stress had caused a fit of bloody coughing, a hint of things to come. After a serious hemorrhage in 1897,^{li} and subsequent diagnosis of what I already knew - that I had contracted the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, I moved to sell my estate in Melikhovo, a convenient 50 miles from Moscow. The doctors recommended a milder, more distant and inconvenient climate. So here I am, and here you are.

Needless to say, I did not think of producing *The Seagull* again, and began work on another play, *Uncle Vanya*. My *Uncle Vanya* was making the rounds of the provinces and was successful everywhere. You never know when you're going to win and when you're going to lose. I'd placed no hopes whatsoever on that play.^{lii} It was at this time, 1898, that I was approached by

Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko of the new Moscow Art Theatre. He wanted to produce my *Seagull*! I initially turned him down, opting for the relative safety of my stories. You must understand, even before the murky reception of *The Seagull* in *Petersburg*, I had endured the disaster of *Ivanov* in 1887, in which only two of the actors knew their lines,^{liii} and the remaining company was drunk. Then there were similar problems two years later with *The Wood Demon*. Don't get me started! Even so, I eventually accepted Danchenko's offer to produce *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre!

You must understand, Danchenko and Alexiev, that is, Stanislavsky, put together a company of actors that I felt, at least, somewhat understood my plays. I saw some early rehearsals in fall of 1898. I then saw a private performance in April 1899 arranged in Moscow by Danchenko. I thought it generally satisfying, but I disliked Stanislavsky's heavy use of gimmicks and sound effects.^{liv} I remember once saying, with him within earshot, "Listen! I shall write a new play, and it will begin as follows: 'How wonderful, how quiet! One can hear no birds, no dogs, no cuckoos, no owls, no nightingales, no docks or bells, not so much as a cricket!'"^{lv} That wasn't very nice was it?

Furthermore, I joked that, because of the slow tempo, the play should have ended with act 3. Above all, I disliked Alexiev's interpretation of Trigorin.^{lvi} I find his acting depressing! I remember, during the Art Theatre production of *Uncle Vanya* in 1900, that I was constantly irritated by his use of pauses in his performance as Astrov. Nemirovich-Danchenko, who directed, managed to cut 40 or 50 of them out, but the show did not get good reviews right away. However, time and patience proved the play a great success, and we were all gratified and

relieved. I must admit that, eventually, Alexiev got great reviews for his *Astrov*. He still irritates me! But, I'm sure I irritate him.

I recall when *Uncle Vanya* was in late rehearsals and Olga Knipper, my future wife, was playing Yelena. She was very beautiful! She was concerned that the play would not make an immediate sensation (as had *The Seagull*). To this, I replied, “Yes, dear actress, ordinary, medium success is not enough now for all you artistic players: you want uproar, big guns, dynamite. You have been spoiled at last, deafened by constant talk about successes, crowded and empty houses: you are already poisoned with that drug, and in another two or three years you will be good for nothing!”^{lvii} Incredibly, this admonishment did nothing to reduce the esteem in which she held me, and we were married in spite of it!

Where is my wife? I know you are wondering. You might have guessed she is in Moscow. That is where we met, at the Art Theatre, during preliminary rehearsals for *The Seagull*.^{lviii} She was very smitten with me. And I was smitten with her. After a long courtship, we were married on the 25th of May 1901, near Moscow.^{lix}

I remember writing to Alexei Suvorin on the subject of marriage some years ago, before I met Olga, when he suggested the institution might benefit me in some way: “Very well,” I wrote, “I shall marry if you so desire, but give me a wife who, like the moon, does not appear in my sky every day. I won't write any better for having gotten married.”^{lx} Well. I got what I wished for! I tend to tell people that I got married mainly because, first, I'm over forty; second, Olga comes from a highly moral family; and third, if we have to separate, I'll do so without the least

hesitation, as if I had never gotten married. After all, she is an independent person and self-supporting. Another important consideration is that my marriage has not in the least changed either my way of life or the way of life of those who lived and are living around me.^{lxi} That's what I tell people. The truth is, I miss her and I adore her,^{lxii} but I am so set in my ways that day to day life with me might drive her away! The arrangement is strange to you, I can tell. But I can tell you with all certainty that I am a splendid husband, just as she is a splendid wife. It is to my dear little Knipschiz that I have dedicated the last page of my life.

(He laughs, remembering a story.)

When he discovered my intention to marry, Maxim Gorky wrote to me to say: "Everyone says you are marrying some woman who is an actress and has a foreign name. I don't believe it. But if it's true, I'm glad. It's a good thing to be married provided the woman is not made of wood or a radical."^{lxiii} Gorky amuses me- I think he is in love with me – in a literary way! At any rate, he's not made of wood, though he is a radical, at least according to the government that has exiled or held him under house arrest over the years. Although his writing style could stand simplicity, that's not what seems to offend the Tsar. Gorky's importance does not lie solely in the fact that he is popular; he is important because he is the first in Russia and the world at large to write about philistinism with contempt and disgust and at the very time when society is ready for this protest. From any point of view you choose, philistinism is a great evil. In my opinion there will come a time when Gorky's works will be forgotten, but he himself is not likely to be forgotten even a thousand years from now.^{lxiv} For the time being, he is quite memorable to those in power for whom he generates so much discomfort.

Tolstoy has had the same effect in certain circles- his excommunication by the Orthodox Church is evidence of this. I once approached him as Gorky now does me, as something of a disciple. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* was, in large part, my inspiration for *A Dreary Story*, which I wrote in 1889. Both stories concern the thoughts of a man who knows he is dying. My views of writing do not agree with Tolstoy's, as his personal views permeate his work, and he often writes in grandiose and judgmental narratives, but I agree with his merciless criticism of capitalist exploitation, and his unmasking of the profound contradictions between the growth of wealth and achievements of civilization and the growth of poverty, degradation and misery among the working masses. That sounds revolutionary, doesn't it? I have just depressed myself.

I fear Tolstoy's death. His death would leave a large empty space in my life. First, I have loved no man the way I have loved him – in a literary way. . . I am not a believer, but of all beliefs I consider his the closest to mine and most suitable for me. Second, when literature has a Tolstoy, it is easy and gratifying to be a writer. Even if you are aware that you have never accomplished anything and are still not accomplishing anything, you don't feel so bad, because Tolstoy accomplishes enough for everyone. Third, Tolstoy stands firm, his authority is enormous, and as long as he is alive bad taste in literature will remain far in the background.^{lxv} I am glad to know him.

I am very glad that my career has allowed me an opportunity to know so many of the people I have come to admire. Tolstoy, of course, who agrees to disagree with me on so many things. Vladimir Nemirovich- Danchenko, whose enthusiasm and insistence is the real reason for the success of my plays.^{lxvi} Nikolai Leikin, the editor of *Fragments* magazine, a rare oasis of approval and encouragement in Petersburg. Pytor Tchaikovsky, my most favorite of composers.

Alexei Suvorin, my great friend and champion, the editor of *New Times*. I still confide and correspond with him. My Olga, my Knipschiz, who adores and believes in me in spite of myself. It's not easy being married to a bachelor. My family, of course, has stayed on with me, some in spirit and some in flesh. Masha, my sister, and Mamasha, my mother, are here. Others, like yourselves, come and go. You will be no less remembered. I still entertain thoughts of travel and of Moscow. Moscow! And my thoughts still turn to the future. I wonder . . .

It's strange to think that we're utterly unable to tell what will be regarded as great and important in the future and what will be thought of as just paltry and ridiculous. Didn't the great discoveries of Copernicus - or of Columbus, if you like - appear useless and unimportant to begin with? - whereas some rubbish, written up by an eccentric fool, was regarded as a revelation of great truth? It may well be that in time to come the life we live today will seem strange and uncomfortable and stupid and not too clean either, and perhaps even wickedin another two or three hundred years, people may be looking at our present life just as we look at the past now, with horror and scorn. (perhaps) the time isn't far off when the light will spread everywhereOh, what a great life it'll be then, what a life!^{lxvii}

Oh, if only we knew . . . If only we knew . . .^{lxviii}

(He slowly moves to sit down)

What can you do? You can take care of each other. Live in peace among yourselves.^{lxix} Forgive everyone who has offended you, forget about it, and, above all, sit down and write.^{lxx} I think what matters is to be just, and everything else will fall into place.^{lxxi}

My apologies, my friends, but I have to rest. Thank you for coming. Masha will see you out . . .

Goodnight!

(Curtain)

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

History

This is a presentation of the historical background necessary for a complete view of the character, Anton Chekhov. This background information includes the social, political and cultural highlights of the late imperial period of Russia. Consideration is given primarily to the period of Anton Chekhov's life, the years 1860-1904. The social and political upheavals during this period in Russian history are the precursors to the 1917 revolution that followed. The people of Russia, during most of this period, were experiencing change from the previous era. In addition, several key examples of the Russian group mind are presented.

National:

For two hundred years before the birth of Chekhov, Russia had been under the control of a Tsarist autocracy. This system had long depended on a rigid class system, beginning with the nobility and going on down to the gentry, peasant, and serf classes. This social organization made it possible to streamline the central government and control the production of agricultural products, which were a staple of the economy.

The abolition of serfdom in 1860 was a catalyst for a restructuring of the old economy. This old economy was strongly linked to the social stratification present at this time in Russia. The serfs were at the low rung of society, overseen by the land-owning gentry, for whom they worked. This arrangement was the backbone of the agriculture that drove a large part of Russia's

economy. The issue of serfdom reached a violent, protest-filled peak at the middle of the century, prompting government action to peasant revolt and the strong public opinion against the feudal institution (Moss 25). Soon after the serfs were essentially freed, the government began to turn over some rule to local governing bodies, called zemstvo. The zemstvo reforms were enacted in 1864, in reaction to the fact that the gentry could no longer govern and organize the newly freed serf population (Moss 29). Chekhov himself later had direct experience with the zemstvo, working together with local governments in both Melikhovo and Yalta to organize everything from famine relief to the construction of schools and libraries.

Another effect of the abolition of serfdom was upheaval in the caste system of Russia. Without the serfs as free/cheap labor, many of the gentry found it economically impossible to flourish. At the same time, they were being displaced in the economy and social structure by a growing middle class (Riasanovsky 188). This middle class was created by a climate of “reform” in 1860s Russia, which Tsar Alexander II had instigated out of economic necessity and peasant unrest (Riasanovsky 168). This was a period of new bureaucracies, such as the zemstvo and civil service, and reform also hastened industrialization and the creation of a new urban working class (Riasanovsky 172). Alexander II’s reforms stopped short of a constitutional government, however, and thus began a powerful anti-Tsarist sentiment throughout the country (Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia 99-100). The Tsar endured many assassination attempts, culminating in his death in 1881.

Alexander II’s son, Alexander III, ruled the country for the next fourteen years (1881- 1894). His reaction to the assassination of his father was to cease all progressive reform measures

(Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia 101), and to reestablish strong central control. This did not, however, cease protest activities, particularly among the intelligentsia and students at universities.

Political and Cultural Climate:

Since the loss of the Crimean war in 1856, the intelligentsia and writers had openly criticized the autocracy for its inflexibility and for falling behind the cultural and technical advances of the West (Offord 45-46). By this time, Chekhov had begun his career as a writer and political protest was reaching its boiling point, both in print and in the streets. This period of the late 1880s and 1890s mirrored, in many ways, the great cultural and political upheaval of 1960s America (Hingley, Russia 134). Like America in the 20th Century, 19th Century Russia had, by late mid-century, swung politically from a patriotic, nationalistic state to a period of upheaval and questioning. Like America's Vietnam experience, Russia's failure in the Crimean War generated enormous questions about Russia's political and economic priorities. A good deal of this questioning was generated by the intellectuals and the youth of Russia.

Much protest was occurring on university campuses, where the intelligentsia held sway over the views of young students. Nihilism, fostered by a distrust of authority and the elevation of the individual, took root (Riasanovsky 174). Populism also experienced resurgence, due to terrible famines and epidemics which gripped Russia in the early 1890s. One of the leading proponents of Populism in the press was Mikhailovsky, the same leftist critic and Marxist who had reviewed

Chekhov's literary work (Offord 98-99). With the death of Tsar Alexander III in 1894 and ascension of his son, the weaker Nicholas, political opposition to autocracy reached its zenith.

Overall, the period from 1881 until 1904, the year of Chekhov's death, was an intense time of change. Due to modernization and a history of protest leading up to it, the autocracy had more difficulty controlling opposing public opinion and unrest (Moss, 52). Leo Tolstoy became a primary critic of Russian society as a whole, and Russian Orthodoxy in particular. For his pains, he was excommunicated (Moss 53). The Orthodox Church, like the autocracy, was a singular power. This resulted in intolerance and persecution of other religions, and the Jews suffered particularly. Other writers, like Maxim Gorky, were exiled or arrested for their political views, but this did nothing to stop the tide of anti-Tsarist sentiment.

Aside from their political predilections, writers in Russia were a part of a period of greatness in the arts. In Chekhov's time, there were restraints on certain forms of political expression, but artistic expression was flourishing. Chekhov himself had to deal with the possibility of censorship when working with imperial theatres like the Alexandrinsky, which had a hierarchy leading to the Tsar himself (Frame 20). Still, free artistic discourse was the order of the day and such arguments as to the merits of Symbolism versus Realism (Frame 13) were lively ones. At first, Chekhov had to deal primarily with the Tsar-approved theatres, many of which were in St. Petersburg, the long-acknowledged cultural capital. But the gradual death of theatrical monopolies in Europe had its effect. In 1881, Russia abandoned the monopoly system as well (Frame 12).

Independent theatres sprung up in the latter days of the 19th Century, foremost among these being the Moscow Art Theatre. There, of course, Chekhov would flourish as a playwright. In literary circles Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Gorky achieved international prominence. This was no mean feat, considering that Russia was struggling to pull itself out of several hundred years of isolation. Russian classical music was also on a high level, with such luminaries as Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Rubinstein. This period saw Russian music heavily influenced by European Romanticism (Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia 222- 24). The overall success and advancement of Russian artistic and literary endeavors stood in stark contrast to her struggles developing socially and economically.

Caste Society and Rural Life:

The society of Russia in the late 19th Century is inevitably related to historical experience. This past experience had created a certain mindset among the Russian peoples. This was uniquely carved out by history, economics, ethnic orientation, world view and long-established ways of living daily life. In the case of Anton Chekhov, this mindset began by his birth as a peasant in a caste society. In spite of the abolition of serfdom in the year of his birth, 1860, the caste system was still ingrained in the fabric of Russian society and therefore in its people. Being a serf or peasant in 19th Century Russia would not tend to bring feelings of inferiority. This is due to the fact that individual rights and expectations were predetermined by the caste into which a person was born (Gorer and Rickman 94). It was an infrequent occasion when a member of a caste was allowed to marry outside that structure, for example. It is also interesting to note that, while child-rearing was usually done in a responsible manner, there would have been no romantic

notion of modern love attached to the process. There would not have been any sense of masculine or feminine fulfillment attached to child bearing, as it was viewed as an inevitable facet of life (Gorer and Rickman 95). Work habits for rural peasants would have long been centered on the system of the seasons. The harvest and planting cycles served to provide not only the frame of reference for the passing of time, but the rhythms of everyday life. In Chekhov's time, these attitudes and life ways would have still been quite prevalent. Because of the freedom from legal caste restraints, however, he was free to advance socially and intellectually. Since his grandfather had purchased his freedom during the serf era, his family had been free to pursue interests in business, art and literature even before the abolition. In short, Anton Chekhov had the freedom to become cosmopolitan.

Traditional Russian Mindset:

Still, Chekhov could not have easily escaped the psychological traditions of the old culture. For instance, Russians of this time frequently looked upon themselves as containing opposing qualities. Being humane meant also being cruel; being industrious had its antithesis in laziness. This latter contrast is an example of the phenomenon of *strada*, a suffering related to the short bursts of energy and work expended in traditional country life. This would have followed the age old dictates of the seasons where, for example, a flurry of harvest activity would be followed by inactivity in the winter (Hingley, The Russian Mind 34-35). Chekhov himself often joked about his "Ukrainian laziness," yet proved to be an exceptionally hard worker.

Chekhov certainly understood the concept of *toska*, which is a feeling of yearning or longing, often for that which is unattainable (Gorer and Rickman 149). We see evidence of this in his writings, none more obvious than the longing for Moscow and a better life in *The Three Sisters*. Another interesting point of seemingly contrary behavior is the love of togetherness coupled with a tendency to be uncooperative. Communes and collectives were familiar to Russians before the Revolution of 1917. Unanimity was highly prized in decision making there, and the Russian Orthodox Church had a sense of strong community mindset. However, group action, as opposed to mindset, involved a lot of individual counter action and resistance (Hingley, The Russian Mind 122-25). Resistance was often passive, and based on orientation towards individual concerns. This could be construed as a prototype for Chekhov's depiction of close knit groups who could not act in concert with one another. Related to this phenomenon of emotional community coupled with resistance is the "failure to communicate," seen in *The Cherry Orchard*, characterized by no communication on the surface level, but agreement on a sympathetic level (Hingley, The Russian Mind 127).

Cosmopolitan Attitudes:

These examples of long-held attitudes and behaviors were supplemented by the so-called higher culture that Chekhov was exposed to by his upward mobility. The intellectual attitudes mentioned earlier were certainly familiar to him, as was the critical concept of truth-verity versus truth-justice (Riasanovsky 179). The former correlation is referring to objective truth, which Chekhov vigorously supported in his scientific observations. The latter refers to subjective truth, which Chekhov came to terms with later in his life. Subjective truth is that which is related to

envisioning the best society for all people. Chekhov roundly criticized writers who used subjectivity to get their point across, but also came to realize, through his experiences at Sakhalin and his clinic practice, that this projection of a better social reality certainly had its place.

The intellectual Russia of the late 19th Century was emerging from a period of Romanticism. The romantic notion of Russia was, for many in the intelligentsia, effectively destroyed by the questions raised by the loss of the Crimean War in 1856. Imperial supremacy was suspect thereafter, and the national economy was beginning to be scrutinized. The tendency of the Russian to idealize the Tsar and treat their leader's will as mysterious and divine (Gorer and Rickman 166-69) had been seriously eroded by loss in war and reforms that brought new freedoms to Russians as a whole. Public opinion became a catalyst in the emerging, modern country. The addition of industrial business caused capitalism to be introduced, and the new economic freedoms gave more power to an emerging urban middle class. More universities opened in the latter part of the century, giving youth a forum for advancement as well as for debate and protest. The reforms of Alexander II were like a genie in a bottle and, once released, could not be totally rescinded, even in the reactionary environment of his son, Alexander III.

This new, emerging Russia was the one that Chekhov was exposed to when he came to Moscow as a medical student in 1879. Chekhov observed and read about the changes occurring in his native land, but he did not allow himself to be swept away by it. Instead, he was enthralled with science and medicine, both of which were in a period of huge advances. Ivan Pavlov's studies of conditioned reflexes was during this period, and Alexander Popov created the first radio receiver in 1895 (Riasanovsky, 192). At the same time, Russian literature was also enjoying a period of

greatness. Chekhov's foray into writing began at the same time he was in medical school. With the swirl of political change, new ideas in social reforms and student protests, he began using observation from science to write about what he had experienced in his life. In spite of his love for Moscow and his experiences abroad, many of Chekhov's stories and plays reflected his rural experiences, his knowledge of the old systems of peasantry and gentry and his keen observation of the Russian mind.

In many ways, Chekhov was like his country. The clashing and merging of the old, rural ways and the new industrialism/intellectualism was a part of both their fabrics. The mirror-image aspect of Russia's mindset- the humane and the cruel, the community mind and sense of the individual- had manifested itself in the politics and culture of the land. Chekhov observed and absorbed the best of both worlds. On a more immediate level, he had great love for both the individual and the greater good, both the steppe and the city of Moscow. He maintained all these connections through management of his country estates at Melikhovo and Yalta, his closeness to his family, and travel all over Europe and Russia. In later years, the social and political questions of his time played on Chekhov more, but he never left the roots of his art, his peasant blood, his love of science and his observational skills.

The Script

This particular script is a self-authored work, derived from the personal thoughts of Anton Chekhov. *An Evening with Anton Chekhov* is designed to be a piece of intimate theatre. The gap to the audience is closed by the elimination of a curtain or fourth wall, and the character

addresses the audience directly, as his guests. In the interest of this type of intimacy and interaction between audience and character/actor, I have drawn from those writings which tended to express Chekhov's more intimate ideas and feelings. These have been his letters and personal correspondences, anecdotal stories from his closest friends and associates, and sections of his stories and plays that relate directly to his personal experiences. For particulars about resources for this play, consult the script footnotes.

Because the play is based on a single character, Anton Chekhov, who appears throughout the play, the standard of *french scenes*, those culminating in entrances and exits, does not apply. The standard breakdown of Act and Scene is also absent, leaving a single act in which there are numerous units. I define these units as being topical in nature, with corresponding beats of action contained within each. For the purposes of organization and analysis, I have devised 25 units, each with a title which describes their "topic of discussion." Each unit has a brief description and accompanying beats of action. The structural through-line of the play is one of exposition, contained in a number of anecdotes and stories, leaving the actor to discover the emotional and active moments within each story.

Unit One: Introduction to Chekhov, Circumstances, Environment

The play opens dynamically, with Chekhov entering, flustered and frustrated at his writing. He holds papers in his hands, explains his quandary, and complains about being stuck in Yalta. The audience knows this is during the last years of his life. Almost immediately, Chekhov apologizes for the apparent disarray, both in himself and his home. He confides in his audience

about the letters he receives, and the problem of student unrest. He lets his “guests” know that he is disapproving of revolutionary activities. He draws the audience in by identifying them with students, then explaining the relative worth of them. He bemoans the fate of many students as ending up as “rapacious public officials” or “cottage-owning doctors,” the latter describing himself. He ribs the audience, asking them if they like his cottage. He then bemoans his isolation from Moscow, and he explains the “problems” of living at Yalta. He feels better comparing his situation to living in Petersburg, the name of which he spits out in denigrating tones. This is because some in that city have “assaulted” his work. He recants, admitting that it was “the plays they didn’t like.” This is the opening incident in a thread of admissions and confessions that Chekhov makes in the script. This underscores a theme of revelation in the play. Chekhov is limited in his time and energy, both day-to-day, and in terms of general mortality, and he knows it. The time has come for him to complete his work and this includes his work on himself. So, he continually corrects his self-deceptions and outright lies throughout the play. There is simply no time left for that kind of nonsense.

After this initial correction, Chekhov put forth his apology at being somewhat cranky at his current circumstances. He reassures the guests that he, after all, enjoys people, but then he throws them off-balance with a declaration that he doesn’t trust groups! Here we are introduced to the playfulness of Chekhov, who quickly draws the audience back with the declaration that he has “faith in individuals.”

Actions:

Complain	Explain	Confide	Protest	Draw Audience Closer
Philosophize	Admit	Confess	Denigrate	Apologize

Assure Reassure Expose

Transition to Unit Two is accomplished by an occurrence; Chekhov realizes his glasses are off. His new focus on the guests after donning the glasses spurs him to confide in them further.

Unit Two: Confiding in the Audience

Having put on his glasses, this immediately reminds Chekhov that a fellow he knows named Alexiev always thinks he looks through them in an arrogant manner. Chekhov plays with his audience further by revealing this person is really Stanislavsky, and proceeds to criticize actors (Stanislavsky is one) as a vulgar lot. He realizes that he may insult an actor among his guests, and so apologizes. He is not entirely sincere, but he explains his standard was set by “the great Elenora Duse,” who he saw act several years before. This reminds him of his wife, Olga, who he admits is an actress. From this admission, he reveals his life-long love of theatre, but categorizes it as “complicated.” From this brief unit, we more glimpse of how the character works in transition. His mind works in stages. One thing reminds him of another or, he realizes that he is uncomfortable continuing with a subject, or wants to save it for another time. This is transitional subtext.

Actions:

Recall Confide Conspire Enlighten Scold Charm

Apologize Redirect

Transition to Unit Three is accomplished by a realization that the subject of love is not one Chekhov is ready or comfortable to elaborate on. So, he redirects the subject to his guests.

Unit Three: Chekhov Addresses the Question of Who He Is

The character smoothly changes the subject to a more immediate one: Who do his guests think he is? He proceeds to explain that his public persona has many definitions, and takes pleasure from the game he plays with the critics. He illustrates that he has come to terms with this relationship when he humorously recounts Skabichevsky's opinion of him.

Action:

Self-Deprecate Welcome Reassure Admit Dismiss Pontificate

Confide

Transition to Unit Four is accomplished through memory connection. The character is reminded by his story of the critic that there is more to the story. By this point, Chekhov is comfortable with his guests and seeks to share his experience.

Unit Four: Personal Philosophy on Labels and Tyranny

Chekhov shares his views of how it took people awhile to come around to his work. This leads him to dismiss again the critic's need to pigeonhole him in some way. These people are not frightening to him, but he is afraid of people who try to create a political definition of him. The idea of "liberal or conservative" resonates with today's audience, once again strengthening Chekhov's connection to his guests. After Chekhov declares what he is not, he goes on to say he wishes he could be an artist, but he can't. This is a thread which appears here and again throughout the play, that of Chekhov's modesty in the face of his fame. This is a reflection of his egalitarianism and his idea that were all pretty much alike as individuals. He does, however, take the opportunity to reveal his beliefs on lies, violence and tyranny. Among other groups, he

finds these ills among the “younger generation,” and uses the opportunity to good-naturedly tease one of his “younger” guests. He shrugs in jest as he recounts that his “holy of holies” includes health and the human body, his own being in a state of implied decline. His guests, however, realize that it is important to Chekhov that the world be free of ills like “violence and lies,” as he reiterates this.

Actions:

Share Confide Dismiss Philosophize Tease Appraise
Lecture Reiterate

Transition to Unit Five is accomplished as Chekhov qualifies his beliefs as a program he “would adhere to if he were a major artist.” This effectively leads him and his guests on a journey about writing and one particular drawback of Chekhov’s fame: People want to know more about him!

Unit Five: Autobiophobia

The character transitions from the idea of being a major artist to its by-product, fame. Chekhov bemoans the fact that others have an interest in his life, but that he is supremely uncomfortable with autobiographical endeavors. He has created the illness “autobiophobia” to describe his repulsion to reading or writing about himself. He reconsiders, however, when his guests become apparent to him. This reconsideration is half politeness, half teasing. His desire to be a good host, in addition to the fact that he has perhaps protested too much, leads him to reveal himself.

Actions:

Qualify Explain Repudiate Nudge Amend Tantalize
Surrender

This entire unit helps in the transition to Chekhov's revelation in the next section, culminating with his acquiescence to talk more about himself.

Unit Six: Facts of Life

A recounting of the basic facts of Chekhov's life, at first delivered with slight reluctance and teasing, eventually it leads him into some genuinely pleasant and invigorating memories.

Sensations and feelings are renewed as he remembers his school and university years. He plays with the audience a bit when listing his writing accomplishments, as he nearly "forgets" to mention his writing for the theatre. He concludes this travelogue, letting his guests know the importance of science and medicine in his literature.

Actions:

Instruct Tease Revitalize Engage Contemplate

The transition here occurs in leading up to the summary "medicine is my lawful wife and literature my mistress." This summary leads directly to more occurrences for Chekhov, relating to his dual occupation.

Unit Seven: Two Occupations

Chekhov invites his guests to contemplate the insinuation of naughtiness in his occupational wife and mistress, medicine and literature. This immediately reminds him of the delightful story of Alexei Suvorin's attitude towards his two jobs. Chekhov draws us closer by mocking Suvorin as he advises Chekhov to give up medicine in favor of writing. Chekhov, like a rebellious boy, sees nothing wrong with two jobs, but does admit that he probably no longer has the figurative

“hounds” to “chase two hares at once.” In this admission is a sly reference to his fading energy and failing health. But Chekhov is enlivened by the thought of two occupations, even at this late date, and allows as to how he would never write if he didn’t have medicine to discipline him. He flatly states that he “lacks discipline,” and this leads us to our next unit.

Actions:

Provoke Disclaim Gauge Seduce Mock Assess

Unit Eight: Writing Difficulties

As soon as Chekhov mentions a lack of discipline in his writing, he is prompted by seeing papers on his desk to admit he has been working on a play. He is frustrated by his difficulties in writing, but makes less than plausible (to himself) excuses as to why he can’t write effectively. It’s the visitor’s fault, he says. He talks in general about visitors, and then realizes his current guests may mistake his complaints for a personal attack. He quickly apologizes, drawing them in to his group of the exceptional few.

Actions:

Confess Excuse Accuse Explain Assuage

The transition to the next unit is born out of Chekhov’s embarrassment at possibly offending his visitors. He realizes that his grouching has gotten him into apposition of unseemliness, and he is left with the fact that the real reason for his difficulties is his health. This admission refocuses his drive to tell the truth at this late stage of his life, and to pass on truth’s wisdom. As a scientific observer, Chekhov also wants to appraise himself honestly, so that others can do so.

Unit Nine: Confessions of Poor Health

Chekhov admits his health is a greater factor in his daily life than he had previously allowed. He expresses his frustration at his doctor's insistence that he stay in the warmer climate of Yalta. He protests that the life in the country is as fraught with worries and concerns as any place else.

Chekhov's frustration is also voiced in his disgust at having to take creosote and Koumiss for his illness. This disgust transcends the actual taste of these concoctions. He longs for vodka, but knows better. Finally, he confesses that the koumiss remedy has, indeed, helped improve his health. Even so, he ruminates on his mortality.

Actions:

Confess Harangue Refute Bargain Refuse Admit

Denounce Incite Retreat

The unpleasantness for both Chekhov and his audience in thinking about death spurs Chekhov to change the subject. He retraces his development in an earlier time, when he "came to be."

Unit Ten: Roots, Childhood

Chekhov decides to turn the tables on an unpleasant subject, moving from his own mortality to an earlier time, when he was a healthy child. He modestly reveals that he is a peasant, for all of his trappings, and proudly describes his grandfather, who bought his freedom from serfdom.

This leads to the complicated and often painful relationship with his father. Not wanting to linger long there, Chekhov uses the mentioning of his home town, Taganrog, to shift the subject to his recollections of the town and his beloved Don Steppe. In Chekhov's sharp mind, this causes him to excitedly connect to one of his stories, which involves the steppe.

Unit Ten, Section A: Yegoruska

This recollection leads directly into an enthusiastic reading/telling of a part of the story.

Chekhov's mind wanders inwardly at times, pondering his own experiences, which he used to write the story in the first place. He has to jolt himself back into the presence of his guests. By story's end, he is completely captivated and transported by his own personal memories.

Actions:

Avoid Strengthen Contemplate Enthuse Mesmerize

Transition occurs when the character comes back to his guests and makes contact. He relates the story to a writer writing about "what he knows." This remark lets us see, in a sly way, that Chekhov has been reliving his own memories in the story. This connects to his knowledge and love of the steppe, which causes a brief, unwelcome memory of poverty and drudgery, which the young Chekhov also was familiar with.

Unit Eleven: The Shop

Chekhov recounts his time in his father's shop, the memory of which is conflicted. Working under his father was unpleasant, yet the exposure he got to various people and professions allowed him to make accurate observations of them in his later writings. When push came to shove, the experience was a valuable one.

Actions:

Instruct Evaluate Own

From here, Chekhov is reminded again of his father, choosing, this time, to address the issue.

Unit Twelve: Papa, and How We Got to Moscow

Turning to the unpleasant, ambivalent memory of his father, Chekhov relates that he had respect for him, but not forgiveness for beating him. This last admission is an unintentional one, and he avoids further lingering by hastily recounting how his father's bankruptcy got them to Moscow.

Here we have the first mentioning of his siblings, each with their own particular meaning.

Staying behind for a time in Taganrog, Chekhov lived in what must have been humiliating circumstances, but his time as a tenant in his own house is viewed with anger, then practicality.

After all, it allowed him to finish school and enter university in Moscow.

Actions:

Aggravate Recover Alleviate Affirm Enthuse

The end of the Unit sees Chekhov affirming his goal of going to Moscow. The enthusiasm he feels, even at the memory, propels him into the next unit.

Unit Thirteen: Life as a Writer

The poverty Chekhov ruminates on when thinking of Taganrog disappears into excitement in his memories of Moscow. He regales his guests with his account of beginning to write as a student there. He imparts wisdom in his opinions of writing while, at the same time, he teases his guests about cutting out the beginning and end of their stories. His reference to a writer's propensity for lies is a touchstone of his own struggles with self-deception. Excitement continues when Chekhov talks of becoming the head of the household. The mention of his sister, Masha, causes him to be grateful to her, yet his guilt about her loyalty to him makes him digress and regret. He refocuses and steers back to the more pleasant subject of writing, and recalls with real pride his

winning of the Pushkin prize. He catches himself in pride and modestly explains that others were more deserving, he just had more support from friends and admirers. When he realizes that the Academy that awarded him the prize was in Petersburg, he grudgingly give them their due. Chekhov distracts himself from this by focusing on a cigar, an old guilty pleasure which his illness forbids him. He redirects his thoughts to writing, this time to the fact that he often has held his medicine in higher esteem than the writing. He confesses that sometimes he doubts his literature's staying power even now, and ascribes this feeling to "today's writers" of whom he is one.

Actions:

Transform Instruct Digress Conspire Awaken Compromise
Exhort Excuse Assert

"That's today's writers!" This assertion propels Chekhov into an explanation of the state of writing in Russia, and how it relates to him. It is a reflection of his need to define himself to the guests and, perhaps, for posterity.

Unit Fourteen: The Aesthetics of Russian Writers

He softly denigrates writers, claiming they can't distract you from a smoke. He bemoans, amusingly, that all of them are sour and dreary, and lacking an identity. His humor crosses the line into off-color with his comment about lifting the skirts of a writers muse, but he presses on to instruct his guests about realism and the addition of point of view. He faux-whines about where he falls in the scheme, then reveals his opinion. In describing himself as a man who observes and has no goal of infusing the reader with his opinion, he also reinforces for us that he

is no artist. This is because he does not possess the desires needed for art. The audience should not believe this for a moment. He proceeds to mock himself and the critic Mikhailovsky in order to illustrate his assertion that he is an impartial writer. He distracts himself for a moment with his desire- to smoke the cigar! He relents; referring to his lungs, but ultimately claims it is because Masha will be angry. This is a hint of the lies and self-deceptions about his health that he must eventually deal with.

Actions:

Instruct	Distract	Mock	Admit	Ridicule	Invoke
Declare	Lecture	Instruct	Divert	Deny	

A part of him realizes this lie about the cigar and Masha, so Chekhov hurriedly returns to a discussion about art and what it means to him. This provides the transition to Unit Fifteen.

Unit Fifteen: Philosophy of Art and of Writing

Using the operative word “anyway,” Chekhov returns to a discussion on art. An apologetic admission about his loss for words about what is artistic, he confesses to being unsure and reduces all works to “those I like and those I don’t. In a rare episode of vehemence about the responsibility of writers, he underscores his opinion that writers shouldn’t slant their works with personal opinions or try to answer their own questions. This impassioned assertion leads him to overextend physically, and he breaks down in a fit of coughing.

Actions:

Distract	Affirm	Confess	Apologize	Assert	Agitate
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The transition is based on the thoughts that occur to Chekhov as he succumbs to the coughing fit. His thoughts turn to his life and his health.

Unit Sixteen: Confronting Lies, Health and Mortality

Chekhov realizes he can no longer treat casually the seriousness of his illness. He makes a decision to reveal its seriousness to the guests. He falters in his resolve and tries for optimism, but the cough interrupts his attempts. His physical weakening strengthens his resolve to tell the truth once and for all. He shores up his resolve by telling the story about the aristocrat and his father, an illustration of the futility of lies. He rallies, acknowledging the ironies of life and death and the particular absurdity of knowing the end is near. This provokes a thought of death in his own family. He sees his father's unexpected death first, and then is reminded of the slow, senseless death of his brother Nikolai. This has a deep effect, and Chekhov tries to fight his way out of sadness by turning to thoughts of early successes in literature. He finds that this is too shallow a subject at the moment, so he relates his grief to his journey to Sakhalin soon after his brother's death. The audience senses there is a connection. This is justified by Chekhov's admission that he was perhaps running away from his grief to go to Sakhalin. With effort, Chekhov moves forward, as he always has, to tell the story.

Actions:

Confess	Admit	Obfuscate	Imbue	Vilify	Confide
Assert	Declare	Consider	Avoid	Divert	

Pushing forward, Chekhov focuses on Sakhalin to give direction to his grief and regret, and to help him return to the equilibrium of his science.

Unit Seventeen: Sakhalin

Chekhov connects his sorrow to a sorrowful place: The island penal colony of Sakhalin, where he conducted a census in 1890. He considers the suffering, reliving his own and that of the people he witnessed there. He denies his own emotional vulnerability when he refutes any sentimentality on his part. He swiftly asserts that pilgrimages might be made there, and then begins a description of the long journey. Chekhov finds refuge in humor, joking about the painful effect of overland travel on his hemorrhoids. He gradually turns from instructing his guests about the particulars of census-taking to talk of the horrible conditions faced by the children of the colony. These horrors gradually affect his composure, until he is forced to turn to philosophy to seek emotional equilibrium. He decides to link the unsolvable questions of Sakhalin to whether or not writers need to answer them. A definitive no is the answer, perhaps to qualify the fact that he was helpless to do anything about the children of Sakhalin. He gains some energy, and is even willing to admit his trip to the island has had an effect on his work. He admits that difficult questions have a place in art – and is careful to separate himself from artists. However, he reiterates his earlier point about artists not being responsible for answering such questions. He illustrates this point with a story about a writer who writes purely from inspiration, without having any intentions. He would call them a madman.

Actions:

Avoid	Declare	Transform	Reconcile	Confide	Instruct	Indict
Wonder	Refute	Declare	Assess	Amuse		

The literary mind of Chekhov resorts to a literary device to express his sudden occurrence that he might be called a madman too, if his theatrical career were scrutinized. He uses restatement of an idea, applied somewhat differently.

Unit Eighteen: The Theatre

Chekhov links his change of subject with the admission that he could be judged mad based on some of the failures in his career as a playwright. He excuses these difficulties by revealing that the process of writing in this discipline he has always felt uncomfortable. He reconnects with his general opinion of actors by saying that, during the 1896 production of *The Seagull*, the actors were all unreliable and unable to take suggestions. This builds into frustration as he describes the aftermath of the production, in which the critics and audience lambasted the play. He feels the embarrassment and anger even years later. Chekhov understands the irony of good reviews that the play received later, when he was not present. He concludes the unit by admitting that the whole process adversely affected his psyche and his physical health.

Actions:

Admit Bargain Judge Defend Relieve Denounce

Exhaust

Transition occurs with the admission that Chekhov had been affected physically by the stress of the Petersburg failure. He moves on to explain.

Unit Nineteen: The Price of Petersburg

Chekhov explains that the stress caused a “fit of bloody coughing,” an ominous foreshadowing of future health issues. He recounts the hemorrhage of 1897 and subsequent exile from his beloved Melikhovo. He realizes that his mood is becoming darker, so he acknowledges his audience and moves on.

Actions:

Consider Appraise Blame Reassure

The transition here is entirely in the subtext. It is led by a regard and recognition that his guests are present and deserve better, but the decision is made inwardly to return to the subject of the theatre.

Unit Twenty: The Moscow Art Theatre

He confides in his audience that he didn't want to deal with producing *The Seagull* anymore. There is the success of *Uncle Vanya* to bring Chekhov back to optimism, but the irony of Danchenko's request to produce *The Seagull* resurrects exasperation. He implores the audience to understand, and illustrates with the disasters of his earlier plays, where drunkenness and disinterested actors haunted him. In spite of this, Chekhov surprises his guests by admitting he accepted the offer of the Moscow Art Theatre to do *The Seagull*! He explains that the company seemed more in tune with his plays. The curmudgeon in Chekhov returns when he claims that Stanislavsky's detailed stage effects upset him to the point of decrying them with Stanislavsky within earshot. The playful side of the good doctor emerges, and the actor in him enjoys reliving this needling of Stanislavsky. Here, he complains with a sense of enjoyment. He needles

Stanislavsky some more, but admits that as much as he was irritated, that he was probably irritating, too. Chekhov continues to clear his slate for the end of his life.

Actions:

Confide	Attract	Admit	Implore	Surrender	Inform
Deride	Delight	Charm	Declare	Explain	Dismiss
Reiterate	Confess				

This transition is of a sudden occurrence in Chekhov's mind. All the talk of the Art Theatre reminds him of other dealings there.

Unit Twenty-One: Actors!

Chekhov recalls an incident in which his future wife, Olga Knipper, was afraid that *Uncle Vanya* wouldn't be the instant success that *The Seagull* was in Moscow. He playfully recounts how he mock-derided her and, in spite of this, she still married him!

Actions:

Confide	Elaborate	Delight	Mock	Amaze
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This section transitions smoothly into conversation about Olga and marriage.

Unit Twenty-Two: Olga and Marriage

Chekhov dramatically implores the heavens to let him know where Olga is. This is a device to grab the guest's attention for further talk about his wife. He explains that she is in Moscow, as usual, acting. A hint of sentimentalism comes through; giving lie to his earlier claim that he is not sentimental. Here, he makes no excuses for it. After recounting their marriage, Chekhov

recalls a correspondence he had with Suvorin about marriage, before he knew Olga. He recalls, with some amusement, that his take on wedded bliss then has gotten him into a long distance marriage now. He then recounts all the “practical” reasons he has given in the past for his late marriage. He concludes, emotionally, that the truth is he loves and misses her. He realizes that the long distance arrangement is strange to people, but he instructs his guests as to the veracity of his commitment to Olga.

Actions:

Implore	Attract	Delight	Explain	Confuse	Admit
Confide	Declare	Pontificate	Dramatize	Beautify	Discount
Obfuscate	Proclaim				

The depth of his revelation is a bit uncomfortable, even before this house of friends. Chekhov quickly diverts his feelings into an occurrence about Maxim Gorky’s humorous reaction to rumors of his marriage, and the transition is complete.

Unit Twenty-Three: Gorky and Tolstoy

The story of Gorky’s response to Chekhov’s impending marriage is lighthearted, and Chekhov resorts to gently mocking his friend through mimicry. He allows that Gorky is probably in love with him, then clarifies earnestly that he means as a writer. He explains Gorky’s predilection for getting into trouble with the authorities, then goes on to say that this is Gorky’s importance as a writer. Gorky’s muckraking and exposing of philistinism in society is what will make him eternal, even if his writing is forgotten. This seems more important to Chekhov than simple literary recognition, a window into the doctor’s thinking on social responsibility. He expresses

delight at Gorky's ability to cause the government discomfort, and remembers his friend Tolstoy, who does the same. In spite of some disagreement in writing styles, Chekhov is more reverent and respectful of Tolstoy, who was an early inspiration. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* was Chekhov's inspiration for *A Dreary Story*, and the fact that both stories involve a man who knows he is dying is not lost on him. Chekhov reveals that he is, apart from being an observer, a passionate proponent of justice and equality in society. When he recounts Tolstoy's efforts in this sphere, he becomes agitated enough to recognize his resemblance to a revolutionary. This causes him humorous pause. He sums Tolstoy up as a person he is glad to know, and there is depth of respect and feeling here.

Actions:

Inform	Mock	Lecture	Instruct	Scold	Respect
Delight	Reflect	Support	Undermine	Consider	Assess
Attract	Confide	Confess	Cherish		

The depth of Chekhov's gratitude in knowing Tolstoy spills over into an assessment of his life. There are others he shares his gratitude with.

Unit Twenty-Four: A Summing Up

Chekhov is led to recalling everyone who has played a major role in his life and successes. Tolstoy, Suvorin, Olga and his family play the major roles, and he treats them all with unique regard. This summing of the past coincides with Chekhov's realization that his energies are ebbing. Still, he is driven to think of returning to Moscow, and what the future will bring. There is optimism, in spite of his declining health.

Actions:

Envision Conjure Instruct Acknowledge Yearn Project

In his wondering about the future, Chekhov decides to further elaborate.

Unit Twenty-Five: Closing Thoughts

Chekhov uses a quote from Vershinin in *The Three Sisters* to sum up his thoughts on our relationship to the future and the past. He concludes this reverie with a line all-too-familiar to him, “Oh, if only we knew.” Repeating the line, he admits to the irony of it being from one of his plays. The next thought he has is to reconnect with his guests one last time- a kiss before dying, if you will. Chekhov’s mortality and physical exhaustion weighs heavily now, so he must distill what he wants to say to conserve energy. He asks that we all take care of each other and be just. This is a simple suggestion, but a tall order. He excuses himself, and the play ends.

Actions:

Wonder Inquire Inform Deprecate Share Expose
Embrace Release

The entire unit is a transition through to the end of the play. The mood is philosophical and somewhat introspective, until the very end. Here Chekhov addresses the guests directly and challenges them to think and act as human beings. It is a summation of his existence, what he wants to be remembered for.

Dramatic Structure

Point of Attack: Since the conceit of the show is an audience with Anton Chekhov, and that the audience members are guests in the house, the initial point of attack is Chekhov's entrance into his room. The audience is immediately introduced to the complications in Chekhov's life: his exile to Yalta, his loneliness and yearning for his wife, his inability to write and the limitations imposed by his health. These points reintroduce themselves through various points in the play, inducing an ebb-and-flow effect in the rhythms of the play.

Exposition: The play is expository in nature, but within the stories and anecdotes there are key bits of information that inform the audience of Chekhov's current state of mind and the conflicts he faces through his past experiences. These include any and all text excerpts and subtext that infers Chekhov's struggle with conquering his self-deception about his health, his struggles with writing, his relationship to his friends and family, his views on his wife and marriage, his views on writing and medicine and his social views. These are all about Chekhov's drive to define himself before it's too late. His drive includes the desire to make us understand, to get this work done while there's still time. The audience cannot fully discern what is going on with Chekhov in the moment until they know more about his development or, at least, they see his inner reactions to what is being discussed. In an expository play like this one, this is an ongoing process, repeated and reinforced throughout the play.

Rising Action: Let us assume that the major dramatic question asked in the play is "Who is Anton Chekhov, really?" Relate this both to himself and the audience. We can see the action

gradually and generally rise throughout all of his revelations about himself, concluding with his feeling about those who have been important in his life. However, within the overall arc of this rising action, there are rhythms, rising and falling through the play. An example of this is the energetic rise to Chekhov's coughing attack, followed by a trough of energy, gathering again through the descriptions of theatrical life. These arcs have a sense of diminishing return after the attack, though; Chekhov's physical energies are lessened with each energy crest. In short, the rising action continues throughout the majority of the play.

Climax: When Chekhov turns from being a raconteur to philosophizing, we are at the climax, which is, in this play, a summing up of everything that has been revealed to us through a lens of philosophy. Here, the rhythm and pace of the show changes. Combined with a tiring of the character and a more thoughtful feeling, the pace slows during Chekhov's musings on the future, and the sense is more of distilling all the stories into a brief, simple view of life.

Resolution: At the end of the play, Chekhov is revealed in a simple straightforward manner. Who he is and what is ultimately important to him has to do with the love of people, a love of justice. These things ultimately supersede the trappings of a long distinguished career and complex emotional life. This concern for people is the essence of who he is as a doctor, writer and man. Chekhov answers our question, which is his question to himself –who is Anton Chekhov, really?

Character Analysis

In her book *Stella Adler on Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov*, Ms. Adler states that “Chekhov understands that every man needs to know why he is living (187).” The play *An Evening with Anton Chekhov* has this need as part of its thrust. The character of Chekhov certainly wishes to know about him in ways that the facts and anecdotes which he divulges to his guests cannot tell. It is part of what drives him to assess his life as he reveals it. When he finally suggests his guests take care of each other and live justly and in peace, he knows and reveals himself to us at the same time. As the actor who plays this complicated man in his journey to such a simple conclusion, my need to know had to start with Chekhov in his time and experiences.

When I began this particular part of the journey, I had all the bald facts and figures that one could possibly need without having known or lived with the man myself. What I did not have was the synthesis of his experience with that of my own. The feelings and sensations that I would have to call upon to make the character of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov live and breathe would have to begin with my own experience and come from the visceral guts of the common emotion. Take then, for example, the feeling of loss that we all feel when a loved one has died. The list goes something like this: shock, denial, anger, grief, acceptance and a bittersweet goodbye. These feelings do not have that same intensity at the same time for everyone, however. What does each person’s culture say about what is appropriate in dealing with a loss? Are we to be stoic or hysterical? So, as I put on the doctor’s shoes and pince-nez and walked more than a few miles in them, I began to feel my way through what I might do or say in his circumstances.

The magic “as if” of Stanislavsky’s acting approach began to emerge, and my feelings began to merge with those of a man of Chekhov’s time, place and happenstance.

Nothing in this process is possible without the need to know. Transferring my feelings and sensations over to a man who died over one hundred years ago would have impossible unless I had done the homework of who he was and how he was affected by his given circumstances. The work begins and ends with the need to know. The beginning consists of the facts of preliminary character analysis.

Early Life:

Chekhov was born in a small port town, Taganrog, in 1860. Taganrog was “typical” for a small town of its day, with various shops lining its muddy, unkempt streets (Chudakov. Cambridge 3). Across Russia this period was at the cusp of major social and political changes; the Crimean War had been lost, there was a major economic and social reassessment, and the emergence of public opinion as a political tool had begun. The weakening of the Tsarist regime had been initiated with reforms including the abolition of serfdom and the allowing of local governments to be formed.

Chekhov’s ancestry had been centered on serfs and peasants, and his development was not far removed from the highly stratified caste systems of old Russia. His grandfather was Yegor Mikhailovich Chekh, a serf who bought his freedom from Count Chertkov, his owner and Tolstoy’s grandfather. He then took the name of Chekhov (Troyat 7-8). His father Pavel was a

religious zealot who believed in corporal punishment, but did not mete it out with prejudice. His mother Evgenia was a gentle soul who was attracted by the arts. As a small child, Anton had two older brothers, Alexander and Nikolai. Soon, three more siblings were added to the Chekhov clan: Ivan, Maria, and Mikhail. Anton Chekhov worked long hours in his father's dingy grocery, which, due to Pavel's poor business practices and lack of decent goods, eventually failed. In part because of his status as a merchant, Pavel sent his son to the best schools in Taganrog, where he was exposed to languages and the classics. Chekhov learned much of the variety of life, however, through the people that passed through the door of the grocery.

Chekhov was forced to repeat his third and fifth years at the Taganrog Gymnasium, due to the hours he kept in the shop. Chekhov had a special affinity for his father's brother, Mitrofan who, like his brother was shopkeeper and devout Christian, but who decried corporal punishment and was a success at business (Troyat 18). Chekhov also discovered theatre as a lad, attending plays and performing in them on occasion. He even wrote a few theatrical vignettes which he and friends performed in. Chekhov's older brother Alexander left home around 1874, preferring to avoid his father's lash and religious harangues. When Alexander left for the University of Moscow in 1875, Nikolai joined him (Troyat 23). In 1876 Pavel's business reverses threatened to send him to prison, and he and the rest of the family, save Anton, moved to Moscow. Anton remained in the family home as a tenant, paying his rent by tutoring and taking odd jobs. He looked to complete his studies at Taganrog Gymnasium, which he did in 1879. Necessity had focused Anton, and he improved dramatically as a student, already aspiring to become a doctor (Troyat 28). After a visit to Moscow, Chekhov never saw his home town in the same light. It

was still his birthplace and scene of his development, but Moscow's cosmopolitan aura had captured him. The cultured intellectual in Chekhov was being awakened.

Medical School and the Beginnings of a Writing Career:

Chekhov joined his family in Moscow to begin medical studies at the University of Moscow in 1879. In his years of study there, he began to develop a writing career which contributed significantly to the Chekhov household. His successes began with a few sketches sold to humor magazines like the *Dragonfly*. Pavel Chekhov continued to hold sway over the younger sons Mikhail and Ivan, beating them regularly. Chekhov, for his part, began to take over the social and financial affairs of the family, beginning by overseeing expenses and forbidding corporal punishment (Troyat 40). He soon filled the vacuum left by his unemployed father. The family lived with several boarders in a ramshackle apartment, in a poor neighborhood in Moscow.

Aside from the scholarship money and rent from boarders who lived with the family, Anton began getting more money from sketches accepted by *Dragonfly*, and with this, his position as head of the household solidified. Chekhov would see to his family's security for the rest of his life. Chekhov's serious consideration remained with his ambition to be a doctor, however, and he thought so little of his work that he didn't even sign his own name to it. In 1880, he wrote an epic play, *Platonov*, had it rejected, and promptly burned all of it but some outline sketches. Chekhov began submitting criticisms and reviews of plays and books, as well. After a time, Chekhov began writing for other papers and journals in Moscow, including *The Spectator* and

Alarm Clock. His brothers Alexander and Nikolai also submitted successfully to Moscow publications.

Chekhov's desire to keep his family supported drove him to continue his writings throughout his University career, and support came from editors in Petersburg, as well. Nikolai Leikin of *Fragments* magazine encouraged him to be prolific in his writing of humorous stories and paid him by the line. He also became a columnist, which got him more money. Eventually, he felt the strain of constantly writing humor, and began his foray into more serious stories. Through it all, he would recharge himself by taking brief trips to Voskresensk, a village outside of Moscow where his brother Ivan taught school. In June of 1884, he graduated with a degree in medicine.

Medicine, Health and Recognition:

Soon afterward, Chekhov experienced the first symptoms of tuberculosis, but continued a habit of denying that he had it for more than a decade. With his medical practice established, Chekhov's income improved. So, too, his approach to writing improved. He began formulating his observational, realistic style of writing, and reworked stories, instead of just churning them out. The Chekhovian "detachment" and objectivity appears (Jackson 1). In 1886, he began his most important personal and professional relationship with Alexei Suvorin, editor and publishing giant of Petersburg. Suvorin immediately began publishing Chekhov's stories in his *New Times*. Soon, the critics began to take note of his work, and many times they were given to praising it. At twenty-six years of age, he had garnered praise from some of the important literary people of Russia, but he was also vulnerable to criticism, now that he had approval. He had developed

sensitivity to having his work scrutinized in a negative way. He had also developed ongoing hemorrhoids, beginning with a case of peritonitis at age fifteen (Troyat 22). At this time, Chekhov rented out an entire house in Moscow, and lived in a very upscale neighborhood for the first time.

This is the point in Chekhov's life when he is disposed to entertain and have guests, but before his real fame, which came with the awarding of the Pushkin Prize in 1888 (Danchenko. Anton Chekhov and His Times 59).

Failures, Success:

Before his triumph in 1888, Chekhov endured another theatrical failure in 1887 – *Ivanov*.

Although the play bore the realistic traits of his later plays, it was in no way as subtle as they would be (Troyat 84). The Moscow critics lambasted it, the actors were ill-prepared, and Chekhov felt the sting of having his real name associated with it. He immediately went back to work, producing one of the hallmark stories of his early career, *The Steppe*. He visited Alexei Suvorin in Petersburg, and in May of 1888, retired to the country, this time to Luka, in the Ukraine. It was here that he first thought seriously of owning his own country estate. In the fall, he was faced with various family problems which kept his writing on hold, foremost among them being his brother Nikolai's advancing alcoholism. During this time, Chekhov received word that he had won the Pushkin prize for his collection, *At Twilight*. In spite of his new fame and kudos from friends and family, he resolved to live as simply as he had been, with nothing to inflate his ego or wear him thin.

Ivanov was produced, this time in Petersburg, with entirely different results. Although there were problems with the actors, the play was well received. This success would galvanize Chekhov into further writing for the stage, but did nothing to assuage his suspicion of the culture of theatre types. He had an uneasy coexistence with the theatre for the remainder of his life.

Sorrow and Sakhalin:

In the spring of 1889, Nikolai Chekhov's years of drinking, coupled with a case of tuberculosis, reduced him to being bedridden. Anton cared for his brother and pitied him, but he also felt trapped by his family obligations and wanted a change of scene. When Nikolai died in June, it was the first death in the immediate family. The family grieved, but Anton himself did not cry (Troyat 108). He busied himself with seeing to the arrangements for the funeral. To get away from it all, Chekhov eventually traveled to Odessa, then to Yalta. While there, he wrote the bulk of *A Dreary Story*, his homage to Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilyich*. This story was too bleak for the critics. To make matters worse, his play, *The Wood Demon*, failed miserably, first by rejection in Petersburg, then by production in Moscow. Chekhov's mood became darker, and he turned away from literature and the theatre to travel across the country to the penal colony at Sakhalin.

In Sakhalin, Chekhov saw two opportunities. First, he could return to the discipline of science and conduct an exhaustive census of the population there. Second, his growing sense of social responsibility would be fed. The conditions on the island were terrible, and Chekhov could record that fact, as well. His friends and family advised strongly against such a long trip for

health reasons, but Chekhov would not relent. He spent months, with the help of his sister and general assistant Masha, preparing for the trip, which took place in the spring of 1890. It was a trip of thousands of miles, to the eastern edge of Russia, which was accomplished by coach, cart and boat. He arrived at Sakhalin in July and almost immediately went to work. Aside from compiling census records, Chekhov witnessed the brutality of the penal colony firsthand. Apart from constant whippings and abuse of corporal punishments, there were the ongoing problems of bad conditions, ignorance, prostitution and bad health. Suffering was the order of the day, and witnessing it on such an unbelievable scale would affect Chekhov for the rest of his life. He left the island in October, having spent slightly more than six months in the census effort.

Deciding to avoid the Siberian landscape on the return journey, he took a two month tour of the Orient, including stops in Hong Kong and Ceylon. He bought three mongooses, hoping to have them as pets. When he returned to Russia, his impressions of his experience caused him to be less than objective: “God’s world is good. Only one thing is bad: we ourselves (Troyat 132).” Ironically, his health was good on the trip, but began slipping as soon as he had returned to Moscow. Chekhov became irritable and upset at the many visitors who interrupted his work. His solution was to take a grand tour of Europe with his friend Suvorin, gambling at the roulette wheels and enjoying the sights. When he returned, he spent a good deal of time in the country, this time at Bogimovo, near Moscow. While there, he worked on his book on Sakhalin and treated the locals as a doctor. By this time, women had been taking note of Chekhov, but his point of view was that of a confirmed bachelor.

Through all of this, Chekhov's developed sense of social responsibility led him to help with a famine rescue effort. He was inspired by Tolstoy's personal efforts in raising funds for this cause. His health forced him to go back and forth to Moscow for treatment of lung and back ailments, but he continued the effort. By the spring of 1892, Chekhov realized that, for reasons of health and piece of mind, a home in the country (but near to Moscow, his inspiration) would be necessary. A working estate in Melikhovo fit the bill. Alexei Suvorin offered to help get the mortgage signed, and Doctor Chekhov and family were suddenly gentrified!

Gentrification and the Theatre:

For the next seven years, Chekhov split much of his time between Melikhovo and Moscow. He opened a medical clinic on the estate in 1892, in response to a cholera outbreak. He wrote "Sakhalinized" stories such as *The Duel* and *Ward No. 6*, which had a darker tone to them and laid out questions of life in Russian society. In particular, *Ward No. 6* asks the question, "What difference does it make (Troyat 166)?" This emerging theme would be seen in later plays such as *The Three Sisters*. His sister Maria's role as an invaluable assistant was solidifying, both in running the estate and helping with his writing career. He expressed relief, privately, when she would rebuff suitors and not marry. Her loyalty and protection would extend for over fifty years after his death. Due to a reinforced sense of objective storytelling, with no personal views involved, Chekhov moved away from worshipping Tolstoy, but still respected him immensely. His parents and sister lived with him full time, and the remaining siblings summered with him. From 1892 through 1897 would be the busiest, most productive time of Chekhov's life, both in

medicine and literature. By early 1893, Chekhov left Suvorin's *New Times* to write for other periodicals, but the friendship endured.

Chekhov's stories were now establishing him as one of Russia's literary lions. Still, he modestly demurred when asked about his status as an artist. He preferred to think of himself as a scientist. After a trip to see to his dying uncle Mitrofan in Taganrog, Chekhov realized he had little connection with his past and the branch of the family he had left behind. He returned to Moscow and Melikhovo and stories poured out of him. In spite of referring to himself as a "mediocre playwright (Troyat 188)," Chekhov had finished *The Seagull* in the late fall of 1895. Friends couldn't figure out how a play with no plot advancing action could succeed. Chekhov's disappointment did not prevent him from entirely rewriting the play, however. His drive to create seemed to supersede any sensitivity to criticism that he most certainly felt.

During this period, in 1896, Chekhov's civic activities picked up, and he assisted in the building of schools and libraries. All the while he maintained his medical practice. In October, *The Seagull*, which had been accepted at the Imperial Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg, went into production. Chekhov was as frustrated with the rehearsal process as he had been with his plays years before. Still, he seemed to hope against hope for approval, and he stayed on for the opening. The play received scathing reviews, and Chekhov retreated in embarrassment. In spite of improved reviews later, he was stressed to the point of illness. Still, he did not swear off writing plays for long. His health, however, would cause a serious curtailment in activities.

Tuberculosis, Creativity and the Moscow Art Theatre:

In March of 1897, Chekhov experienced a severe hemorrhage of the lungs. This occurred at a dinner with Suvorin and others present. Amazingly, Chekhov joked his way through dinner. He was more embarrassed than concerned for his health (Troyat 197). Within days, all of Moscow knew and visitors poured in. In three weeks, he was released from medical care. Chekhov's life as a sometime invalid had begun. On the advice of his doctors and friends, he grudgingly began thinking of curtailing his activities. Never again would he travel with the frequency he was used to, though his weakness couldn't stop him from traveling altogether. In spite of warnings that his life could be shortened further by stress and travel, and in spite of his frequent references to his own personal laziness, Chekhov went back to work. His story *The Peasants* caused uproar, shattering the typical Romantic notion of bucolic life in the Russian countryside. In spite of this, the critics supported the work, in no large part because Chekhov's style of unflinching realistic observation had reached the zenith of its power to move people. Once again, the country doctor had risen from the ashes of critical failure to triumph beyond all expectations.

Chekhov traveled to Nice, which helped his lungs and exposed him to the case of Alfred Dreyfus. The notorious case would raise his ire and stimulate his sharpened sense of justice. In spite of his dispassionate, scientific writing style, Chekhov's personal opinions became more political and oriented toward social justice. He had a passion for arguing the injustice of Dreyfus' situation to anyone who would listen, and seemed to have a stake in convincing people of his point of view. He identified with Zola's vigorous campaign to exonerate Dreyfus. Meanwhile, he began long distance work to build and supply schools and libraries in his home

town of Taganrog. In May of 1898, Chekhov returned to Melikhovo, soon to be petitioned by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko of the Moscow Art Theatre. Chekhov refused to give him *The Seagull* to produce, wrote stories for awhile, then he relented. While Danchenko and his actors, along with Stanislavsky, wrestled with Chekhov's play in Moscow, Chekhov embarked on another period of creative output, and it was for the last time that he would write stories with swiftness and efficiency.

In the fall of 1898, Chekhov attended rehearsals for *The Seagull*. His reputation as a writer was secure, yet he was insecure about another dramatic production. The actors, for their part, were nervous at the prospect of mounting a great author's extremely difficult play. The play called for a "realistic" and natural style of acting which had never before been successfully carried off. Chekhov disliked Stanislavsky's fussiness in assigning endless detail to the play, but had to leave for warmer weather before the opening. He had, however, taken note of the young actress playing Irena, Olga Knipper.

The Exile Begins:

Chekhov fled to Yalta as soon as his lungs were no longer able to stand the chill of Moscow. Soon after arriving, he had news of his father's death. This was an odd situation, having decried his father's stern example, yet acknowledging the value of his childhood in the development of his twin careers. He had always looked for the best in the individual, and he could do no different with his own father. The death sealed the deal of leaving Melikhovo, and Chekhov moved to sell the estate. He began looking for properties in and around Yalta, first buying a

parcel of land in Autka, then settling on an estate in Kuchukoy. In December, *The Seagull* opened to rave reviews. During this time, Chekhov lived through the correspondences he received from friends in Moscow and elsewhere. He did not relish being isolated from the capital city.

Visitors began to come with more and more frequency as Chekhov's fame grew. Chekhov also had visits from Tolstoy and Gorky, and corresponded with Suvorin on the student riots that were becoming more common. Chekhov, detesting violence and revolutionary acts, nonetheless found much fault with the autocracy. In the spring of 1899, he ignored his doctors and headed for Moscow. The visitors he began to receive in Yalta were legion in Moscow, and the process of entertaining exhausted him. Still, he got to see a performance of *The Seagull*, in which he found praise for the actors and some criticism of the director. He also got a chance to see Olga Knipper again.

In the meantime, during 1898 – 99, Chekhov had experienced the closest thing to an unqualified success for one of his plays. *Uncle Vanya*, which many people believe was a rewrite of *The Wood Demon* (there are a number of similarities), was a well received in provincial theatres throughout the country. Originally scheduled for its Moscow debut at the Maly theatre, concerns about overt criticism of the intelligentsia in the play caused the Maly to suggest changes in the script. This was due to the depiction of the character Serebryokov, an old professor who is not shown in a positive light. To his credit, Chekhov refused and the play was reassigned to the Art Theatre, where it opened in the late fall of 1899. The success of the play continued, in spite of early critical reservations. The strength of Chekhov's friendship with Tolstoy is revealed in

Chekhov's amused reaction to the old master's criticism of the play. When Tolstoy derided the play for having no drama and no morality, Chekhov replied that "Tolstoy once told me, 'as you know, I detest Shakespeare. Well, your plays are worse than his (Troyat 244).'"

Olga and the Last Plays:

By this time, Olga Knipper was becoming a larger part of Chekhov's life. She had had leading roles in the first two of his plays at the Art Theatre, and they began a low-key courtship. Chekhov invited her for trips to the country, which she accepted when her schedule permitted. Rumors began to fly about their liaison and possible marriage, but such rumors had followed Chekhov for years, and he had never married. This was different. Chekhov's fame was peaking, and the boredom and isolation of Yalta made him rethink his semi-solitary life. His sister Maria got along well with Olga and it was to Maria that he made reassurances that, if marriage came, life would not be different for any of them. It was true, Chekhov had been a bachelor his whole life, and was set in his ways, but Olga's acting fit well into this equation. She, too, would maintain her independence. This was no mere arrangement, however.

The letters they exchanged during this time reveal a real affection and growing love between them. Anton's passions go from calling her "My Dear Actress (Chekhov and Karlinsky. Life and Thought 355)" in 1899 to declaring, "I am yours! Take me and devour me . . . (Pitcher 82)." He confided his writing plans to her and freely expressed his esteem for her. In late 1900, he told her he was writing yet another role for her, Masha in *The Three Sisters* (Troyat 253). Chekhov struggled with the play, having witnessed a reading of it at the Moscow Art Theatre in

which the actors seemed to fail to grasp the point. He fled to Nice where he revised the third and fourth acts. During this time, Chekhov developed a habit of resisting Olga's suggestion of marriage in her letters. Chekhov tended to tease Olga about his worthiness as a husband. While he was away, *The Three Sisters* opened to mixed reviews. Chekhov had been ready for the critic's inability to understand the play fully, however, and hoped for a future reassessment. He returned to Yalta, braced for more rounds of visitors and admirers. Olga kept Chekhov informed of the growing success of *The Three Sisters*, which was a smash hit among the audiences.

Chekhov, for his part, continued to put off marriage, ignoring the issue or complaining of failing health, prompting Olga to think she loved him more than he loved her, but further entreaties culminated in Chekhov's traveling to Moscow in late May of 1901. There was a hastily arranged ceremony, due to Chekhov's concerns about publicity, and they were married on the 25th of May (Pitcher 94). Masha's feelings were hurt, but she and Olga maintained a friendship that lasted over fifty years. Chekhov's tactic with all his close friends and family was to reassure them that nothing would change.

The honeymoon culminated in a rest cure to Axyonovo, where Chekhov indulged in drinking four bottles of Koumiss every day. This helped his weight and his cough, but he couldn't stand it for more than a month (Troyat 269). So, it was back to Yalta, where Olga, as new head of the household, held a tighter reign on Chekhov's grooming and eating habits. This caused some arguments from Maria and the household staff. Chekhov's stance was to be a peacemaker, but it caused him great upset to see people fighting over him. By September of 1901, the Art Theatre was remounting *The Three Sisters*, and this time it was a critical, as well as popular success.

Chekhov's trip to Moscow for the event had been satisfying, but it had worn him out. He was forced to return to Yalta, exhausted. It was a long winter of letters between Anton and Olga. With Gorky and Tolstoy now living in the Crimea, too, Chekhov visited and had visits from the two literary brothers. They got along famously, with Gorky worshipping Chekhov and Tolstoy crudely teasing Chekhov for his modest nature (Troyat 278-79). Meanwhile, Chekhov pined more and more for his now-famous wife. In late February of 1902, they met for a second "honeymoon." The result was that Olga had become pregnant, but she miscarried a month later. Chekhov was concerned only with his wife's well being.

Once Olga was in recovery, Chekhov decided to travel during the summer. His compulsion to travel led him to Perm, in the Ural Mountain district, where he had been invited to stay at the estate of Savva Morozov, a millionaire merchant and admirer. Chekhov toured Morozov's factory and promptly convinced him to reduce work hours from twelve per day to eight or ten (Troyat 287). Chekhov's health deteriorated on this trip, and he became pale and thin. His sense of others never waned, however, as in the case of his apologies to his fellow guests when he feared an evening hemorrhage may have disturbed their sleep (Troyat 289). Late in the summer, Chekhov returned to Yalta, to find he needed to patch things up between Olga and his mother and sister once again. In the midst of this, Chekhov resigned from the academy of sciences because of their refusal to accept Gorky's entry on political grounds. This was the first significant political action taken by Chekhov.

Literary action on his new play was slow. Pressure from the Art Theatre and Olga did nothing to improve the outlook. Chekhov's health combined with constant interruptions from visitors had

reduced his output to nothing. Even when left to his own devices, the output from his pen scarcely exceeded a half of a page at a time. This effort would exhaust him for the day. In the fall of 1902, he traveled to Moscow to see the new facilities of the Art Theatre. While there, he visited with Olga and the city herself. He knew, however, that his health was not getting better anymore. After six weeks in Moscow, his lungs could take no more. He returned to Yalta for the winter. In early 1903 he began work on *The Cherry Orchard*. It would be among the hardest and best labors of his life.

Summary:

For purposes of the play, Chekhov's story ends in 1903, as he begins his struggle to write *The Cherry Orchard*. This leaves the last great period of writing ahead of him as he sums up the experiences and philosophy of his life. Chekhov does not sum up merely because he knows his death is imminent, but because he must brace himself for what is left of life. Chekhov became more cynical in later years about the existence of God and an afterlife, so it was life itself that interested him. He was not about to wait for some post mortem reward for his work. He could not wait for an otherworldly revelation of the meaning of life, either. If Chekhov (in the play) is to have that meaning, he must find it in the "here and now," for himself and his guests.

In order to do that, the character must draw primarily on his experiences and the conclusions he can make from them. The synthesis of his philosophical conclusions about life begins with the history of his life; where he has been, what he has done, who he has known and what effect this

has all had on the man. Like the play itself, it is a series of stories that, when put together create more than the sum of their parts. They fuse to create a man.

Physical Characteristics and Applications

Chekhov has been described as having a large open face, a gentle, some times shy smile and a large chest (Korovin. Chekhov and His Times 4). He was of “above average height,” had chestnut colored hair and a beard and moustache. His smile sometimes appeared and disappeared rapidly, and his eyes would often look away after talking to someone for a time. Danchenko describes the coming and going of his smile “as if it had suddenly occurred to him that it was perhaps not fitting to smile on that subject (Chekhov and His Times 62-3).”

Danchenko goes on to explain that he had an inner calmness and equilibrium. His eyes were expressive and, though often described as blue, were brown with blue flecks. Chekhov was significantly near sighted, and had difficulty seeing without his glasses. Bunin describes seeing him this way: “In Moscow I saw a man of middle age, tall, slim, light of movement . . . In Yalta I found him very changed: he had grown quite thin, his face was darker, his movements slower and his voice sounded more muted (Bunin. Chekhov and His Times 170).” Bunin notes that he was a friendly person, but sometimes reserved. Chekhov seems, according to his friend, to be thinking of other things constantly, and this gives him a quality of inwardness and mystery.

Chekhov’s voice has been described as being deep, with metallic undertones. Bunin noticed that his voice sometimes achieved a mumble or a monotone, as if he was thinking and talking to himself (Bunin. Chekhov and His Times 178). There were other times, probably due to his

tuberculosis, that his voice was thinner and dry. Bunin also describes Chekhov's laugh as "infectious," and that he enjoyed joking (Bunin. Chekhov and His Times 170). There were some who felt that the quality of his laugh was soft, almost noiseless, and feminine in character. The overall judgment of Chekhov's energy is one of some restraint, no wild gesticulating and no explosions in the voice. This restraint must have been exacerbated by ill health later in his life. In times when he was particularly ill, his appearance must have resembled that of an old man and, indeed, some of his contemporaries were shocked to see how he aged in his final years at Yalta.

Physical Approach to the Character:

In writing the play, I had chosen to show Chekhov in his later years, after the ravages of tuberculosis and other ailments had begun, but before those illnesses made it impossible for him to get around and move freely for a time. To do this, I had to first remove any unconscious physical remnants of myself and adopt the neutral stance (Dennis 42). If, after consideration, I wished to add movement particular to me later, I could do so with control and awareness. So, I began physically and mentally stripping away layers of myself, making myself as neutral and open as I could. With a more or less blank canvas, I could begin the work of getting in touch with Chekhov, the character.

Descriptions of Chekhov's large chest made me think that this area might be a good primary center for the role. Aside from being a visible characteristic of Chekhov, it was also the area in which a great deal of his energy was focused on his sickness. This meant that the chest area

could be a center in motion, a center in attraction and a center in repulsion. The stomach area was one of sensitivity for Chekhov and so, at times, the whole thoracic region could be involved. This would turn out to be particularly true during the coughing scene, when that region would experience a collapse, both energetically and physically. The antithesis of physical collapse is expansion. Chekhov was not physically healthy at the end of his life, nor was he particularly expansive anyway. In addition to his own reserve, he lived in a more reserved time, with restrictive mores, rules and even clothes! To address Chekhov's living condition of physical being, I experimented with different weights for different parts of my body. I thought of Rudolf Laban's applications of weight and effort (Newlove 64-66). What kind of weight and effort would be applicable to this character? Chekhov, I decided, was weighted more heavily in his lower body, as it was a great effort for him to move freely in his illness. I literally began rooting his energy to the floor through his feet and legs, while allowing his upper body to move more freely in his more passionate moments. I noted that, if I maintained the energetic connection between lower and upper body, the weight and grounding of the legs and feet had the effect of limiting the energy of movements in the upper extremities. To aid in the gradual development of Chekhov's tiring throughout the play, I allowed this "connection" to become more pronounced. This gave the feeling of a creeping weight, which could spread to my chest, shoulders and arms.

The key to initiating this phenomenon was breathing. The deeper and more easy I would breathe, the lighter my upper body would feel. I visualized the effects of a tiring tuberculosis patient, began breathing in a shallow, labored fashion, and invited the sensation of weight from below to creep upward and outward in my body. Over time and through further exploration in

rehearsals, I could call upon this sensation in performance. The efficiency of this depended a great deal on my focus. I found that if my focus was thrown, the organic nature of this physical development could be lost. This happened for a time in my second performance but, through reestablishing the breath pattern, I was able to reconnect with the sensation.

This process was like a sense memory exercise in reverse for me, since I thought I had no experience with tuberculosis or similar sensation. Instead, I worked to create a physical state that would then call up some parallel experience from my memory. One day, it reminded me of a low-grade panic attack I had once suffered, and the particular “wrung out” feelings of its aftermath. I was then able to reinforce the sensation I had created, and channel its emotional consequences into “familiar” feelings. At this point, I was able to deal with the physical reality of being short of breath and of having reduced and heavy energy because of it. I could now work with the physical “as if” of Chekhov, just as I had been assembling the “as if” of his thoughts and feelings from his other life experiences.

Continuing with the Laban method, I then began structuring some effort shapes for Chekhov. Specifically, I began working with sustained effort, in the manner of pressing (Newlove 78). In his weakened state, Chekhov presses to sit, to stand, to recover from a coughing spell. In walking, he can sometimes glide, but the lightness of gliding tends to be confined to his upper body, where he can also dab, slash and thrust to make a point with his fingers and arms. When his body collapses from tiring or coughing, the pressing returns or wringing of the abdomen happens. Other examples of effort shapes developed for Chekhov include the use of floating (a light, sustained energy) for becoming lost in telling his story of the boy, Yegoruska, Dabbing

(direct, sudden, strong) and thrusting (direct, sustained, strong) for use in the psychological gesture of a finger flourish on key transitional words in the script, such as “but” and “anyway,” and pressing (direct, sustained, strong) for the underlying effort against feeling weak or in pain.

This approach added another layer to my physicality, and made me think in different terms.

I was able to be cognizant of transitions in the state of Chekhov’s physicality that occurred with transitions in thought or feeling for the character. To be able to execute physically what I felt and thought as the character, I turned to Michael Chekhov’s idea of “sensitivity of the body to the psychological creative impulses (2).” This merging of the thoughts and feelings of the character with the appropriate physical impulses in reaction to them is vital to bring the performance to life. I realized that this is a gradual process, combining all elements worked on in research, writing and rehearsal with a developing awareness of how these things work on the actor emotionally. Once that awareness is established, experiments in the realm of the “as if” can commence. What is the reaction to frustration in the physical world created? How does culture and health affect the percentage of energy used in physical expression? How much becomes internalized rather than expressed. What role does thought play in Chekhov’s reactions on the physical plane? Does he forget himself and react in ways that might compromise his health? Does he become careful and calm, even when his inner world is in turmoil? These questions had to be addressed for the point of view of where Chekhov was physically and emotionally in each moment. The creation of physical response also had to be influenced by how that expression would translate to an audience. The next step would be to move in space in a way that made sense in the merging of physical discipline with the emotional and intellectual sense of the character.

Blocking:

Stephen Wangh says that the actor can take responsibility for blocking, keeping the following in mind: “1. It helps to focus the audience’s attention on the action. 2. It creates images that clarify the story. 3. It expresses the changing relationships of the characters (188).” Wangh feels that the third purpose, expressing relationships of characters, is paramount. Since my play has only one written character, the audience’s relationship to Chekhov has to be considered as if they were the character’s acting partner. This consideration brings the audience into sharp focus as part of the performance. Everything I do as an actor is in direct or indirect response to the fact that I and the character know that the audience is present. The blocking, therefore, is not merely a directorial response to sight lines and physical relationships to other actors in order to tell a visual story. Though this should never be true, it is underscored in the execution of a one-man play. The absence of a fourth wall simply transfers the relationship of characters to the audience. This, to my mind, meant that physical and emotional readiness for almost anything had to be considered. In the case of physical reactions, it meant being plastic and flexible and ready to respond to character occurrences and audience reaction in a variety of ways.

In the case of blocking, I felt that the best way to encourage immediacy and flexibility was to adopt a “scenario” attitude towards the movement of the character in relationship to each vignette or story being told. This structured improvisation would allow for a wider range of impulse response from the character and actor, as well as freedom to respond to audience reactions. The structure I set for the blocking was based on the symbolic importance of each acting area encompassed by the set. Since I was performing on the set for *Five Women Wearing*

the Same Dress, I had to account for the limitations and opportunities afforded by a set with three doors, a centrally located bed and sufficient downstage area for a desk and chairs.

The set in my rehearsal space was simply an upstage center bed, a stage left armchair, and a stage right desk and chair. It wasn't until I was able to explore the actual space, two days before opening, that I was able to explore some of the upstage space more specifically. Therefore, my rehearsal world focused on the symbolic centers of Chekhov's writing and medical career, his health, and his family, friends and married life. For writing, the choice of the stage right desk was obvious. This area would be a source of attraction and repulsion, depending if an anecdote was about success, philosophy or failure in this sphere. The stage left armchair was a center of health concerns and the area of the coughing fit. Here, a table with medications and remedies for tuberculosis was present. The downstage apron and center areas were options for relating directly to the audience, as well as being a forum for Chekhov's autobiography speech and rants on philosophy and writing. I found that Chekhov's energy tended to erupt more in this downstage area during rehearsals.

This, then, was a place of gathering energies for important feelings and ideas on the high energy scale. Low energy tended to find Chekhov retreating to the chairs, either sitting or supporting himself on them. Once I got onstage at the Black Box theatre, suggestions about using the upstage areas began to take root. There were book cases upstage on either side of the stage, so I placed books and family photographs there to refer to or even travel to during stories reflecting those things. My philosophy of semi-improvisational blocking based on area significance allowed me to experiment with the blocking up until three hours before opening. Allowing

myself to occasionally break the area convention gave me more of a sense of freedom and immediacy, as well. This loose structure was highly important in dealing with the uncertainty of an audience, and allowed me to move freely, yet still hit the emotional and physical points necessary to dramatically tell the story.

Aside from this self-generated work, I can never thank enough the people who lent their eyes and assistance to the rehearsal process, giving me the benchmarks and reminders that I needed to move towards actual performance level. My committee chair, Dr. Seay, was an invaluable advisor who gave me the sense of timing in moments, reinforced the practical considerations of the performance and helped to strengthen my relationship to the audience in innumerable ways. David Knoell and committee member Mark Brotherton also provided valuable advice on everything from focusing breath in key moments to encouraging me to use as much of the playing area as was logically possible. I continued to find new moments up through the performances, in part, because of their suggestions.

Vocal Approach:

Descriptions of the character's voice from anecdotal sources include a deep, metallic voice from times of better health to a reedier voice in times when Chekhov's health was more affected by the tuberculosis he suffered from. Since I was dealing with the Chekhov who was suffering more from his illnesses, my own tenor voice seemed suitable, with occasional forays into a deeper tone during periods when he feels strongest in the play. Basically, the character voice starts out with more strength, as evidenced by more baritone or low tenor tones in the voice. As

the play progresses, this steady tone dries up, literally and figuratively. A slight nasality to the voice, born of his normal metallic undertones, comes to the fore a bit more with the “thinning” of the tone (achieved by giving over slightly to the nasality) as Chekhov tires. This graduation in quality had to be approached in much the same way as his breath and physicality, since they had a direct effect on one another. The rhythm of this change had to be invested viscerally, in the body, over a period of experimentation and rehearsal. Caution was needed in the application of this change, and the change had to be more subtle in execution, so as not to compromise vocal energy to the point of losing the connection of tone and pitch to the emotional quality of the words.

I began the sensual vocal process by humming out in different ranges and in different placements in the vocal and resonant instrument (Skinner 4). Simply, I hummed and did vowel work in the lower chest voice, then, opening the voice, moved this into the forward resonators and, finally, into the nasal cavity. I then needed to find a subtlety in the nasality which I could learn to control and use as a constant throughout the vocal performance. It would be up to my vocal range placement to provide the contrast between strength and fatigue in the physical state of the character voice. To this end, I selected text from the script to try both high and lower ranges, getting the feel of how the vibrations fit each text instance.

For example, I found an open, slightly deeper sound worked best with instances where Chekhov was instructing as an authority, and where it was possible for him to breathe freely as the character. Where his breath was shallow, the nasal quality could become more prominent, even if the resonance was still somewhat chest-involved. This was coupled with a higher, dryer tone,

accomplished in part by the remnants of the constriction caused by the desire or impulse to cough. This was not a constriction of the instrument, which would be detrimental physically, but more of a constricting of the support behind the vocal apparatus. The intercostals and abdominals contained more tension (without a closing off), the breath was shortened and the momentum of the ribs-diaphragm-abdomen dynamic of breath and energy support was restricted subtly. In order to prevent the vocal/verbal delivery from being weakened theatrically, I chose to speak in shorter phrases of text, which added to the sensation and appearance of shortness of breath and physical struggle. The important aspect of this exploration was to find a way to keep the instrument as open and free as possible. It is, I found, possible to work within a restriction such as shallow breath. An adjustment to rhythm in the speaking of the text will allow for (shorter) intervals of supported vocalization.

Special attention to consonant sound was called for. Since there was a variance in the tone and energy of the voice, along with the employment of a Russian dialect, the framework of the consonant sounds was critical. Leading up to the performance I struggled with finding the balance of vocal energy that would allow me to be understood and heard. I found that consonance was the key to the former, while establishing a fairly high vocal energy in the beginning of the performance helped maintain a minimum standard in the quieter portions of the show. I experimented with rhythmic changes and slower pace in some of the intimate sections of the play, to get my mindset away from softening the voice too much. This seemed to help.

Acuity of vowel sounds was also critical, in order to fill the words with imagery and feeling for myself and the audience, an extreme example being the drawing out of the word

“autobiographobia,” which was done for comic effect, as well as to lay out an unfamiliar word, of which there were many in this play. Vowel sounds played an important part in the dialect, as well. In order to give unfamiliar names and places the import they deserve, I had to not only pronounce them consistently, but also fill the sound of the names with meaning. “Petersburg,” for example, was spit out on the plosive “p” sound, but the rest of the word could not be thrown away in favor of the mock-disgust that was behind the delivery. The unusual words were a particular challenge to create feeling, and accept feeling from.

Dialect:

Anecdotal information on Chekhov’s dialect describes it as “genuinely Russian (Danchenko. Anton Chekhov and His Times 62).” Knowing he was originally from the Ukraine, I took this to mean that his time in Moscow and at university had eliminated any provincial dialect he may have had as a youngster.

In the approach of Russian dialect, I used the Lessac concept to voice and the structural relationship to tone and consonance (Kur 1-30). In this concept, the neutral diphthong N2n (found in the word “peer”) is the leading action and tongue position (front of the tongue first arched to the palate, then pulled down) dominant in the execution of vowel sounds in Russian. This tongue position produces a “y” sound at the onset of the second stage of the diphthong (Kur 70). This sound is sometimes referred to as “palatalization (Blumenfeld, 203).” In practice, I found the sound “eeyuh” was helpful in getting this tongue action into my body. In application, the word “little,” for example, becomes “leeyuhtle.” In practice, the second half of the

diphthong, after the “y” sound, can often be softened so as not to give an artificial, over-emphasized feel to its use.

I found this diphthong produces, in my instrument, a near-swallowing sensation followed by stimulation of the hard palate. This was the primary sensation that I had to become familiarized with. To that end, I memorized the script by speaking it in dialect. Among other sound considerations, words like “be,” and “seat” would have the primary vowel sound pronounced with a N2 (“fill”) ‘I’ sound, making “seat” sound like this: “si-yut.” The open vowel sounds become deeper. For example, words like “hall” take on a rich Lessac #3 sound (as in “law”), and sound like this: “hawl.” The consonant “r” sound can be trilled briefly on words like “return” or “person.” On some words like “women,” the “w” sound is lead by a hint of a “v” sound: “vWeemen.”

As I began to rehearse using this dialect, it became apparent to me that it would be too strong for the American ear in its purer form. I realized that I needed to make adjustments to lighten the more swallowed sounds and play down unfamiliar consonance like the “vW” sound. The mission became to add a strong flavor of the Russian dialect to add interest to the performance, but not to make it difficult to understand what was being said! Once I had mastered the sensation of the dialect and clarified the pronunciation of some Russian words I was using, I was able to de-amplify the dialect gradually, so as to hold on to the structural principles of the accent. I used the ears of friends and advisors to help me gauge the success of my process. An example of the reduction can be found in my treatment of the “ing” sound. In the Russian dialect, there are instances where this sound, at the end of a word, is dominated by a final hard “k” sound.

This is evident in words like “singing,” which becomes “sing-ink.” I decided to reduce this to just a few instances, and only when the character is intense in some way. Another consideration to using some of the richer, unfamiliar sounds was how the words were being paced and delivered. If it added to the feel and imagery of a word, the “vW” sound, for example, could become more prominent. This process could only be accomplished with the helpful ears of others, who could get the effect at a distance, and judge the effectiveness (or not) of my dialect choice. Through it all, I attempted to maintain structural integrity in the execution.

The Audience as Other

The one-person show is at once similar and different from the ensemble acting piece. The development of character is similar, with research, script and character analysis forming the spine of preparation for the rehearsal/exploration process. The actor must prepare physically and vocally. The work of becoming the character, of creating the inner life and living “as if,” is the same. However, the dynamic of the acting partner is somewhat different. In the monograph performance, the actor cannot rehearse with the acting partner. This dynamic can only be achieved through interaction with an audience. In order to facilitate this interaction, steps must be taken to draw the audience in to the performance, not just as spectators but as participants as well. Meyerhold’s idea of stripping away the trappings that separate the audience from the actor is an initial step in this process. In his production of *Don Juan*, Meyerhold eliminated the proscenium and curtain as barriers (Gladkov 9). In the Black Box theatre production of *An Evening with Anton Chekhov*, these barriers were also removed. The space is a three-quarter

audience surround arrangement, with a house limited to 128 persons. This physical intimacy paves the way for emotional intimacy in the show.

Once the physical barriers to intimacy are removed, it is the attitude of the character and the actor's approach to the audience which will cement the relationship of performer to audience. This is no mean feat, as there is no other structure to fall back on. When I chose to perform as Chekhov, I had to acknowledge that I would be taking a leap of faith beyond that of other productions I had been in. There would be no fourth wall to "hide" behind, no fellow actors upon whom an actor could place his faith and trust. There would also be no one to share the audience focus with, so to be tempted to "drop out" of audience focus would be disastrous, even more so than in ensemble work. The only recourse to this one-to-one situation is to accept it. As an actor, I had to accept the fact that I was the sole focus of the piece, except for brief moments when I could turn that focus back toward the audience. I was not going to give my honest moments to an audience through their customary voyeuristic role in a darkened theatre. Instead, I would give them directly to my audience. They would be the confidante, the acting partner who would need to give and take with me for the show to be truly successful. In fact, I would be taking a leap of faith; that faith could not be solely invested in myself, but also in the unknown. The audience would be that unknown each night. There was no choice but to assess and regard each other in the moment, honestly. To do less would mean to disconnect with each other as acting partners and invite disaster.

The role of Chekhov wholly depends upon this relationship. I found a parallel in the works of William Shakespeare, whose characters are often written and designed for just such a close

relationship to the audience. When this design is ignored, the characters become ineffective, when the design is accepted, success is more likely. The Shakespearean actor Anthony Sher is described by Bridget Escolme as approaching roles both ways, with predictable results. She offers his highly proficient yet cold offering as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* as evidence of an inward, disconnected performance that leaves the audience out. There is little direct address to the audience, and the stage is huge and vastly separated from audience. Escolme claims there is no empathy with the character, merely an observance of his psychological trauma (2). In a later production of *Macbeth*, Sher engages his audience, asks them questions and elicits a response through direct contact. His *Macbeth* acknowledges the audience and takes them along for the ride. He invites the audience into his world. This production was also staged in a smaller, more intimate theatre (Escolme 2-3).

Beyond the creation of an environment for this kind of intimacy, an actor must face the fact that all of his or her objectives, including the super objective, are transferred into a relationship with the audience. It is the audience that Chekhov must cajole, seduce and manipulate to reach his objective of defining himself and to keep them listening while he does so. It is their sounding board that allows him to find himself deep within the story of his life. The audience satisfies his drive to tell his tale, if they listen, and Chekhov must discern the roadblocks that stand in his way of making first them and then himself understand the meaning of his life, and life in general.

At any rate, the role of the single performer is to connect with the audience. The relationship is an interdependent one, and if either side fails in their role, the play is lost. Escolme refers to the “performing human,” as opposed to the actor (150), in this situation. The performing human has

a direct connection to the audience, is part of their world and subject to their immediate judgment of the overall event. This is a potentially terrifying position for any actor to be in, if that performer lacks the ability and resolve to take a leap of faith into the unknown. To be prepared for the unknown, and for my unknowable acting partner, I resorted to using a scenario mindset in the creation of the performance and character of Chekhov.

The good actor, according to Meyerhold, does not perform exactly the same way twice. He notes that it is the opportunities in variation and subsequent improvisation that a good actor relishes (Gladkov 108). This is, of course, all within the structure of the work being performed. To underscore this point, Meyerhold envisioned a future where actors would be given explicit instructions for a role, but the role would have “gaps” for in-performance improvisation (Gladkov 112). Ironically, this seems to describe well the situation among many of the *commedia* actors of centuries past. *Commedia* actors, of course, dealt directly with their audiences frequently, even inserting local references into their touring productions.

In order to be free to interact with the audience, a great deal of preparation must take place. The performer must know his character, be his character in many ways. Still, he cannot retreat into the “public solitude” of a fourth walled Stanislavsky-based production. If there is a fourth wall in a one person show of the type that I have done, it is the back wall of the theatre, beyond the audience. The reality of the audience presence must be built in to the character. In the case of my Chekhov, the given circumstance of hosting a group of guests is structured into the play. This given circumstance makes it easier to structure the audience/actor relationship. Still, the audience is free to react in any way to what is happening, and so, too, must the actor be free.

Preparation of character, script, objectives, movement and voice gives a structure that one can rely on. This structure is developed gradually, in rehearsal. Grotowski speaks of avoiding a mechanical quality in performance by developing a “score” of performance, gradually, that involves “give and take” that normally occurs in human interaction (212). This process is based on being in the moment, and results in no two performances being the same. I free-blocked the play into certain symbolic areas but tried not to make any movement rigid or over rehearsed. This lack of rigidity in blocking allowed the kind of scenario-oriented improvisation I needed in order to deal with the “give and take” between myself and my audience.

In summary, a fluid and free relationship to the acting other, the audience, must be fostered. As a performer, it was incumbent upon me to approach the spontaneity and freedom to react that my audience was coming into the theatre with. Since I had a script and certain tasks that I had to complete in order to tell the story of Anton Chekhov, It became my responsibility to be thoughtful on this process and to devise as many ways as possible to encourage, in myself and my audience, a sense of immediacy and freedom. It was a profound leap of faith to place a high degree of trust in myself and an audience, and I could not have done it without serious consideration and application of the principles discussed here.

CHAPTER FOUR: REHEARSAL / PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

This is a record of the process of getting the show “on its feet,” and reflects my thoughts, feelings, adjustments, challenges and discoveries during that process. The journal also contains a record of my experiences performing the script for two nights of public performances.

2/6/06

The script has been drafted and now I can really consider the words. Even though I have been experiencing Chekhov's thoughts and words through the process of creating a script, I haven't as yet really felt the sensuality of the words on my lips and tongue. In my explorations on the page, I have managed to see the connection, through image-laden phrases and onomatopoeic words, the potential for visceral/vocal connections. I guess I'm also ready to think more about the physical aspect of the character, after having organized and intellectualized the piece so much. There is a lot to consider, physically, about the historical man, as well as how the physical is involved in the approach to audience and creating emotional pictures and connections. Chekhov was a man challenged by a lot of health problems, foremost of which was his suffering from tuberculosis. These illnesses caused a slow, inexorably fatal progression from youth to premature old age. The play is set towards the end of this progression. Eyewitnesses have written about the alarming change in his physical appearance in his later years. He apparently lost a good deal of weight and color, as well as experiencing a change in physical energy in his latter years. In spite of this, he managed to keep traveling and writing until the very end.

What was missing in physical vitality was replaced by his psychic will to go on. This juxtaposition of energies has to be realized in performance. The dramatic challenge here is in expanding the energy in one province of physicality, while contracting and muting it in another. Is it the eyes and perhaps the hands that the man's enthusiasm bursts forth from? The chest and stomach are areas of weakness and illness, so are they contracted, slow, vulnerable? When the text, and therefore the thought, is moved to vulnerability, do these areas of the body underscore the emotion of the moment? I sense an irritation in Chekhov's admissions of ill health, or, at times, a feigned ignorance of its seriousness. There is great potential here for the use of subtext in the physical, as well as vocal, in getting across the inner man.

2/7/06

Antosha (Chekhov) is essentially a shy man, although he has a sly sense of humor. I have noted in physical exploration, that this shyness cannot be overstated. In conjunction with the physical, shyness may energetically slow the tempo of the piece too much. This will require a by-the-numbers physical and vocal discipline that, in the minds of some, belies the use of the inner emotional tools of the actor. However, the inner emotions are very much incorporated. Whatever Chekhov is to feel in this play, he must feel them through the lens of how he is physically, as well as how he views all his past experiences and chosen civil behaviors. I begin to see from this an essential struggle, a conflict, if you will. Here is a man who is running out of time, and he knows it. Some of the struggle involves getting past a natural shyness to confide thoughts and ideas that he may not be able to share in the future. He tells us that he suffers from

“autogrophobia,” yet he seems more than willing to tell us so much about himself. Is he driven to do so by the circumstances of his health and mortality?

I think this is partly so. I have learned that Antosha was/is well aware of his celebrity and appreciates it, in spite of his learned humility in speaking about himself in normal situations. This, however, is not a normal situation. He feels under the gun health wise, but he is also somewhat isolated by his sickness. The impulse to travel or return to Moscow when he is too ill to adds to an inner urgency that will make the character interesting. Whatever outer physical limitations he has, my Chekhov will be a dynamo on the inside, seething with desire, passion and the need to push on.

2/8/06

Costume selection is complete! My costume is from the UCF costume shop and everyone was very helpful in aiding with my selection. Anton will be essentially monochromatic, grays and blacks, with a possible splash of color in his tie. I have selected a grey morning - type tailcoat, black pants and vest, black shoes and a white shirt. The clothing, except for the vest, gives the appearance of being slightly too large, to illustrate his wasting from the tuberculosis. The centerpiece of the ensemble will be the pince-nez, a signature of Chekhov's overall appearance. This piece is swiftly becoming, in my mind, the means of at least one of his psychological gestures. I want to be able to show Chekhov's journey from inward reflection to outward expression by the removal and replacement of his means to see the outside world. Chekhov himself admitted that he couldn't see much of anything without the pince-nez, and there are times

in the play when he can shut out the outside world by taking them off. Physical expression of inner thought and feeling can be accomplished in this way. The pince-nez, as well as the dress clothes, also express how far Chekhov has come from his roots as the son of a peasant.

His appearance reflects the trappings of a comfortable life that he has worked hard to achieve.

His hardscrabble childhood is evident, however, in his constant desire to push forward, to better himself and to look at life as it is.

2/9/06

Why does Chekhov, who was well aware of the esteem in which he was held in later life, find himself loathing to describe himself as an artist? I think that his passion for science and medicine, and what he feels he owes to it, is certainly one reason. I think his respect for Tolstoy (even in disagreement) and other literary lions of his day are another. In the play, he describes himself as part of a group of writers who observe, more along the lines of practitioners of the scientific method. There is pride in this, yet he reverts to (false?) modesty when he says that writers like him probably won't be remembered for ten years! I need to decide if he is teasing his guests, the audience, with this supposition, or is he remaining true to an egalitarian ethic (which there is evidence of)? This man is a complex individual, and grist for the dramatic mill! On a practical note, I have decided to have my Chekhov speak with a Russian accent. Obviously, a heavy accent would not be appropriate for the American ear, so I am experimenting with levels here. I think a taste of the "swallowed" quality of certain sounds, the careful use of altered vowel sounds, and a particular care to diction will allow my "guests," the audience, to become used to the "foreign" aspect of the "Good Doctor."

2/10/06

Going through some of the anecdotes today made me realize the ethic that I used when rehearsing Chebutykin in *The Three Sisters* last year. I need to look for the humor wherever I can find it in the words and stories that Chekhov tells. So much of what people in the lay community assume about Chekhov has to do with the “Cult of the Pause,” and the perceived tragic element of his work. Since I feel that humor played such a strong role in his plays particularly, I am quite sure to exploit his sense of humor. Chekhov wrote from his own experiences and observations. His writing therefore reflected his life in some ways. From what I have read and researched in his personal correspondences, he had a sometimes dry and always witty sense of humor. He respected people in general, so his humor was seldom sharp, except in a gentle, almost sly way.

I thought about the “subtext energy” of the play again today. There is definitely a frustration and urgency in segments of the play, particularly when he speaks about having *The Cherry Orchard* ready to begin, but not having the energy to write more than half a page a day. This is a man who once was capable of reeling off an entire short story in a day, and a draft of a play in 1-3 weeks! I think that this reduction in efficiency was a kind of impending death of its own in Chekhov's eyes. By this time, his medical career had been all but taken from him, and his ability to travel and socialize in Moscow had also been seriously curtailed. The image of a caged animal comes to mind. Perhaps an old lion, pacing arthritically, fearfully and urgently looking for a way out, lived inside Anton Chekhov. Conversely, there are other times in the course of the play where the man seems, if not totally at peace, at least accepting of how his life is playing out.

For these times there is a sense of ebb and flow energetically. It is a more calm, reflective, even a sometimes happy energy. I feel that no matter what the energy, the through line of a passion for life always exists. This is the vitality of Chekhov that his illnesses could not conquer. Even in his dying moment, he took time to sip champagne before observing his own end.

2/11/06

There is a joy in Chekov's description of his life and philosophies, even when, at times, he knows it will lead to a sad reflection or admission of frailty. There is a through-line that has developed in sections of the play that have to do with self-disclosure for Chekhov. For example, he goes on about his inability to write, choosing to blame it on visitors and his surroundings. The realization and admission of the role of his failing health in this situation follows. It is historically true that Chekhov downplayed the seriousness of his illness throughout most of its course. The phrases “in truth” and “in fact” crop up frequently, and reflect directly his struggle to correct his flaw of self-deception. His strong views on lying also come at odds with his initial “fibbing” about his condition or spinning other events a bit to the audience.

As the play progresses, Chekhov achieves a kind of victory over this self-deception by viewing it as outright lying, which he considers to be “like alcoholism.” He catches himself, once again, deceiving himself and his “guests” about his sickness, choosing to underscore the occasion and point it out not only to himself, but to the audience. This, to me, is a man who is coming to the end of his life, and is struggling to throw off any unnecessary trappings and flaws to get to honesty. The urgency factor comes to play again. How does this affect him externally and

internally? I would say his physical limitations do not disqualify Chekhov from a singular outburst, but it would not come without consequences. Is this a small collapse, perhaps?

Another internalization for Chekhov that I am exploring has to do with his penchant for travel, which also seems to parallel a need for escape. Escape to Moscow, escape from Yalta, escape to Sakhalin after his brother Nikolai's death. His somewhat strange (to us) need for bachelorhood, even after marriage, may give insight into his essential shyness, as well as his reticence to face certain situations. By all accounts, he was a man given to generosity, both socially and civically. His advancing illness did cause him, more than once, to retreat physically from situations and literally hide in his room. He had limited energy, of course, but was something else going on there? He had been responsible for his family's security from his late teens and what he called the "yoke" of this responsibility was unrelenting throughout his life. Even in the darkest hour of his illness, he was beset with concerns for his mother and his estate. Escape? I will explore how to symbolize this aspect in script situations calling for it. It may be as simple as a down turned eye, or "going away" energetically in some way. Perhaps refocusing is a better way to look at it.

2/12/06

Breathing rhythms and physical weights are in my mind today. There are clues in the text to lightness and heaviness in the body which tend to correspond with emotional highs and lows, but also can be employed in dealing with fatigue from Chekhov's illness. Some of the emotional highs and lows are obviously influenced by how he is feeling from one moment to the next, but there are also quiet periods of near-suspended moments when Chekhov retells a passage from

The Steppe. The sensation of pushing through might be better served with weight and transitional suspensions, the points at which the heaviness of a previous moment or physical state can balance before becoming lighter and “floating.” This can correspond to breathing force and rhythm as well, for instance, a transitional sigh from a quiet moment before living in a more dynamic moment of attack. This seems, in some instances, to work from reminiscences of the past to being in the present and being compelled to speak of some ethic, philosophy or desire. How does Chekhov's urgency relate to breathing and physical rhythms? When does it transition to other, related emotions such as desperation or determination? I don't think Chekhov is by nature off balance chronically, but there are definite moments of realization and transitional occurrences that keep the balance dynamic alive physically.

Among these are the realization, mind and body, that Chekhov has temporarily spent his physical energy on some point, the subsequent retreat and recovery. Recoil and space-taking occur both as base physical and as physical propelled by thought and feeling. Most of these are subtle, interior events, but with a higher percentage of energy appropriate to the through line of urgency. This is not to say the piece will be high voltage in appearance, but focus and sensation will be intense.

2/13/06

I am memorizing in dialect. I find this takes longer, but ultimately will streamline the process on the other end. I had a revelation about using a red tie or handkerchief today, which could be used to symbolize the end results of tuberculosis when Chekhov talks about the “unpleasant

business” of finding blood in his handkerchief. This would be a handling and considering of the handkerchief/tie, not a literal re-enactment. Immediately following this consideration, Chekhov does away with the article, as he goes into a lie about his relative health. Use of objects could also include papers, letters and books, when anecdotes related to these objects are being mentioned. These can serve as touchstones, as well as blocked-in as mnemonic devices, both for the character and the actor.

Symptoms of Tuberculosis:

“Cough that is worse in the morning hours; hemoptysis (blood in the sputum) can accompany cough; Mild fever, headache, chills, night sweats; chest pain from pleurisy; breathlessness, swollen glands, malaise (feeling unwell), fatigue; signs of pneumonia; extreme weight loss (in advanced stages of the disease).”

(source: <http://www.arches.uga.edu/~efletch/symptoms.htm>)

These symptoms all visited Chekhov at some time in his illness. He refers to stomach problems in the play - this could be stress related, but TB also can affect other systems in the body besides the lungs. The “pulmonary apical lesions” Chekhov mentions his doctor discovering are probably healing scars from earlier lung damage caused by TB. Chekhov most likely had untreated TB for over a decade before it was diagnosed, and no doubt knew of its presence early on. He probably contracted it early in his medical career, as early as 1884, from treating TB patients. It is interesting to note that, although Chekhov was a physician and knew the dangers of TB, he continually downplayed the likelihood of his own infection, denied and even ignored it for years, until the symptoms became too severe to put aside. Why? I feel his drive to

accomplish things in life, particularly his writing, his medicine and caring for his family, disallowed his psyche from considering the inevitable slowing down caused by TB and its treatment. He was a notoriously lousy patient, and some of that can be explained by his irritation with other physicians. I feel that a better reason was his inability to slow down and stay in one place. There is a source of urgency in his character and energy in that, for sure.

2/14/06

A luxury that I have been taking part in with this process is my ability to alter the script. I have noted areas where repetitive dialogue can be truncated, as well as opportunities to make connections with the audience with comments and bridges in the through line. I am beginning to see concrete transitions and inner struggles in the flow of the piece. For example, when Chekhov mentions living in his old house with the new owners, he states they would only allow him the corner of a room in which to live. A simple “That wasn't very nice, was it?” to the audience can inject intimacy, as well as a transition from dreariness to hopefulness of being able to complete his studies and move on to Moscow.

2/15/06

The idea of human flaw, and its relationship to Chekhov, in particular, begins to make itself apparent. He constantly speaks of truthful observation, either directly or in some indirect way, yet he is forced to look at himself and the way that he deceives himself about his health, primarily, but also his relationship to his sister and his practice of medicine. His character makes him downplay his fame and his place in the literary world, yet he catches himself lying, at times,

and has enough conviction about it to correct himself. He, most times, admits his tendency. It has the effect of slight embarrassment, resignation, and sometimes anger and irritation. There is also some humor to add to the palette of expression that Chekhov has about this situation. I find this adds some complexity to the man that the dissemination of facts and instances of his life do not have on their face. It's a good feeling to find some depth in the discovery of a man's flaw - in gives contrast to the instances of his integrity and unwavering loyalty to his identity as a writer/doctor. Some of these admissions have to do with his health, which is a major factor in the man's life. At these critical moments of admission, is it his integrity that causes him to confess, or is it the onset of physical symptoms? Is there an internal lie to struggle with about which provokes him to confess? I think I will integrate both possibilities in a few instances, for in reality, don't we sometimes unconsciously decide which of two reasons is comfortable for our conscious minds to deal with. Perhaps realizing later that the lie still exists internally will cause Chekhov to deal with the next situation differently, or cause him to consider in the midst of some other line of thought what has just occurred. Example: As the physical inevitability of his illness first begins to present itself, before the guest can detect it, Chekhov decides to make use of the ethical face of confessing his condition before the condition decides for him. Later, he is irritated or ashamed or amused by the shallowness of his fear of discovery, which has led him to choose the "ethical" response. This, in turn can color a subsequent anecdote.

Is this a direct violation of "in the moment" acting? I don't think so. We as people, as thinking, feeling beings, often are affected in the present by such thoughts, regrets, feelings and sudden occurrences inspired by recent or distant past occurrences. We, as people, don't always stare (either physically or energetically) intently at our partners, coworkers or friends. Sometimes, in

the moment, we “go away” to be with ourselves, while we outwardly carry on as though nothing were happening. For me, this is every bit as valid a form of subtext as that which is inspired by an immediate reaction. In fact, these things color our “immediate reactions” under the heading of such things as historical and character analysis, and “the moment before.” I think Chekhov's “moment before” includes not only hurrying to entertain the guests he may have forgotten about because he was distracted by cares of the estate or was simply tired and had not dressed in time, but also the cumulative experiences of his life up to that point.

2/16/06

I met with Doc (Committee Chair) today at UCF. We discussed the script, and he had some questions about the use of stories, as well as how can I inject more contact with the audience, and humor. We talked about how I was using the script as a fluid, changeable entity and that I had begun doing some of the connecting and humor in learning lines and wandering through sections on my feet. I had not placed stage notes in the script, so I explained, with examples, how some of the transitions were occurring, as well as my theory of Chekhov's flaws, which would present some logic in terms of his changing of the subject seemingly out of the blue. The man, I explained, had a penchant for withdrawing when he felt overtaxed, even though he valued politeness. His illness made this not only necessary, at times, but gave him a good excuse to become emotionally solitary, which was a source of comfort to him. The question of how to show that Chekhov really did love his wife Olga came up, so I know that it needs to be restated in some way, either in the text, or subtext, or both.

2/18/ 06

I have been doing a great deal of line work - memorizing and cutting - changing syntax and a few references. This has been in the latter half of the play - There is a lot of information, and I have added a few confidential sides and some humor in order to engage the audience, my other, more closely. As in Shakespeare, there is an element of the audience that helps complete the character dramatically. These “guests” that Chekhov has allowed into his home are, in some ways, a single entity, a confidant that he allows to look inside him as few have. This relationship is critical to supplying the logic as to why he would say so much, when he is normally fairly quiet and reserved to most people who are not close to him. The “guests” also provide a sort of confessor to Chekhov, who, in his waning years, admits he realizes that he will “eventually, no doubt, eventually come to an end.” The audience “other” provides the engine by which the thread of urgency, the need to get it all out, or, at least, most of it. Chekhov was aware of his fame, and, though he himself suffered from “autobiographobia,” he was also aware of creating a legacy, which, in life, he did through giving his sister control over his estate and writings. She was executor and holder of his will. He knew that she would protect and nurture his legacy, and, perhaps, the audience will play a role in that legacy. Is Chekhov also a mentor, here? Perhaps, in certain situations, this impulse comes out as well.

2/19/06

The loneliness of line study, over the course of the last few days in particular, gives me insight into the solitary, inward aspects of Chekhov, the reason for some of his sudden changing of the subject in his conversations with his “guests.” Some things are more difficult to share with

others, are a little too intimate, yet Chekhov must share these things in order to make people - and himself - understand what was happening in his life. It may be seeking some kind of confirmation or absolution, or even self-understanding through disclosure. Ultimately, it may be comforting to Chekhov to think of these disclosures as sharing his thoughts with himself, trying to put it all together for some internal autobiography, a final reckoning of what he has done in his life and why. Is it satisfactory? Life seldom wholly is, and Chekhov still has work to do before the “last page” of his life is written. There are regrets that there is only so much more he can do. Some of these are seen by the audience, but never spoken.

This is the Chekhov who accounts only to himself, the Chekhov who, he admits, spends a great deal of his time alone. Some of the difficulty he encounters relating to the “guests” may also be that he considers it immodest or inappropriate to share his opinions of his father or other intimacies of his family. Why does he do it? Again, the internal accounting in combination with the urgency to establish understanding and his place in history seems to fit. Perhaps he is simply in a better mood overall than he has been in for some time! The psychological expansiveness associated with the emergence from a mild depression or physical illness may account for some of his talkativeness. Maybe, with the uncertainty of his health, this could be the last time he has the strength to “let it out.” I’m beginning to get a taste of what it’s like to live under the shadow of impending death, to say you don’t fear it, but struggle with that inside.

Most of Chekhov's adult life dealt with this condition, and it certainly permeates his attitudes and work. Whether it be gallows humor or a willful denial of the power of death, or the need to examine the meaning of life or the need to simply connect and summarize his life, we all know,

to a lesser degree, this role that death plays in our drive to live. We're all going die sometime! I also realize that I am more or less the same age as Chekhov when he died. His body, of course, was much older due to illness, but he was middle-aged in many of his thoughts. This is another surface situation which I can connect with him on, then going deeper into what that means, the day-to-day details, the overall view of life, the way he sees the young, thoughts of impending mortality and what is left undone.

2/20/06

Still about a page and a half of script to go, but tonight I began rehearsal in the High Bay space on campus. I got a sense of how much space I have to deal with, the three main playing areas, and what I need to do about furniture and props. My choice of locomotion for Chekhov is that he travels in few straight lines. Mostly curves and hooks, which break down when he is angry or intense, or needs to be more direct in some way. On the Five Women set, there is a bed upstage, I am trying to figure out how to use it, but referring or using it in the "Nikolai death" story might be enough. It doesn't have to be used, at all. The important areas are the down stage and center areas, where the symbols of his convalescence and his writing are found in the desk and chair, and short couch or easy chair. I'm going over to UCF tomorrow to see what I need in terms of furniture and what I can use that is already there. Props will consist of a few books, a handkerchief, some papers, a file or two, a cigar and tray, and a glass of water. Simplicity is the soul of Chekhov, in terms of his writing, and I would like to have as few things as possible. I'm not using any gimmicks, or sound effects, as Chekhov was fond of deriding Stanislavsky's use of them. We'll just have Chekhov and his guests. "Chekhov Unplugged," if you will. The

relationship will be different each night, I'm sure, and we'll need for Chekhov to be a little different with them.

2/21/06

One week to go! The lines are coming along, and with each new section, I am able to create another little story and fill another little piece of the through-line puzzle. It becomes much more apparent to me that Chekhov's change of subject usually involves some discomfort he feels, either physically or psychically, which impels him to move away from something until he either feels impelled to speak of it once more, or places it in another context. One exception is his take on the experiences leading up to and including his marriage to Olga. He seems much more good-humored in general about these instances. He seems to revel in some of the stories of his attitudes of marriage. Of course, there is an "in truth" related to these, as well. We get to see the heartfelt Chekhov when he admits the love he truly feels for his "little Knipschiz."

Another instance of this is his joy and excitement in reliving the visions of Yegoruska, the little boy in the story he tells. This is a return to a personal memory that is appealing and basic to the positive aspects of his upbringing. I am moving today with an emphasis on more weight in Chekhov; even when he is exuberant in some way, his feet always remained anchored to the ground. The lightness in his soul cannot physically overcome the relative fragility and heaviness of his physical being. Also, his is a character that is "down to earth" in so many behavioral ways (his love of logic, simplicity and scientific method coupled with his peasant heritage). It is actually an interesting feeling, one I am trying to move into his arms and, at times, to his lungs.

The breathing is erratic, but that is because it needs to be specific to instances. At times, it is short with excitement, at times it is heavy with the onset of tubercular symptoms, at other times, the breath does not come without explosion or cough. As Chekhov tires throughout the play, more of an energetic price has to be paid with any outburst of energy. This is complimentary, and based intellectually on physics. In practice, I have to ready my body to respond to this on a graduated scale as the play, and Chekhov's tiring, progresses.

2/22/06

There are lots of lines and a brutal headache this afternoon, which prevents me from teaching my evening class and continuing with lines. My body-memory will use this unfortunate experience in judging some of the discomfort that Chekhov experiences in the play, and some of the pain his illnesses have caused to this point in his life. This is an experience of collapsing energy and physicality. I just want to roll up in a ball and hide from the light. I managed to trim some of the overly-repetitive phrasing in the script earlier, and I can see room for more improvement. There are too many references to writing only half a page a day, for example. Some points need reiteration and make sense, such as his chagrin and worry and acceptance that traverse the through-line of Chekhov's illness. Add frustration to that list, which also encapsulates the current state of his ability to write.

I have found an interesting facet of the writing table is that it is both a source of attraction, as when he recalls his old literary friends, and of repulsion, as in his frustration with his lack of writing. The whole beginning sequence of the play deals primarily with his repulsing the

circumstance of his current everyday existence, coupled with his attraction and his solicitation of his guests. This is a highly interesting and exhilarating place to go, energetically. It also occurs at the very point in the play when Chekhov is at his highest energy physically. His emotional and intellectual energy plateaus in other places, but the physical “rush” comes right off the bat. I think I am ready for notes, at least on certain sections, I get a sense that I need another pair of eyes to judge and reroute certain aspects, and refocus others. Nuts and bolts; what looks good, what makes sense, etc.

2/23/06

My personal energy slowly begins to return after an exhausting bout with a near-migraine. I crawled into bed around 8pm last night, and remained there until 11am this morning. I was able to review some lines, but my physical energy was too low to do any real energy work, except low energy work. I looked to the latter part of the script, particularly after the Major coughing fit, which takes place after an emotional outburst about the responsibility of writers. This trough in my own energy allowed me to explore weight and energy surrender and muscular “looseness.” This comes when the body has nearly expended its vitality. The release of breath in this state is interesting, a relief, of sorts. This is, after all, where Chekhov ends up at the end of the play. I have just gotten word that Doc, my Committee Chair, will be attending rehearsals tonight!

Rehearsal 2/23/06

The rehearsal with Doc started slow, I’m still getting my physical bearings, but I began finding the basic “places to go” with the character, both in terms of symbolic and real blocking, the

owning of the space (the High Bay rehearsal space at UCF), and some of the emotional flow. I tended to hurry and blur over some of the effective transitions emotionally, but at least I got from story to story with some coherence. Some things to work on from Doc and myself:

- On entrance, acknowledge the “guests” before first line. That’s not to say action connected to moment before isn’t happening.
- Watch the dialect- it is too thick at times.
- Talk to your audience, not at them (this is a problem with committing to visualizing them, at this point).
- Take in your three-quarter audience, don’t rely solely on center.
- Explore using a raised finger as a psychological gesture.
- Find humor and self-deprecation in incidents like being phobic about talking about yourself (as Chekhov).
- Color listings of words differently (a la Monk, Gradualist, Indifferentist).
- Find places to clear your throat give little coughs and catch breath as part of the physical reality of Chekhov’s illness.
- Don’t recite certain stories, like Chekhov’s autobiography – find the new thoughts, let them occur.
- Find excuses to engage the audience directly, with a joke or find someone to point to and connect with on lines like “among the younger generation.”
- I need to use more spontaneity on all stories, so we don’t get a “lecture” feel, but we see the story’s effect on Chekhov.

- Shorten the text a bit more to give you time for pauses and moments important to the character's state of mind and transitions. Don't feel the need to rush!
- Think of the possibility of having a couple of pictures to refer to on the set (such as Papasha, or Nikolai, his brother).
- Who do you enjoy talking about, who do you dislike?
- Find the playfulness and naughtiness in messing with Stanislavsky's head.

2/24/06

Three days left! Today I ran errands to get last minute props to the show – I've decided to add "photos" to the set, at least ones to have lie about or prop up here and there. I have also decided to get something to resemble creosote and koumiss onstage, just to refer to.

I managed to do some more cuts this morning. I have completely cut the Sakhalin conversation with the child, and have moved straight into "I can't solve the child question."

Rehearsal 2/24/06

Doc attended again, and we have set up an additional time in the Black Box performance space for tomorrow. This will be invaluable for making special adjustments and "owning" the actual performance space. We won't have lights until Sunday night, however.

Tonight, I incorporated much of what we had discussed and noted the night before. I have much more engagement with the audience. I have even incorporated Chekhov's "hemorrhoids" into the show, with sitting down, etc. This, done honestly and with some genuine irritation, may even

be good for a laugh. Doc made some interesting observations that I hadn't invested in, but thought about. I need to commit to the idea that Yegoruska's experience of the steppe is really Chekhov's immediate memories of it. This makes perfect sense, as he would only "write what he knows" and "loved the Don Steppe." Also the eccentric fool in the closing quote from Three Sisters is a not-so-vague reference to Chekhov's own doubts about his own literary immortality.

More notes and challenges:

- Love the idea and memory of Moscow more.
- Revel in each new thought, and let the audience in on it.
- More use of check-ins with the audience, like: Yes? Is this not so? Ahh! This will make the stories more conversational.
- Get more lost in the Yegoruska story, it's a reverie that Chekhov must snap out of to relate the story and relate to the audience.
- Use the admission that Papasha beat Chekhov as an inward aside – a mistake that he wants to move on from.
- Find his guilt in Masha's sacrifice to him.
- Use dark humor when referring to mortality and inevitability of tuberculosis.
- Laugh at some of your own jokes.
- Relish and consider Chekhov's relationships to the important people in his life.
- Genuine feeling on how lucky he was to win the Pushkin prize
- When you call death ridiculous, make it so!
- Be angrier when describing the children of Sakhalin.

- I feel much more oriented to this character as I relate him more and more to his audience/confidante. As in Shakespeare's many audience-dependent characters, Chekhov is becoming fuller as he debates and relates to his "guests" more and more.

2/25/06

Today was energetically diffuse. I had rushed around all morning to print the programs for the show, then get to the space, then move everything around. I was also up until four in the morning, getting rewrites and notes from the previous rehearsal integrated, as well as some printing chores – I found some great public domain photos of Chekhov, Stanislavsky, Knipper and others that I have framed for use on the set and to refer to at least one or two, particularly Nikolai, when Chekhov recalls his death. For Nikolai, I have chosen a great photo of a young Tolstoy, another person that meant a lot to Chekhov, especially early in his career. For his Papasha, Pavel Egorovich Chekov, I have chosen a picture of a much older Tolstoy, when he was on the verge of becoming something of a wandering aesthetic. Like Pavel, Tolstoy was also a very religious man, at least in later years. This connection is a nice, interesting secret for my performance. As to the energy not being focused, this evidenced itself in the rehearsal.

Rehearsal 2/25/06

My volume and vocal acuity kept going in and out, and I was particularly too soft during the intimate moments. This is a typical pitfall, exacerbated by the fact that I was also tired. I found a better angle to approach the bed during Chekhov's reminiscences of Nikolai, and this was due to my placing the picture of "Nikolai" on a far left corner of the set. This prompted me to hook

up to the left side of the bed instead of the right, opening me up more to the audience. All this was due to serendipity and necessity – there was no place to put the picture, where it would be as significant, on the right side of the stage! Overall, I found the actual stage environment conducive to what I wanted to do, but it distracted, today, from the “small” moments that I have been incorporating.

More great things to think about:

- Accentuate the moment before by coming in with the first line and carrying pages from an unsuccessful attempt to write.
- Find the humor in the disgust at the medicines he must take.
- Become “lost” in Yegoruska story, to the point that the audience “goes away,” and you must “snap out of it” as a transition.
- Find a sense of drive and flow in the final listing of important people.
- Be specific!
- Think and feel always in terms of what is occurring to you in the moment. Stories, names, dates, etc., should be in the now.
- Let a fire grow in your belly during the telling of Tolstoy’s criticism of capitalism – you agree with it, in spite of the fact that you don’t believe in revolution.
- Remember that you fade in the waning minutes of the play, and find ways to inspire this growing weariness. Look to the cough, the breath, the heaviness, but don’t let it slow your delivery to a lengthy monotone.

- Don't pontificate – relate! In a few places, you must watch falling into the trap of lecture. Take every opportunity to connect, to feel, to laugh, to introspect and to be alive with your guests.

After rehearsal, Doc mentioned that, in spite of any notes he may have given, that he felt the show's structure and moments were essentially there. This made me feel like progress was being made. Using someone else's eyes and expertise as a sounding board for my "creation" has been invaluable. You really can't know how effective any of the moments are, or if the play makes sense in practice, without outside observation.

I think that there are two keys to making a quantum leap tomorrow: I have to get fired up about reaching out to my audience, and I need to rely on the spontaneity of some emotional and situational recall to give variety and truth to the performance. I need to trust that the visceral responses to the memories I encounter in the stories I tell will bring the character to more vivid life. On a technical note, I need to get some adhesive or pads for the eye rests of the pince-nez, they keep slipping off! This has caused a problem with my physical freedom, as you can imagine. It has also caused me to have a retort for every pince-nez related disaster, such as, "Heh! This happens all the time," or "Please to excuse my clumsiness." Sometimes just an "Ehhh!" and a look have sufficed. This situation has helped me to be flexible, but I need to minimize the danger of it happening too frequently.

2/26/06

I'm starting to get anxious now. My way of dealing with performance anxiety usually includes relaxation exercises, breath control, vocal warming and running the first page or two of the lines. Pacing back and forth usually happens, as well! I ran the whole play on my feet at home this morning/ early afternoon and I made an important discovery. My blocking is fluid and involves a great deal of improvisation. Within this improvisation, there is, of course, a structure. The desk area, which is stage right, tends to attract me during the literary references in the play. The arm chair stage left has become a haven for me when Chekhov feels unwell, or is complaining, or during some of his medical references.

I need this kind of give-and-take with my audience and my reactions to them! This physical spontaneity needs to translate to how I view each story/vignette in the play, and how I react to what the audience is feeling. Obviously, there are also times when I react to what I have said. What are the feelings and impulses that the stories and memories stir within me? I have, for example, experienced moments of profound connection in the moment when Chekhov refers to the "waste" of his brother Nikolai's death. This is a kind of sadness that vibrates my whole being. This is not connected to any particular story of my own (as an actor), but seems to involve a physical reaction or memory that goes beyond intellectual specificity. It is visceral! It's also ancient and common to all people, and that is precisely the level that I want people to see this show on. Speaking of vibration, I'm starting to feel the text and let it work on me as I speak it. Certain words can encourage a feeling to emerge and ride the wave of tone or consonance. For example, "but!" is a plosive transitional sound/image. It feels funny when

pushed, or irreverent. However, when left to softly fall out of the instrument, it has a sad, remorseful side to it.

On a practical costume note, Chekhov's tie will be a black, narrow one. I decided to avoid my red tie idea as being too obvious, as I thought of using it during the sequence when he speaks of the "unpleasant business" of discovering blood in his handkerchief. Focusing on the actual handkerchief will take care of this. Another important change will come in the opening sequence. Doc suggested that I need some way to connect my frustration with my 'muse' being upset at the top of the show. He felt that some people might not "get" that my muse was my writing, so we discussed the problem, and came up with a solution: I would begin the play with "Rubbish! It's all rubbish!" This would occur before coming through the upstage door. As Chekhov enters, he is carrying some papers, as if he has been writing. Gesturing with these papers on the "muse" line would help reinforce the idea of what my muse was. I also found this was a good way to enter the play on a higher energetic level, as well as providing a suitable distraction for Chekhov, leading up to his discovery of his "guests." This intensifying of his energy of frustration changed the explanatory tactic of the first line sequence into more of the complaining Chekhov eventually apologizes for at the conclusion of the sequence. A good adjustment all around. One last note: I bought eye pads today which, because of the narrowness of the pince-nez eye rests, have to be cut in half. When this is done, they fit perfectly and keep the glasses on securely, even when I move about vigorously. Success!

Rehearsal, 2/26/06

My classmate, David Knoell helped me set up the stage after the afternoon performance of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress*. The set, a simple off-white, has a series of doors, two on the stage left side and one upstage right. The bed from the set is pretty much up center. By putting a light yellow cover on the bed, I have achieved an almost monochromatic effect on the set. This is offset only by the primarily green area rug down center, and by Chekhov himself, to a certain extent. Chekhov's clothes are monochromatic in a different sense, being dominated by white, gray and black. I wanted to give a sense of the past, a little like an old photo. This was to help the audience's sense of time as well as my own. The splash of color in the rug seems to lend immediacy and a "here and now" underscore. You are aware that things are happening before you in the play, but still couched in a time we know is long past. We all know the history, but what will happen tonight?

David and I set up the lighting cues, a simple up and down type of set up. He agreed to take notes and give a few suggestions, but since time is near to performance, I didn't want many. The run had a few gaffes, mostly about placing a line or two in the right context, but wasn't too bad. I felt a little off-balance focus-wise in the space, which needs to be corrected, but the off-balance feeling I had physically is good. I don't want to find an equilibrium that stays with me. I always want to be going from disequilibrium to equilibrium and on to the other side. The fluidity of the blocking and my ability to improvise it helps with this, as I am able, within context, to follow impulses physically. Intellectually, Chekhov is closer to equilibrium, but I am

finding that his emotional life helps to keep that pendulum swinging, as well. His reminiscences can take him out of his head and back to his heart, where I think he belongs, most of the time.

I am finding more humor in bringing the audience into my confidence, and I think that laughing at some of his own jokes can draw the audience in, as well. The anecdote about Skabichevsky, the critic, saying Chekhov would “die drunk under a fence,” for example, is a good instance of self-deprecating humor.

I’m finding the ability to speed up certain sections, particularly pronouncements and lists, to be helpful in varying the pace of the show. This is tricky, because each word of the text still needs to land on both myself and the audience, and not just be a recitation. I’m finding, overall, that I can take my time with the play, and play each thought without hurrying. Originally, the end was so long that I felt rushed, but since cutting the anecdote about the Moscow Art Theatre and all the “awful, quiet pauses,” I find I can still achieve the same philosophical change in tone effectively, and with great feeling. This run, I also finally got a feel for Chekhov’s great love of people. Another level of his drive to tell this story is that he wants people to benefit from his experience and wisdom, in spite of his often modest protestations. The “guests” in his house, and his meeting with them, incites him to caution, instruct and encourage them with his stories, as well as share the things that they might share in common. When I finished the rehearsal run, I noticed that I had better assumed the “worn out” demeanor of Chekhov, as he excuses himself at the end of the play.

I started visualizing him as weighted to the floor during the performance, with the weight gradually spreading from his feet to his legs, to his trunk and arms and, finally, to his head. This

tactic helped me get a physical sense of how the phenomenon of his tiring works. Doc's suggestion of adding the odd cough here and there was working, too, as it forced me to interrupt the rhythm of a story or line. This interruption allowed me the luxury of testing the waters of a very heavy physicality, while also being able to bounce back a little before the next interruption. This seemed to me to be similar to the ebb and flow of the pace of a play as a whole. It also gives the impression that Chekhov's illness holds him back and controls his pace, in spite of his efforts otherwise. This was a gratifying discovery!

I found my breath affected similarly, with length and depth of breath being most obvious. I used breath suspension a few times to get myself into recovery from the coughing fit, and David seemed to think the coughing fit was effective. He also told me that I should use the suspension to help me transition from one train of thought to a new occurrence, sort of like a breath-based "aha!" David also suggested that I think more in terms of knowing when I'm funny, and letting the audience in on it. I guess this is another level I can use, the old "wink and a nod."

The stories themselves are now having a firm effect on me as the character. I can envision Sakhalin, Moscow and Petersburg. These places have their own themes, their own colors, and the feelings that correspond to them. This vivid projection is beginning to allow me to impart their meaning to the audience as something energetic and physical, not just from the text. The physical and emotional subtext is there!

Minor problem solved – the fellow who was supposed to run lights for the show has backed out, David can't do it on Monday. Brook has agreed to do it then, and David will do it on Tuesday. Mark Brotherton has agreed to run sound and give curtain speech. I'm set!

2/27/06

The day of reckoning is here! Mark Brotherton, one of my committee members, will see this afternoon's run of the show, and he is assuming the role of "cheerleader," but I hope he will make a few suggestions to me. My nerves and- I'd like to think- work ethic has pushed me to run the lines several times today. I'm adding the liquids to the "creosote" and "koumiss" containers today. I'm not using them, other to indicate my disgust and discomfort in taking them, but they make a nice little addition. We have a new technical person today, my classmate Brooke Harrison, and she will be running lights for the show. Mark has been kind enough to run sound, and when we had to troubleshoot a few things technically, he was a great help. Since Mark is giving the curtain speech, Brooke will have to run the opening sound fade in addition to the lights.

Rehearsal 2/27/06

We started the run around 3:35, and it was interesting to be fully enclosed in the world of the play technically. Also, I had decided not to wear contacts, not only for the opening sequence of the play (in which Chekhov is without glasses), but also for the sense of security it gives me to feel what's out there, rather than rely on my eyes all the time. Let's face it, if you can't see 'em, they can't eat you! Seriously, I see well enough without contacts to know my audience is there

and, in the case of my play, deal directly with them. Anyway, I found the play flowed pretty easily under show conditions and, aside from a few phrase misplacements, I felt very easy and unrushed. Sense of pace had been a real issue at early rehearsals, as I tended to rush too much. I didn't have this problem today, and took my time without a sense of urgency about time. It turned out that the run took one hour and five minutes, which is acceptable at this point.

I felt really good about the run, and Mark was able to give me one hugely important suggestion. He noted that I wasn't using as much of the upstage areas of the set as I could. The reason he noted it was because he saw the contrast when I did decide to go upstage, as when I checked the door to see if Masha was nearby. He urged me to go further with this, but not at the expense of what I was comfortable with in the play. Since I had kept the blocking in the spirit of a scenario, that is, roughly organized with specific areas used here and there, I will be able to digest this note to use in the actual performance.

After the run, I set certain books on either upstage side of the stage, on top of existing book cases. These I would perhaps use when referencing one of my plays, or one of my "writer friends," such as Gorky or Korolenko. I placed specific photographs to be used for reference during the show. I had used the picture of Vera Komissarzhevskaya in the last dress run. I also used a picture of Chekhov's wife, Olga, during the "where is my wife?" sequence.

I was preparing myself for the eventuality of my physical and emotional impulses, so I wouldn't be saddled with having to sweat exactly where and when these references might occur. I knew that if I didn't get around to all of them, there would not be a problem. I decided to let Chekhov make those decisions, as he should.

Over dinner, Mark, Brooke and I talked a little shop. I found out that I was the first performance MFA candidate to do a monograph piece! I knew that at least one musical theatre candidate had done one, but never thought in terms of setting a precedent myself! Yikes! I have to admit, I started feeling the nerves, so I left dinner a little early to go through my pre-show ritual. First, check the set and props, and make sure the liquids were placed onstage. I put a carafe of water on stage, in case I should need it. Then, since I had the luxury, I wandered about the stage, humming and lowing, warming my voice, shaking out a little, and doing a few of the transitional line sequences I thought I might have any trouble with.

First Performance: 2/27/06

When Mark and Brooke returned at about 6:30- 6:45, I retreated to the Green Room to go over my costume. I paced, I fretted, I ran lines some more, peeked into the lobby. Finally, I got dressed. That actor's skin of costume did wonders for my confidence. Was this a safe place behind the mask, perhaps? The thing is, the "mask" of the character, for me at least, creates a place where I can reveal myself more easily. Within the structure of that character and historical figure Anton Chekhov, I was able show more of myself than I would have thought possible at the beginning of this process. I thought of how much of an affinity I felt for Chekhov's- my – viewpoints, his hopes and dreams. The sense of fun and humor that I found in both his plays and his correspondences began to permeate me. His profound sense of justice and equality always touches me somehow. Thinking on this, I felt I was "in touch" with yet another layer of the character. To play someone on the stage, with only an audience to confide in, you have to rely

on what it is you are, underneath the trappings, as well as how well you have assimilated the countless hours of research and synthesis that makes the character a part of you, and vice-versa. By the time I had thought through this, it was nearly time to go. The bouncing, galloping jitters tried to take my body, but some deep breathing and shake-out activity brought me back. I did a standing leg tremor, by bending my legs slightly, and this opened up my core and relaxed my belly. The thought of breathing through my butt occurred, and it made me laugh. Chekhov had/has hemorrhoids! It was definitely time to go.

First moments: I knew everyone in my audience of four. I used the moment of recognizing the presence of my guest to orient myself to them. Kat Ingram, Paul Lartonoix, Chris Niess and Doc were all situated on opposite aisle seats, dead center. This could have thrown me off my expanded idea of blocking, but I decided to let the adjustments take care of themselves. Like an acting partner, I needed to be aware of my audience, where they were, how they were feeling and reacting, what I wanted from them. All the training kicked in at this point. I was aware of the back story of Chekhov's underlying need to tell his story, to make the "guests" understand him, to know him as a person. This gave me the drive to tell my stories. They were *my* stories now. I found that taking it easy with the pace, though varying it, really gave me a chance to explore the audience, make them laugh, and react off of them. I felt no need to rush, since the audience seemed to be "getting it" just fine. My emotional transitions to stories and anecdotes generated urges to either move or recede into my chairs, and I could trust it. The use of the word "but" to underscore the transitions or explanations became a source of glee for me, and the audience picked up on it. I was highly gratified to find that I could carry my "guests" along with me, and this gave me a real sense of belonging during such stories as "Yegoruska" and my Stanislavsky

anecdotes. For the first time, I felt my approach to the audience as other had been justified in a concrete way. Their reactions added a whole new dimension of the play- a partner who I could depend on to be there in some way. I knew that, although small, this audience was special, alive and with me. What a feeling!

The hour flew by, and although I made note of some transitions that were a little rough, I felt really good about the performance overall. I think I was able to effectively get across to the audience my relationships to the people I talked about and remembered. Each of these people had their own colors, like a lifetime list, each one was considered in its uniqueness. Tolstoy was great, even though I disagreed with his writing style. Olga was a presence of love and security, even in her absence. Stanislavsky had his own place, and was a source of naughtiness for Chekhov. Suvorin was the spine of professional support and source of good humor. I found the touchstones of my life in the photos, doctor's bag and medical concoctions, and in so doing, I found myself using the whole space.

The illness took me to a deeper place of regret and admission tonight. I was really able to effectively change the direction of the play and underscore Chekhov's flaw of self-deception here. This was also an opportunity for some coloring of his more basic philosophies on life, death and telling the truth about it all. From this point I was, aside of being mindful of what I had to do to create the character's tiring to the end, feeling it in my body and in my heart. From here on out, there was no denying that my time was running out. I found the places to let the coughing and breathing problems to activate, and these truly gave me launching points to some key transitions, such as the one in which I admit my lie about my health. By the time I was

wrapping up the Tolstoy story and going into the “philosophy” part of the conclusion, I could feel the illness put me in a place for reflection. I felt old, I felt a little sad, and I felt small and insignificant in the larger order of that “unanswerable question”- the meaning of life. So, it was time for my two cents worth of a lifetime’s experience.

I took all the time in the world with the idea of looking into the future, the lines from *The Three Sisters*. I took it from inward to an outward phase, then back again on “Oh, if we only knew.” When I repeated this line, I did so as if I were remembering that I had written it. When I did this, I felt as though the character’s life were passing before me, in all its triumphs, failures, and ironies. The weight that I had built in to the physicality of the character settled in my feet and shoulders in particular, and made me have to give more effort to move. My breath became shallower and an almost sleepy feeling settled over me. The physical approximation of the state of heavy tiring created the emotional state of it for me. As I gave my final goodbye, a sense of relief settled over me – I had done it! This is not, of course, to say the performance was judged perfect by me- on the contrary, I immediately began to assess moments that I had missed, rhythms that could have been initiated differently or sooner or later, and the cigar that I picked up a little later than I would have liked. There were a few transitory moments that I felt the sensation of being Chekhov had left me momentarily, but, like the character, I moved along the pendulum of equilibrium and disequilibrium to find my way back into Chekhov’s shoes, his weight, his breath, his memory and his feeling.

After the show, I was thrilled to get some very positive feedback from some of the people that mattered most. Kate was genuinely pleased with the progress I had made since first auditioning

for her production of *Misalliance* when I first joined the program in the fall of 2003. Doc thought I had done well in incorporating most of what we had discussed over the several rehearsals we had had together. Chris mentioned that the show was good product potential, for tour presentations and such, which had actually been a reason that I had written the script myself. I felt that, if the script was right, I could use it to actually further my career and make it profitable. This comment, which was not limited to Chris, confirmed that I was on the right track. Paul also enjoyed the show and thought it had good potential for further performance. Mark seemed genuinely excited by the evening's performance, as well. On the whole, it was a very positive experience for all of us. I thanked them all for being so supportive, and looked forward to tomorrow.

2/28/06

The last day of February marks the second and last performance of my monograph. There were a lot of distractions today, just your average domestic stuff, and I have friends coming in from out of town for the SETC convention and auditions. So, it's get ready to clean the house and shop for groceries, etc. By the time five thirty rolled around, and it was time to go to the Black Box, I was a little diffused mentally. I had run the show's lines once before leaving, and did so again on the road and for the first half hour after arriving at the theatre. I went through the usual ritual; I set up the stage, checked costumes, set props and liquids, then I went about preparing for the show physically and mentally.

Warm-ups tonight consisted of shaking down, then weighing down. I needed to get the physicality into myself early in order to live in it throughout the show. I did a little vocal, humming and opening up physically, but it was more the different types of breathing and their locations that I concentrated on, having recently run a section of the play at full vocal energy. I felt really tired, so I made sure to eat plenty of long-term energy food before driving over to the theatre. Once Mark and David arrived, we ran the opening show sequence of lights and sound so David would know what to do. Tonight's audience would include Julia Listengarten, my other committee member, who happens to be Russian, so I felt a little extra pressure as the show time approached. I ran the first two pages of dialogue twice while I waited for curtain.

Second Performance: 2/28/06

I had nerves right out of the box. I feel more scrutinized by the audience. My girlfriend is in the audience, Julia is there, etc. I lose my line track about one minute into the play, and don't get it back for a couple of minutes. This is where the improvisational component of my rehearsal and blocking save my butt. I stumble through the "letters from students" section, find my rhythm by the end, but then I'm off again during the first section of the "are any of you students?" section. I calmly use the koumiss as an anchor, take a drink of it, and make an offhand joke about how disgusting it is. I knew I had that stuff onstage for some other reason than display! The audience chuckled, and I was off. I realized I couldn't rely on them or play to them in quite the same way that the previous audience had allowed me to. They were more subdued, and nothing was going to completely change that, nor was I in the business of trying to change them.

After the Great Koumiss Incident, I grabbed a hold of my failures in Petersburg and never looked back. I struggled for a moment with the old trap, “did I forget something important?”

I realized that this was only going to lead down the path of distraction, so I let Anton go ahead and I got out of his way. This was an exercise in faith, and it was rewarded. I stumbled over a couple of words in my first story of Stanislavsky and my glasses, but that was Anton, and not me. It didn’t faze me a bit this time, and I continued on, reconnecting with the feelings and transitions, the need to confront and rib the audience, the need to tell my story. Thank God I had been living with this fellow intensively for a good three months, between writing and rehearsing.

He didn’t let me down. I started looking at the audience in terms of their reserve. Anton would feel an affinity for this, and an understanding from the shy side of his personality. I made them my “friends,” and used that word extemporaneously as I addressed them more and more directly. If I felt the slightly different turn of an end phrase of an idea or story might benefit them and be more in line with my relationship to them, I used it. This was always within the sense of the play as written, but, since I wrote the play, I felt I had the freedom to add a little here and subtract a little there to make a stronger connection to the audience, and to Anton speaking to them. Once I made peace with this, which was pretty quickly, I began finding new ways of confiding in my guests.

I might lecture a little in my philosophy of writing, I could joke and wink more or less with each anecdote. Due to the small, closely situated audience, I could approach a whisper with more conspiracy behind it, or naughtiness! I started to see and live the possibilities, and was, at last, enveloped by the world I had intended to create. I took control without force. When the

“autobiographobia” section failed to elicit enthusiasm or much laughter, I dismissed them playfully and explained what it meant from the point of view that they were friendly, if naïve students of mine. That got the reaction. My enthusiasm at recalling the Pushkin prize became more focused and deliberate. I was able to lay out scenarios with language and feeling in a different way. It ultimately allowed me to return to the idea of “the first time,” when an actor approaches the text as if he or she is saying it for the first time. Occurrences happened in different, often interesting times. I was on my feet tonight for “I no longer practice medicine in the country,” and this precipitated a different timing in the tone of my admission. I sat a little later, and did not assume the subdued energy I had the night before, but move on into frustration about my doctors instead.

Speaking of sitting, I did almost miss the physicality of the hemorrhoids in my sitting a few times, but managed to turn it around into surprise discomfort, as Anton had gotten worked up enough to forget himself, until the pain and discomfort came on him in surprise. That sensation of surprise was an honest feeling for me. Yegoruska’s story became a real oasis for me, a chance to go deeper into Anton’s being, to refuel for the rest of the show. The cigar pickup was late again, but I used the “desire for a smoke” line to remind me that I had one around there somewhere. I got a new reaction in discovering the cigar as if I had been reminded to look for it, and this prompted the back story of his former addiction to be internalized as the feeling of suddenly revisiting an old, friendly addiction. This added a layer to later admitting I shouldn’t smoke it, a layer that was more aimed toward the pleasure of being bad, rather than the health implications. The coughing fit worked just fine, and I discovered the heaviness was there in my physicality, although it was less vivid and more like a familiar old malaise that I wanted badly to

rise above. This allowed me, at times, to rise above it by forgetting about it, only to be reminded of it again when I had expended too much energy on some diatribe or emotional moment. The price of expending energy was still there, as my weight got heavier between recoveries, but the price was more of a surprise to Anton when it came around each time. I would be reminded of the price, calm down, then forget it by the next rise in energy which, in turn, would cost me more in energy each time.

Finally, by the end of the show the return to energy was so minimal that I could only muster seconds of the old vitality with a breath. I sat a bit more in this second performance, but only because of this new energy loss/regeneration/loss pattern dictated it. I coughed and recovered myself in different places tonight, and discovered new possibilities in the rhythms of the play. Again, I surprised myself, went out on a limb more. My passions about Gorky's importance in the world were measured, but somehow more intense. I found ways to relate that intensity through my focus of vision and through my deliberate gestures. I had found a new way to protect the inner fire without sacrificing the obstacle of Anton's failing health. The relief of summing up my philosophy at the end of the play mirrored Anton's relief of getting his points across before he could no longer continue. The audience probably knows he does not die for another two years, but perhaps they heard wrong? Was this his swan song in some way? I certainly don't know when I'm going to die- Anton knew it would be soon, just not the hour.

After the performance, I went out to greet the small house of ten people. This greeting session turned into an impromptu question and answer session, and I was questioned on such topics as, "did he really say this?" or "what was writing the play like?" I was surprised to find so much

enthusiasm over the script itself, and could only explain its process in terms of research immersion, time and use of extracted quotes and correspondences. I tried to convey what attracted me to Chekhov, not only in terms of my undergraduate experience directing his *Marriage Proposal*, but also in terms of my affinity for many of his philosophies, passions, and his sense of humor. I realize with this phase of the thesis project complete, that this man I had chosen to follow and mirror and merge with myself was a great laboratory of contradictions, flaws, strengths and personal drive that any actor would and should be clamoring to get inside of. When I chose to do this project from top to bottom, I wanted to control my destiny in its creation and not be held accountable to any “maybes” or “ifs” that might be associated with casting at UCF.

What I now realize is that this experience has allowed me to branch my creativity into playwriting, as well as hone the research and performance skills I have worked on while at UCF. Also, the project is wholly mine (with a great deal of support from my committee and others), it belongs to me, and whether I succeed or fail I would have to own it. I feel as though, in many ways, it has been a success, and certainly a wonderful experience. I think I have proven, to myself at least, that I can create on my own and make my own work in this profession.

CHAPTER FIVE: COMMITTEE REPORTS

Dr. Donald Seay, Committee Chair

AN EVENING WITH ANTON CHEKHOV

I received an updated script from Alan on Feb. 17, 2006. His rehearsals in the High Bay began on Monday, February 20. Prior to that, Alan and I met and discussed the text concerning: any sections that might seem to be confusing. We also discussed whether there might be a need for any cuts. Prior to observing the first rehearsal, I was able to read the script three times and consequently felt sufficiently conversant with it.

The first rehearsal I attended was in the High Bay on Thursday, February 23. At that rehearsal, it was clear that Alan had focused primarily on the history of Chekhov and was now beginning to feel his way into the character of Chekhov. We explored character traits found in the script and began looking for those moments of humor. We confined our search into four categories:

- A. Moments of humor that were obvious attempts resulting from the character's personality and genuine sense of humor.
- B. Humor resulting from self deprecation.
- C. Humor resulting from Chekhov being hoisted on his own petard.
- D. Humor resulting because of his health.

We also began to explore questions concerning Chekhov's ill health and the debilitating effects they may be having on him. Following this exploration, we began to examine how he dealt with his illness. In addition to this work on characterization, we also began to look at the script for any passages that might be confusing to an audience. The Russian dialect was also discussed, not so much from the point of view of authenticity, but from the audience point of view regarding clarity and difficulty of understanding.

The second rehearsal I attended was in the High Bay on Friday, February 24. There was a significant improvement in the performance as compared to the earlier rehearsal. We continued to explore characterization and humor. Again, we focused our attention in the four categories of humor that we examined on the previous Thursday. Additional discussions focused on the physicality of the character. Specific dialect notes regarding clarity and ease of understanding were also noted. At this rehearsal, some attention was given to blocking and sight lines as they pertain to Stage 2, the black box theatre; and to the possibility of some script cuts, additions, or rearrangement of some of the text. Some additional ideas were discussed concerning the use of various hand props such as photographs, the cigar, etc.

The third rehearsal I attended was on Saturday, February 25 in the Stage 2 space. We dealt with what furniture would be removed from the set of "Five Women Wearing the Same Dress" and with the placement of appropriate furniture pieces for the Chekhov piece. This was the first run through I saw in the actual space where the piece would be presented to an audience. Again, it was very clear that Alan had worked very diligently to incorporate the ideas that were discussed in earlier rehearsals and as a result, this was the most polished performance I witnessed to date.

Some minor adjustments in blocking were noted with regard to sight lines. Most of the discussion following this run through was a reinforcement of ideas discussed earlier.

Due to a prior engagement, I was unable to attend the rehearsal on Sunday, February 26. I did attend the opening night performance on Monday, February 27. There was a small, but very appreciative, audience of four. Through observation, it was clear to see that they, like me, were thoroughly engaged and captivated by the script and Mr. Gallant's performance. It was an impressive performance noted for its clarity, its humor, and its pathos. The script, written by Mr. Gallant, thoroughly interesting and entertaining in its own right, was made all the more effective through the use of strong and believable characterization, consistent and suitable physicality, and the effective use of dialect. Alan's wry and self-deprecating sense of humor imbued his character with warmth and humanity. His use of subtext was clear and suitable to the character and the situation and the performance was further distinguished by clearly defined character needs and wants and appropriate actor choices. As a member of the audience, I felt as if he were truly speaking to us rather than at us. There was a natural ease and professionalism to the performance that was very impressive.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Donald W. Seay

Professor of Theatre

Dr. Julia Listengarten

I thoroughly enjoyed “An Evening with Anton Chekhov,” Alan Gallant’s one person’s show that I attended on February 28th, 2006. The script, written by Alan himself, perfectly captures the Chekhovian quality of “laughter through tears.” Indeed, the text is imbued with poignancy and sadness mixed with joy and humor. The script also reveals Alan’s in-depth knowledge of the subject and understanding of the character of Anton Chekhov that he created in his performance. The script is a reflection of a well researched topic and painstakingly analyzed process. Alan focuses on both Chekhov’s philosophy and his personal life, which results in a fine, detail-orientated presentation of this major artistic figure.

Alan’s demonstrated his maturity as an actor in dealing with the performance-related challenges of the script. I appreciated his use of space and his direct address to the audience throughout the show. During his performance, Alan was successful in crafting a complex portrayal of Chekhov, weaving together various layers of his personality—his self-deprecation and his unrelenting search for humanistic values; his dedication to science and his love for writing; his appreciation of individualism and his longing for the collective spirit. The vocal and physical qualities in Alan’s performance were also well developed and justified. He kept the audience constantly engaged by introducing new traits and ideas that Chekhov would espouse and by changing tactics in building his connections with the viewers. I applaud Alan’s significant creative undertaking and encourage him to continue to develop this show and seek various venues for its performance.

Prof. Mark Brotherton

MARK BROTHERTON – COMMITTEE MEMBER OBSERVATION

I have had the pleasure to work with Alan Gallant numerous times during his stay in the Department of Theatre at the University of Central Florida. I taught Mr. Gallant in numerous acting and voice classes. In addition, I was his director in the production, *The Visit*. In all these efforts, I have been impressed with Mr. Gallant's intelligence, talent, creativity, and commitment.

So, I was not surprised by his successful work in writing and performing *An Evening with Anton Chekhov*. The piece was informative and the same time, extremely entertaining.

Mr. Gallant was constantly updating me on his preparation and rehearsals. It was clear from the start that this project was in the hands of a well-prepared, well-organized, and creative artist. His research on Chekhov was in-depth and thoroughly studied. Mr. Gallant worked around limited resources, tight deadlines, and very little time in the theatre. Instead of seeing these problems as roadblocks, Mr. Gallant saw them as a challenge.

In performance, Mr. Gallant showed himself as a mature and intelligent actor through his analytical skills in the understanding of this character. He constantly made strong specific active choices were insightful and always interesting. His acting was invested with a search for simple

truth and honesty in a very complex man. Above all, Mr. Gallant was successful in showing the many sides and layers of this character. He found his humanity.

It was a very strong performance. I would work with Mr. Gallant anytime.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

When I first chose to do this project, I was told by some that it would be too much work, that it was more than I needed to complete my MFA in performance at UCF. My standard response to these remarks was to say that I wanted “more control” in what I was going to spend so much time being immersed in. While this was partially true, there were other reasons to consider. I wanted to challenge myself to write a dramatic piece that was actually viable in performance. In classes with Dr. Listengarten, I had written brief plays and had co-produced an expressionistic film entitled *A Dollz Haus*, with other members of the class. I had enjoyed this work, as I had also enjoyed working on research projects throughout my graduate career. I thought it might be gratifying to merge research with creative output, hence the choice of a historical figure, Anton Chekhov, for my monograph thesis. Most importantly, this was a project of considerable scope, the likes of which I has never attempted before. The idea of stretching my expectations and exploring my capabilities was, for me, a strong through-line in my experiences at UCF. In movement, voice and acting classes I had been asked to consider the possibilities, to envision, to create to expand. I felt that this monograph project would do justice to those ideas.

I began work on the play by researching its subject, Anton Chekhov, in the early fall of 2005. My personal style of research involves a lot of what I call “creative procrastination.” I would read books and passages on the particulars of Chekhov’s life, views and sensibilities. I would then absorb and digest this information by slow consideration, doing imagery work, and daydreaming about it. Then, after making notations about possible uses of the material, I would go back and read other materials, repeating the process. The script itself was the child of

Chekhov's letters and reminiscences, with additional material from impressions of his contemporaries.

Once I began assembling the script from these sources, a process of looking at it from two points of view emerged. The first point of view was that of playwright, which asked such questions as, "What is the point of this play?" Other questions were raised about continuity, how the stories reflect the personality of Chekhov, and where the opportunities were for him to reveal himself emotionally. The viewpoint of an actor was the second lens through which I viewed the script. Who was this guy, this Chekhov? What are his thoughts, what drives him? How can I make this man live in the "here and now?" The foremost question, which didn't emerge in fullness until the script was complete, was: how was I going to approach an audience?

The "one man play" concept necessitated a firm decision in this matter. Because Chekhov knows he has an audience and there is no convention of a fourth wall, he has to treat them as a direct part of the play. They are his confidantes, his students and his confessors. In the space of an hour, I was faced with the prospect of developing a relationship with an acting partner that I had no real control over. John Wayne Shafer once mentioned the "actor's faith" in my first acting class at UCF. Here I was confronted with it in a way I had never been before. It was just me – and them. No wall, no rehearsed relationships, no faking it. Faith had to extend to the audience/acting partner, as well. These strangers-to-be-friends were here to see Anton Chekhov, and that's who I would be for that hour, developing the story of my life, addressing my "guests" on a variety of subjects close to me and, all the while, trying to sum up my life and assign meaning to it.

When the script was done in late January, 2006, I had assimilated one level of meaning: the meaning of the accumulated experiences of a person's life, and what lies beyond that statistical sum. The philosophies, views and feelings of Anton Chekhov would be expressed through his recalling the experiences of his life. Before I could proceed, I had to complete the hated task of learning over twenty pages of monologue. Eventually, this "monologue" would become interactive dialogue with the presence of an audience, but that was a little help to me for the ten days in which I spent countless hours memorizing, in Russian dialect. It was at this point that the fear of failure gripped me as strong as it ever would. How would I take these dry words and make a living, breathing man out of them? How could I stand in front of an audience and create this thing? I was not giving myself credit enough for my own intuitive powers, which were the basis of what would become an inner life for the character. The magic "as if" was being born, in a combination of my own experiences and feelings, my affinity for Chekhov's views and situation and, lastly, the research on the man that I had gradually made a part of my every breath.

I had thought of my physical character, the ways in which I would express concepts like attraction and repulsion, weight and lightness and the use of breath and Rudolf Laban effort shapes. As I consciously used these techniques in moving about in free space, I was gradually able to receive the state of being that I envisioned Chekhov in. A man who, although sickened in body and short of breath, was more alive inside than most people will ever be. How do you activate a sense of humor when you are coughing and wheezing your way towards death? By staying in the moment of life that you have right now! Chekhov's sense of responsibility to others in the face of his own needs must play a part in carrying on.

And on and on and on it went. The gradual assimilation of all aspects of the performance made it possible to become a whole, more than the sum. Like a life. I knew I was on the right track when, two days before opening, I came across a photo of Chekhov's ill-fated brother Nikolai and wept. Of course, I knew I wasn't Chekhov, but I was becoming a pretty good reflection. I was "remembering" through everything that I knew about Chekhov and myself.

The process of rehearsing with my chair, Doc Seay, in my corner was a great boon in my process. Without his counsel, I could never have focused the practical considerations of this type of performance so swiftly. His suggestions and ideas gave me a tremendous sense of security and freedom when it came time to perform. In essence, he made me redirect my thoughts in terms of my relationship to my audience (address, rhythm, meaning and humor), and kept me thinking about things other than being terrified or, at least, unsure of myself. There was inestimable value in it all.

The infusion of an element of improvisation, particularly in the timing of movement and blocking, was also a huge help in dealing with the prospect of different audience reactions that I could facilitate, but not control. It gave me even more flexibility. Furthermore, I had to be emotionally and energetically present as Chekhov at all times. I came to understand that I owed this to myself and my audience and, I couldn't ask them to do more than I was willing to do. The experience underscored the importance of being focused and present under any circumstances on the stage. The performances were full of surprises, as was the whole process.

The biggest surprise to me was that I had managed to do this work on so many levels. Much of what I had done in this project I could not have done before I came to the UCF program. That which I had the skills to do before, I lacked the confidence to try. I certainly still have much to work on, but I have the awareness and tools to do the work. This thesis is the culmination of my experience at UCF. I've waited a long time to get to this beginning of a new phase in my life. Thanks again to my instructors, my committee and everyone who has supported me. I'm forty-five years old as of this writing, and it was worth the wait.

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