

Chekhov



Edward Sanders

Chekhov

1.

The Phantom from Taganrog

Who was this man
 called Chekhov
 in the time-mist

Who was this very energetic guy
 from a little grain-port
 on the Sea of Azov?

We glimpse him
 in his stories and plays,
 in the 4,000 letters that survived

 and in the words of Gorky,
 Bunin, Suvorin, his sister Maria,
 his brothers Mikhail and Alexander
 and a few hundred others

The life of a genius
 can swerve for 10,000 pages
 & yet you're looking at sand

It's not clear what he was
 except a writer and survivor
 who lived his productive years
 to the constant throb
 of the TB doom-drum

 who told his tales
 wrote his plays
 built schools and clinics
 tended the rubleless sick

His life as complicated
 as any genius
 with a racing metabolism
 and the ever quick'ning throb
 of the TB drums

This phantom from Taganrog
 whom we call out to
 100 years down
 into the mist

2.

Chant to Russia in the Time-Mist

Holy Russia in the Time-Mist
 We enter your Time-Tracks
 in your complexities
 and try to forgive
 the way you harmed
 for so many centuries
 your bent-down workers and farmers

Try to forgive
 the anti-Semitism
 and hungers for Orthodoxy

the centuries of total censorship
 your tsar-class's ceaseless
 thirst for control and bondage.

Your ancient Orthodox eyes affixed
 to the ports of the south
 and the jewels of Korea, Japan and China
 to the East

Holy Russia in the Time-Mist
 for whom Chekhov felt such obvious love--
 for the land and its people,
 its music and writing
 the beauty of its vastness

Huge and Holy Russia in the Time-Mist

we can't help heeding the clank of it—
 a cruel and clicking clank—
 the grind of Tsar and Church
 the grind of border-bashing
 the grind of saintly and mean-souled peasants,
 of exile, Siberia,
 white gloves and pain,
 prisoners shackled to wheelbarrows
 grinding and heaving in the Time-Mist

and the grinding and seething too,
 brilliant and soon all-seething

of Marx, of Lenin,
 of strikes and steely stridor,
 & the score-settling rappels of rev

3.

Tsar, Church, Slavery, Absolute Power

Tsar comes from
 the Latin word Caesar
 and then Kaisar

The Tsar's official title was
 Emperor & Autocrat
Imperator i Samovlastityel

*

In the old Slavonic bible
 the Greek word *basiléus* for king
 is translated "tsar"
 As a title it was first used by
 Slavonic folk in the Balkan peninsula
 and was used by medieval Bulgarian kings
 was assumed by Muscovite princes who shook
 free from the Mongols
 The "other" tsars over time were stomped down by
 the tsars of Moscow

*

Modern tsars acquired their title from
 Ivan IV — Ivan the Terrible
 whose jutting, bearded jaw
 we know from
 the Eisenstein movie

Ivan suffered from child abuse
 and took over the gov't at 14
 He crowned himself tsar in 1547
 and ruled for 37 years
 setting the Russian tsar-tone of
 Absolutism and Terror,
 feeding his first set of enemies—
 those who had abused him—
 to hungry dogs

He suffered from paranoid fury-fits
 his brain a Total Fear Zone
 analyzing slights and conspiracies

He once destroyed a large city

and everything for a
 100 miles around
 fearing its leaders were a-plotting

He set the game for future tsars
 with his vast personal energy
 his photo memory
 his Absolute Power
 His “Ego Deus Sum”

*

The Peasants

Serfdom began in the 16th century
 and was consecrated in law in 1609

Sometimes it arose from conquest
 Sometimes the serfs
 entered slavery “voluntarily”
 when times were harsh

The serfs became the slaves
 sometimes on State land
 sometimes on the estates of “nobility”
 sometimes on Church lands

They were chained to their plots to
 drudge at the masters’ whims

and to farm open field strips
 organized in village communes

There was every sort of cruelty
 in the cage of their masters’ caprice

The serfs were kept illiterate,
 prone to rumor from isolation
 slaves of the plow
 and game-planned

by the mooch class
 to mumble and bow

*

The tsar’s absolutism
 depended on the support of
 landowners
 and he therefore
 tolerated the grim exploitation
 of the peasants

*

The Church

The Greek Orthodox Church broke away from
the Roman Church in 1054

There was the Byzantine concept of the
absolute ruler, inspired by God,
for whom the Church with its divine authority
was a belfry, support unit, battle-soother
and keeper of the ritual

When Constantinople was conquered by the Turks,
the church in Moscow claimed to be the protector of
all Orthodox Christians.

Two Romes have passed, so went the adage,
& Moscow was the "Third Rome."

4.

A Revolution in France

In France as in Russia,
the "nobility"
a clergy that believed in an Iron Jesus
and a right wing military

ran things with iron gloves

and the peasants
were impoverished
by feudalistic filth-rules

yet monarchy was known
to be defeatable
as the recent American example had shown

and all the Enlightenment
the struggles of Diderot
philosophers and bards
hundreds of thousands
of leaflets
and jail terms

for at least a hundred years
was ready to prevail

*

The nobility summoned the States-General
(which hadn't met since 1614)

hoping to control
the rappel of rev

The States-General was the seldom-used
representative body
of the French monarchy—

It had three parts:
the 1st Estate (clergy); 2nd Estate (nobility)
and 3rd Estate (“commoners”)

By June of the year of rev
the “commoners” had forced the creation
of a true National Assembly

Then, in four beautiful months:

- The Fall of the Bastille
- Abolition of Feudalism
- Declaration of the Rights of Man

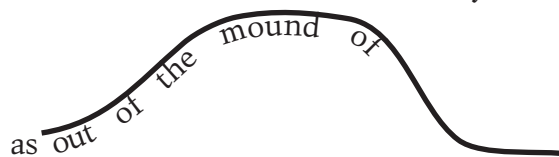
*

Next were Experiments
in various types of
governing

After all, it was Something New
but there were too many tough guys
wanting to be Dictator

aping the essence
of what their philosophies
had rejected

as out of the mound of



Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité

sprang the dragons
of death-dust

*

But "Carpe Diem" had occurred
and no right wing droolers
were going to take back
the freedoms of '79

*

The tyrannies of Europe
the leeching complexes of nobility
The royalist armies
banded together
to war the

French Revolution

*

The Paris Commune (1792-'93)

Political power was grabbed
by the group known as the Girondins
in late '92

The Revolutionary Convention
formally abolished the monarchy
on 9-21-'92

and then in January, '93 Louis XVI was beheaded

and war declared against
Britain, Holland, Spain

*

Imperial
Europe was like
a microscopic
slide
of pond water:

Tyrannies ever striving
to shove other
tyrannies out of
the way.

And so not only did they band together
to kill the rev

they thought they might as well
scheme to
eat French land

so that the Austrian Minister
could write that “the
return of peace.... will be a benefit
which France
will have to purchase
by the sacrifice of the province
we shall have conquered.”

*

The Committee of Public Safety

The Girondins
failed at war
in the spring of '93

and the French National Convention
set up a
Committee of Public Safety

to be
the Executive Branch
throughout France

*

Then the Jacobins
took power in the spring o' '93
and executed the Girondins
on Halloween '93

*

Robespierre (Nov '93-July '94)

For nine months the Jacobins
vied to set up a system
of rule
based on “absolutist aspects”
of Rousseau's *Contrat Social*

Robespierre saw himself
 as the emanation of the
 “General Will”
 in a Rousseau-inspired gov’t

but sank in the hell of serial murder
 as he used The Committee of Public Safety
 to settle scores

with head-chops aplenty—
 2600 were guillotined in Paris alone
 including Danton and Hébert

Then Robespierre himself
 was head-clipped
 and the Jacobin Club closed

death-dust to death-dust

*

The Directory ('95-'99)

An entity called The Directory
 ran France four years
 after the Jacobins’ fall from power

There were five directors
 who ran things
 helped by a bicameral
 legislature.

Britain, Russia, Austria, Naples, Portugal
 and Turkey

united to war against the
 French Republic

The Directory
 was known for its
 fiscal corruption

& lost the faith-will required to survive

*

In 1796
 the French armies
 had become the

armies of Napoleon

The Rev, for now, was defeated
 by moneyed people inside France
 and by the coalition of Euro-tyrannies,
 the Absolutists, the Royalists,
 fans of the Clergy and
 the complexes of leeching nobility.

*

Bonaparte

Napoleon overthrew The Directory in 1799
 and for 15 years thereafter
 was the autocrat of France
 and the lands he conquered

He crowned himself Emperor
 in front of the Pope
 in Paris

*

Retreat From Moscow

After a 12-week campaign in 1812
 with 100,000 troops
 Napoleon entered Moscow
 to find it in flames
 3/4 ths of the city
 destroyed within a week

He stayed in Moscow till Oct 18
 waiting for tsar Alexander I
 to cringe for peace

*

Invaders from the West
 stumble in the snow.
 An early winter
 snared his men
 killing the horses
 and thousands of soldiers
 in foodless winterless garb

The Russians
 chased the French

and nearly captured Napoleon in Lithuania
 on the horsekilling ice
 of the Beresina River

5.

The Romanovs

The Romanovs
 ruled Russia
 from 1613 to 1917—
 Some were sane &
 some were bonkers

Alexander I, the tsar from '01-'25
 was the son of the Mad Tsar Paul I,
 who was murdered
 with Alexander's "connivance"
 according to the
Penguin Dictionary of Modern History

Alex was a hero
 in the battle against France:
 On 3-31-'14
 he invaded Paris.

As for the way he governed
 at first he made some liberal reforms,
 but believed God had chosen him to lead the world
 and sank in the drool of reaction

Alexander was subject
 to periods of religious mania
 It was reported Alex
 did not actually die in '25
 but fled to be a hermit
 His coffin was opened in '63
 and found a dusty cenotaph

6.

Pushkin (1799-1837)

It takes a hundred years
 to hurl aside

a clinging, ancient order

Pushkin was part of a two-century
Chant for Change

in whose second centennium
still we chant.

Pushkin was an “iskra,”
a spark, who lived in the open age
of Byron, Shelley Goethe, Égalité, Fraternité
when bards seized freedoms underused.

He wrote on a variety of themes
impossible to publish
later on in the century

Pushkin’s poem “Poslanie k tsenzoru” (Epistle to the Censor)
His 1819 “The Village” attacked serfdom
“Noel” 1818 ridiculed Alexander I

The minister of war Arakcheyev
is “scorned” in the epigram
“Against Arakcheyev”

His very daring “Ode to Liberty”
was passed from hand to hand
in manuscript

The soldiers in the barracks
could chant it from memory

They almost fried Pushkin in Siberia
for “Ode to Liberty,”

but he took a gig in Kishinev
in Bessarabia
(site of the Pogrom 83 years later)

for two years, to avoid it.

*

Touching France
France touches you

*

During the wars ’gainst Napoleon
the soldiers and officers

were exposed to the
revolutionary ideas of the West

Some officers adopted the
concept then in vogue in France, Germany and Italy
that the safest way
for guaranteeing political progress
was through secret societies.

Sec-soc's began to be formed in Russia
around 1816,
a year after Waterloo.

Puskin had friends associated with
the pre-Decembrist
secret political societies
such as the Union of Salvation

He became a member of the Green Lamp
which in addition
to wild partying
may have been part of
a pre-Decembrist sec-soc:
The Union of Welfare

It's hard to trace
the members of a successful sec-soc

and the revs
never quite
trust a poet

but when tsar Alexander I died suddenly
in Taganrog on 12-1-'25
(or fled to be a hermit)
without an heir,
some officers from the secret societies started a mutiny,
under the leadership of one Paul Pestel.

Thirty officers supported by three thousand soldiers
tried to prevent the senators from taking an oath of allegiance to
new tsar Nicholas I.

The Decembrists had hoped
the rest of their garrison might
rush to their side

Instead their fellow soldiers

turned and fired,
and dozens were dead.

All the leading conspirators they could locate,
including Pestel, were hanged.

When the take-over failed
Pushkin rushed to his pad
and burned some compromising papers

and began to position himself
with the new tsar.

In 1826 Nicholas
summoned Pushkin to Moscow and
announced that he, the tsar, henceforth'd
be Pushkin's personal censor,

while at the same time
the tsar placed him under the close surveillance
of secret police chief Benckendorff

Nicholas I
forced Pushkin
to wear the uniform of the
Gentlemen of the Chamber
in the final years to his life,
to Pushkin's great resentment.

No contemptible tsar-raff
could stop the liberal thought-waves of the 18th century
Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité
from lifting the boats.

Pushkin Pushkin!
Liberté Égalité Poetry Fun
Pushkin Pushkin!

The Revolution
is as absolute
as tsar this-and-that

& Pushkin was stretching
the drumskin on the frame

7.

The Russian Police State

Meanwhile, Nicholas I ruled for
 thirty hideous years
 (1825-1855)
 He set up a police state apparatus,
 the infamous "Third Section," in 1826
 to prevent revolutionary ideas
 oozing from abroad

Revolution
 "in all its forms"
 (such as freedom of expression)
 was to be stomped
 his severe and misanthropic face
 ever wincing
 at the concept of change.

He put into place very strict press censorship,
 and a system of passports making it difficult
 for Russians to visit other countries.

He discouraged the growth of
 universities and schools

His secret police were always in action,
 stirring and spying and spoiling.

Composers, of course, were suspect
 and musical works were examined
 out of fear the notes
 might be done
 in a rev-code.

He made his courtiers cut their beards
 because beards were a sign of
 democratic sympathies in Western Europe

*

Rurality, which should have meant an easy life,
 meant poor-kill.
 Now and then there were peasant rebellions
 which opened the window
 and forced a temporary discussion

of the peasants' grim life.

Then clank, then clunk,
Then thut-thut,
window shut

*

Nationalism to Avoid Justice

Russia controlled 1/6th of Gaia
and one way the people
will shudder into a kind of
unanimity
is through beating at borders
rousing the hate for Others
and Russifying the vast
1/6th of Gaia the tsar controlled.

So there was a deliberate, relentless Russification
of the hugeness— the whole of Siberia,
and in central Asia to Tashkent, Samarkand,
Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand;

and in the Caucasus, from the Black Sea to the Caspian.

Russia was a moiling mix,
with 87 million Orthodox Greek
5.2. million Jews
13.9 million Muslims
430,000 Buddhists
and hundreds of
schisms and sects

the Russian Orthodox church
was determined to smash
with its iron ikon
till all bent down
in fealty to the iron triad
of Tsar, Church, Absolute Authority.

Repression
is the craftshop
of the drumskin

8.

Euro-Rev 1848

In 1848

Michael Bakunin wrote to his sister

from exile in Paris,

“We shall not be happy
till the whole world is in flames”

French was the lingua revolutionis

and everybody looked to Paris

for the *flamma aeterna*
of working people betterment

France was now a republic

and it had done away with things like debtors prison.

1848 huge unemployment—

a slump—

one of the

periodic “blessings”

of a greed economy.

French workers wanted

the gov't to help organize

useful guaranteed work

at wages and benefits

families could live on

*

National Workshops

The French gov't decreed

on Feb. 26, '48

National Workshops

be set up to give employment to

out-of-work workers

100,000 came to Paris

from the provinces

for the Workshops

The right hated the workshops

as much as the U.S. right

hated the WPA and the CCC

and wormed within
to stomp it down.

*

The First Workers' Congress in the World

What was known as the Luxembourg Commission
met in Paris
and the very first day
they ordered the workday to be lowered
to 10 hours in Paris
and 11 in the provinces.

The Luxenbourg Commission
proposed setting up all over France
agricultural colonies
each with a hundred families
with a common laundry
and big kitchen
where wholesome food
would be prepared
for the colony

Other colonies were to be created
by industrial workers
who would borrow sufficient money
from the state
to become self-sufficient

These colonies were to have a full system
of social security for illness
and old age.

Only one such cooperative was ever formed.

*

Russia already
had in place for centuries
a system of cooperatives
called the Artel.

So that when workers
came to a city
from a province
say, to work as carpenters or masons
they united in groups of ten to fifty people

lived in a house together
 ate together & each paid his part of the costs
 to the elected elder of the Artel.

All over Russia
 "since time immemorial"
 a system of Artels.

*

Waiting for Signs from France

The King of France, one Louis-Philippe
 was 75 and thought soon to die
 his health was waning
 and people all over awaited his passing

certain the twists of his agonized sheets
 were be the twists
 to trigger the rev

In South America Garibaldi
 was waiting this sign
 to bring him back
 for the liberation of Italy

but the people of Paris of '48
 tossed out the living king
 who ran with the queen
 through a back door
 in the Tuileries
 and headed for England.

The drums were heard
 without borders
 & the students of Germany
 the patriots of Italy and Hungary
 arose to the
 drum-thrums of rev

Poland, northern Italy and Ireland
 hungered to be free of foreign domination

There must have been fifty revolutions
 erupting in Europe in '48

in the small German and Italian states
 in the provinces of Austrian empire

in Poland, in Bohemia, in Paris

*the hunger for rev
the hunger for rev*

*

The Issue of a German Parliament

In 1848
a group met in Heidelberg to
organize a parliament
to represent the entire, splintered
German nation

The German people had never had elections
and the group called for them

*

The Communist Manifesto
written in German
was published in
early 1848

and soon began its long
ensorious enceinturement

*

Austria

The Austrian monarchy— the Hapsburgs—
ruled Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, Northern Italy,
and a big chunk of Poland.

The Hapsburgs dread-hated the workers &
intellectuals.

The exploiting classes
kept Austrian workers
stomped in the abyss

There were large factories
and tremendous poverty

dead tired workers in dead toned rooms

*

The Etiquette of Absolutism

In Austria
 the E. of A.
 forbade the Emperor
 from giving any reasons
 for his decisions

*

Censorship in Austria

Every single book, paper
 or advertisement
 in the Austrian Empire
 had to be approved
 by the censor

In Vienna
 12 guys could handle
 the censorship,
 showing how few the
 publications were

*

The Rev o' '48

All in all
 it was a tossing of
 violence 'gainst violence

The heat of the Dream
 was not enough
 to shatter the old order
 so that new more-benevolent pieces
 could form in
 a better pattern.

After a failed rev
 there's that dreaded thing
 called "reaction"

when the greed-heads,
 repressionist clergy,
 bruised egos,
 right wing nuts
 and score-settlers

pour dirt

9.

Hard Times for Dostoevsky

In 1847 the writer Belinsky
 sick with consumption
 and staying with Turgenev
 in Salzbrunn
 for the cure
 wrote a famous letter to Gogol
 —a “furious invective”
 against serfdom, the
 creepiness of the
 Russian Orthodox church,
 and the ghastly geekiness
 of the state bureaucracy.

This letter was passed about in
 thousands of handwritten copies

 and became the
 Manifesto of Russian Liberalism.

Anyone reading this
 letter aloud to others
 in Russia
 could suffer the death penalty
 yet most of the intelligentsia
 knew it
 almost by heart

The Secret Police
 hated the
 concept of
 “The Circle”


In November of '48 there began
 what was known in police reports as
 the Petrashevsky Circle

A group of young intellectuals
 met Friday evenings
 in the library
 at Mikhail Petrashevsky's house
 in Petersburg.

The library had the works of Fourier,
 Proudhon, Marx, Feuerbach
 and others.

The base of the meetings
 was the hunger for
 representative democracy
 and various propositions for
 communal economics.

The tsar shook his epaulets in anger
 when the secret police told him about it.

At one of the meetings of the
 Petra' 
 Dostoevsky was chosen
 to read Belinsky's Letter to Gogol.

That was the main ground for his arrest.

On April 23, '49 Dosto and his brother
 and 30 others were popped

On December 22
 they were condemned to death
 and were driven to
 a large outdoor
 execution zone

and just when the soldiers
 were about to fire
 the tsar commuted the sentence to Siberia

Dost. was sent to Omsk for 4 years
 hard time 'mong hard timers.

and another six years of exile
 before he could return
 to the literary life
 of Moscow or St. Petersburg

There's nothing quite like
 a few years in Siberia
 to calm the passion for rev

 and focus the
 inner scream.

*

Two years later

on Dec. 2, '51
 Napoleon's nephew
 then President of France
 seized total power

 made himself emperor
 & intellectuals
 all over France
 invisibly puked

It buffed the soul of
 Baudelaire
 who vowed
 "to remain
 from now on
 aloof from all
 human politics."

*

Dosty, then Baudy, then Turgy

The great Turgenev
 —however cautious—
 was arrested
 for a month
 and jailed on
 his estate for a year
 for publishing
 in '52
 an obituary
 for the banned Nicholai Gogol.

10.

Defeat in the Crimea

There was always the dream
 of grabbing land and saving people
 especially Christians
 from the Turkish "infidels"

The Ottoman Empire
 controlled from the Persian Gulf to Morocco
 and from
 Constantinople to the
 approaches to Vienna.

It was perceived
 by the 19th Century as weak

Tsar Nick sneered at Turkey as
 “The Sick Man of Europe.”
 and called for its partition

The other countries
 in the European pond culture
 didn’t want Russia eating Turkey
 and so propped up the Ottoman

The century had already seen
 vast zeal to free
 the glory of ancient Greece
 from Mohammedan culture

The great poet Byron died
 at the siege of Missolonghi
 in April of '24.
 and finally Greece
 was made an “independent” state.

*

1853

Russia made a demand to protect
 Christians within the Ottoman empire

kept shoving at the Turks,
 and then there was war.



The French, English and Sardinians
 joined with the Turks
 against the Russians

There was a year-long seige

of Sevastopol by the allies

The Russians forced
 their conscripts to march
 in a thanato-trudge
 into the Crimea from the north—

We're Marching to Sevastopol

The deserts of southern Russia
 were flecked at frequent foot
 with fallen corpses

We're Marching to Sevastopol

for Tsar, for God, for glory, for the Holy Synod
 for fear of flogging, for indeterminate senses
 of why not? &
 what does it matter anyway?

We're Marching to Sevastopol

500,000 people died
 on both sides
 till the taking of Sevastopol
 in '55
 & Th' Treaty of Paris
 in '56
 in which Russia
 had to agree
 to limit armaments
 in the Black Sea,
 to withdraw from th' mouth
 of the Danube

and to give back Bessarabia
 which it had annexed in 1812.

*

Russia faced Euro-snicker
 for its backward ways
 and fumbly style
 in the loss of th' Crimean War
 The Ruling Class was convinced
 that if Russia were to regain
 her prestige as a great power
 and not be snickered at
 in the semi-changed realms
 of the West

some significant changes would
 have to be made
 in the way Russia was ruled

II.

The Chekhov Family

Chekhov's
 paternal grandfather
 a serf named Yegor Mikhailovich Chekh
 (who ran a sugar-beet mill, and
 then was the superintendent
 of an estate in Voronezh Province in
 central European Russia)

bought freedom in 1841
 for his wife and three sons
 at 700 rubles a head

He hadn't the bread to free-buy his daughter
 but good Count Chertkov
 tossed in her freedom for measure.

*

A Russian "Cursus honorum":
 (1860-1890)

serfdom
 ↓
 shopkeeping
 ↓
 "professions"

*

Yegor apprenticed
 one son to a bookbindery near Moscow

Other sons, Mitrofan and Pavel
 opened up small stores in
 a place called Taganrog

In 1854 Pavel Chekh

married Yevgenia Yakolevna Morozova
 from a serf background also
 the daughter of a traveling cloth merchant

The family changed its name from Chekh
 to Chekhov

12.

The Emancipation of the Serfs

Just before
 America's war
 to free its own,
 52 million serfs were "freed"
 in Russia

The Emancipation Decree, as it was called,
 was dated 19 February 1861
 when Chekhov was one year old

Overnight they were free to own property,
 choose jobs freely, marry whomever they chose

Most landowners did not want to give serfs land
 and it was scammed through that
 even though the land had been farmed by
 the peasants for centuries,
 and viewed by them as theirs
 the land was in fact the property of the "landowners,"
 who therefore had to be paid.

*

Greed-heads overestimated the value of the land.
 The peasants had no voice in the negotiations
 so that each peasant family received less land
 than they had previously farmed,
 and what they now "owned"
 was less than needed for
 even poverty-level subsistence.

*

Read Chekhov's story, "The Peasants"
 for what it was like
 never to have enough food
 in a rich land

*

Russian Class System

Your economic class was
stamped on your passport

*

Thut-Thut

For ten years the
liberalization loosened the pain
and then the door was shut
on the fingers of th' reform.

*

Interlocking Movements

Every kind of reformist,
hesitantist and gradualist
existed in the tangle of
Interwoven and Interlocking Movements

There were liberals
There were those who looked to France or Germany
There were Nihilists
There were socialists
There was the "conscience-stricken gentry"
There were the "machinations of reactionary landowners"
There were the freed serfs
looking to wheel-deal
or get into the professions
There was a rise in the urban workers
predicted by Marx

There was the intelligentsia
There were the ever-stirring secret police
Left wing populists
Right wing populists
and any serious work
(such as printing a leaflet)
was carried out
in tsar-dreading secrecy

or coded words in literary reviews
secret meetings

whispered asides

& the secret whisper of
ink

*

There were reformer and radical
émigré groups in the cities of Europe

who published newspapers & pamphlets
where all the banned thoughts
could be expressed

well, most of the thoughts

*

Commation in Honor of the Printing Press

The printing press
in a police state
you worship
as a deity
in its secret shrine

and the
very, very slight
& secret shuffling sound
as your secret supporter
hands you a wad of ruble notes
by the Kazan Cathedral
in St. Petersburg
to print a leaflet

*

Song to the Underground

In a police state
rules are sneered at
& dreams of change are nourished

in secret groups

and so it was in Russia
for several centuries

and especially when the
Grand Reform
 policed to a halt.

In the underground
Everything is anything,
that is,
 open to question.

To the rightwing outsider
the Underground
is a dome of doom

but to those
 INSIDE the Underground
the air, the tone, the clime
 can thrill a person more
 than all the kisses of infinity

In the Underground,
 where freedom is sacred
 and all things
 open for discussion
let's laugh at the tsar, the pope,
 and even ourselves!

Fie! Fie! Fie-Fie Fee!
Nihil Nada Nobodaddy!

In the Underground
 we talk about the family, marriage,
 taxation, the status of women
 freedom for peasants,
 Elected Assemblies,
and the varieties of Western socialism:
 Saint-Simon, Bakunin, Proudhon,

 plus the Vast-Village Russian socialism
 that grows, some of us think,
 out of the ways of
 our vast rurality

and there is nothing
 the secret police can do about it

Fie! Fie! Fie-Fie Fee!
Nihil Nada Nobodaddy!

In the Underground
 we have our own form of Ghost Dance

We're with them—
 the millions of souls once miserable
 from under the dark Russian sod

and there is nothing
 the tsar can do!

Fie! Fie! Fie-Fie Fee!
Nihil Nada Nobodaddy

13.

Go to the People

There was temptation
 to “believe” in the
 bent-down peasants

golden like
 endless wheat
 in a 7-century Struggle
 for Equity

*

This was the time
 influential writers
 such as Bakunin and Herzen
 pointed to the Russian peasants
 as “born socialists”

It was a tactic
 which read the future like this:
 the middles classes
 increasingly admire the West

but our drive is Slavophilic

Our people are not just greedy strivers
 We're sincere, we have solidarity,
 and the way we already live
 points to socialism!

while the West—
 well, the West is decadent,
 poisoned with vice, selfish,
 and suffused with capitalist mania

*

Of course Anton Chekhov
had some later words
on the worship of peasants—

“In my veins
runs the blood of a
mouzik

& the virtues of a mouzik
do not astound me.”

*

1861

The great Alexander Herzen
published an emigre newspaper in London called
Kolokol (The Bell)



It was “illegal”
but smuggled to Russia
and read by many.

Though Alex II
had just freed the serfs
he took repressive measures
against the universities

Herzen was the first
to urge young people
to “go to the people.”
(*idti v narod*)

“Go to the people. This is where you belong
exiles from science, soldiers of
the Russian nation.”

It was the drumskin of the next generation.

*

1862

Land and Liberty (Zemlia i Volia) was founded,
influenced by the ideas of
Chernyshevsky, Belinsky and Bakunin.

determined to bring about rev
through propaganda,
with assassination being classified as propaganda.

To Zemlia i Volia
violence would speed up th' transformation--

that you couldn't rely on
a vast, swaying mass of
illiterate peasants.

The working class was, as yet, small
and the bougeoisie yet too weak
even to think of selling out.

*

Therefore the revs
had both to educate
and to rouse
the victims

of the tsarist Nobodaddy

*

Hell in '66

There was a short-lived group
in Moscow called "Hell"

a member of which
tried to kill the tsar in '66

*

The Okhrana

The tsar hastened rightward
and he set up the dreaded Okhrana,
a secret police replacing the former Third Section.

The first head of Okhrana, 1866-1874
was Count P. A. Schuvaloff

*

but nothing could stop
the blood on the drumskin
now and again
an action
an outbreak
& blood-spattered
sticks on the skin

*

And then, à la Beatnik,
arose the phenomenon
named Nihilism

which people regarded
as the most
serious of all
revolutionary problems

heh heh heh

The right wing press
always posts its pejoratives:

“Nihilist” “Beatnik,” “Hipster,”
“Yippie,” “Commie” “SDSer”

heh heh heh
danger
heh heh heh

14.

The Revolutionary Catechism

The revolutionary is a doomed human

She has no personal interests
 He has no business affairs or emotions
 She has no attachments or property
 He has no name
 Everything
 is focussed upon
 a single thought
 a single thrill
 a single love:

REVOLUTION

Dum spiro pro revolutione spero

Turgenev first used the name "Nihilist"
 in *Father and Children*
 in 1862
 In Russian it's: НИГИЛИЗМ

Also in the early '60s the first Russian edition of
The Communist Manifesto
 translated by Bakunin

and then, in '69, *The Revolutionary Catechism*
 was writ and passed around
 among the revs

Oh Nihilism
 let's tear it down and pulverize!
 It's evil and rotted

Oh Flames of Nihil!
 Sacredly flaming,
 Burn down this filth of Tsar
 and flogging Count,
 of literary hack and secret police

Burn it & sack it, O Nihil!

Nihilism
 the triumph of the completely rootless individual
 Nihilism
 deny the order, crush the order, break the order
 Nihilism
 free from all social and moral bonds
 Nihilism
 no relationship with any society
 other than freezone Nihilism
 Nihilism
 complete independence, as Lone One's Loning

to Pavel and Yevgenia Chekhov
on January 17, 1860.

Taganrog, a “city” of around 60,000
in South Russia,
600 miles from Moscow
on the northeast shore of the Sea of Azov,
itself an inlet of the Black Sea.

Once a big port for the export of grain
by Chekhov’s childhood
the harbor was silted up

It had the proverbial “gentle inertia”
of provincial Russia

a polluted water type of town
where life was “eked out”
and some of its store signs were misspelled

and where Life itself
was spelled
Li(listless)fe and
Li(brutal)fe

Prisoners from the town jail
pulled carts with produce
from street to street

or searched out stray dogs
in the marketplace
and clubbed them with spiked sticks

in the gazing eyes
of the young man
whose life was spent evolving
from spikes and sticks

*

Not much style
but masses of mud
and a moil of nationalities
in a grain port.

Most of the wealthy grain merchants were Greeks,
and while brutality and boredom etched the city,
Taganrog at the same time was the cultural center
for the surrounding Cossack and Ukrainian boondocks--

There was a cathedral, a new public library,
 a bandshell at the town park, a theater,

& even with its public flogging
 and broken swords
 he always felt Ovid's "odi et amo"
 for his home town,
 Taganrog,
 Sea of Azov

*

Chekhov was relish
 in a sibling sandwich,
 some younger some older.

Alexander born in 1855, Nikolai in 1858,
 Ivan in 1861, Maria in 1863
 and Mikhail in 1865.

*

Memory

His earliest memory
 was hitting hands

"Every morning as I awoke
 my first thought was,
 'Will I be beaten today?'"

After a hitting by daddy,
 Chekhov was made to kiss
 the hitter's hand

*

Father Ran a Store

Father ran a store
 a dark and dirty store
 with coffee, candles, sunflower seeds & oil,
 groceries, tobacco, nails, tea, flour,
 sweets and lamps and wicks
 and vodka

There was a black sign
 with gold letters over the door:

TEA, SUGAR, COFFEE AND OTHER GROCERIES--
TO TAKE HOME OR DRINK ON THE PREMISES.

The store was open from 5AM till 11 PM
At night it was a scrounge-lounge
for the tale-telling yokels—

Anton sometimes tended the store at night
He'd refill the vodka crock
and Mozart the million-fibered tales of a port town
grim, grainy, groany, groiny and graspy
from liquor-loosened lips.

*

Daddy liked to pray a lot
and scam the peasants

One of his favorite store-bore apothegms
was, "Wares without owners go weeping."

One day a rat drowned in a barrel
of cooking oil
and daddy brought in a priest
who chanted a purification
ritual above the oil of *rattus rattus*

so father could sell it.

It was the type of childhood
you count the days to escape

"For us, childhood was sheer suffering."

*

The Floor as a Drum

Dad would take them a couple hours early
to church

and then the family would file home
for the mid-morn break

and sing the hymns just heard
in front of the ikons

Daddy would have them
 lie on the floor
 praying and beating their
 heads on the planks
 in a thumping susurrus

till it was time once again
 to trudge to the final morning mass.

*

Mom was a good story teller
 and father was skilled
 in making adorned ikons
 He read French novels
 and taught himself the violin

For a while he had a tutor in
 French
 come to the house for the kids

*

1867
 Volume One
 Das Kapital

Not many copies in Taganrog

*

It was such a police state
 that Anton's Latin teacher
 at the Taganrog Russian Gymnasium
 spied among the teachers
 for political plots
 and sent off denouncements to the police

*

'69 & '70

When he
 was 9
The Revolutionary Catechism
 was written
 and when he was 10
 Vladimir Ilyich
 Ulanov

(Lenin)
was born.

*

Visuality

In towns from Sumer and Akkad
to Taganrog and Tuscaloosa
every birth, death, and event is everybody's business.

So in Taganrog
the ultrasmart townie named Anton
knew it all—
each muddy alley, every building and spire
each smell, each moil, each mell—

The secret mind began to whisper,
to sort, to sift, to store
the billion-fold feast of particulars

*

In Mitrofaniyevksy Square
ta-tum
ghastly public killings
ta-tum ta-tum
where they broke a sword
ta-tum
on the condemned one's head
to the rattle of sticks on doom-skins
a view little Anton could see and hear
from his nearby window.

*

sledding
in the
town park
smearing his ears
with goose fat
to keep them from
freezing

16.

The Thrill of Greasepaint

When he was a wild 13, in '73,
he was taken for the first time to the theater
to Offenbach's *La Belle Helene*.

He loved the haunts of hocus pocus and logos,
the lure of The Other,
went many times to the theater in Taganrog.

He wrote his first playlets
which he and his brothers
staged at home
with props and scenery.

Other.

17.

The Triumph of Failure

In 1875
his two older brothers, Alexander and Nikolai,
fled to Moscow. One became a journalist,
the other a painter.

The next year father Pavel's store
mothed into the debt-flame, and dad fled to Moscow
to avoid debtor's prison.

The mother, Yevgenia Yakovlevna also went to Moscow
with Chekhov's younger brothers, Ivan and Michael
and sister Maria.

Anton stayed behind
from 16 to 19
an emancipated youth
supporting himself by tutoring

and studying
to pass the tough exams
that would give him

free education
at the university in Moscow.

He gave lessons in the winter

trudging from house to house
with leaky boots and a chilly coat

Maybe it was here that the bacillus
was coughed into his
chilly lungs
and sealed
in skullèd dormancy

18.

Narodniki

While Anton Chekhov
was living his childhood
in Taganrog

the Narodniki
arose from the Russian Underground

Young people
heeding the Underground Press

to go among the masses

*

They learned the Primal Secret
of rev-work:
that secret presses
flambent fliers
and inky exhortations
almost never really entered the lives
of the bent-down masses

so they decided to
“go among the people”
(idti v narod)

which is how they
got the name, “Narodniki”

*

So that
the SDS in
1968
did not invent

the concept of
 “going to the people”

to learn from them
 & prepare them for
 a sharing eco-nomos

*

The Narodnichestvo

This peaceful populist movement
 the *narodnichestvo*,
 inspired by Herzen and Bakunin—
 captured the moment

with its devotion to the People:
 to bring it all together:
 peasant and student
 smooth hand and callused

to heal the chasms
 with peaceful work
 construction, teaching, caring

to create a Native Socialism

*

Famine Roam

In weeks of plenty
 the peasants might have
 a meal of millet porridge
 mixed with hemp-seed oil
 after field work

but there was a horrible famine
 the season of '73
 and oil of hemp gave way
 to goutweed soup
 stale bread
 moistened in water
 & the cold fingers of children
 in snowmelt
 plucking
 sorrel & clover
 to their
 lips.

And when starvation or slumps occurred
 the population
 grew mobile & roaming

Workers would leave the country
 and slave in factories
 then sleep in starvation's tenements

where it was impossible
 to rest and recover
 after a workday
 rarely less than 12, 14, 15, up to 18 hours.

*

1874

The tsarist gov't
 had ordered all students studying abroad
 to return to Russia by Jan. '74
 (where they wouldn't be
 exposed to
 Western ideas, or the
 radical émigré press)

Most came back
 and many joined
 the Narodniki

—*idti v narod.*

*

That spring
 2 or 3 thousand students and activists
 many of them women

“went to the people”
 serving as teachers, agricultural experts,
 veterinarian surgeons, doctors, nurses
 mechanics, midwives, school teachers, governesses,
 factory hands and laborers.

They explained their positions
 and handed out their pamphlets
 looking
 with enormous youthful energy
 for converts

*

The “Mad Summer” of ’74

The campaign of
 idti v narod
 grew ’mid the growing

The press called it
 the “Mad Summer”

this intense
 living leaflet
 of devotion and idealism

*

Get Off My Property

The peasants declined the help
 of these voluntary teachers and helpers,

It’s difficult enough
 for actual rev’s
 to understand the
 phraseology and abstract principles
 of socialism
 much less letterless peasants
 and worn out factory workers

*

Turgenev’s *Virgin Soil*
 about the Narodniki
 among the peasants

The Narod’s didn’t dig it
 and scorned Turgenev

*

Don’t Stop, Don’t Stop

In ’75 thousands returned
 to the villages
 and several thousand young people
 were jailed,

Many of the accused imprisoned or exiled without a formal trial.
 Some were not put on trial till '78
 Scores died in dungeons, some went insane

*

Medicine

In June of '75
 when he was 15,
 Chekhov
 swam in a cold river
 on an outing in the country
 and came down with peritonitis.
 He was cared for by a Dr. Strempf with
 such compassion and skill
 he decided to become a doctor.

*

By 1876
 various splintery Populist groups began to forge
 a theoretical and practical common agenda:

- Large estates were to be split up
 and divided among the peasants
- More power for the village assemblies
 and greater local autonomy

The organization, because of police terror, had to be secret,
 divided into regions, with secret presses, and large numbers of
 sympathizers.

*

1876

There was a second version
 of Land and Liberty (Zemlia i Volia)
 (The original had occurred in '62)

with a clear program:

- kill tsarism “from below”
- promote strikes among workers
- passive resistance among peasants
- “fighting units” to

form the vanguard
of the rev

*

Action Faction, Praxis Axis

In 1879 Land and Liberty split into two groups.
One was Chernyi Perediel
(Black {Earth} Distribution or Black Partition)
with a plan of agrarian socialism, lead by George Plekanov.

Black Earth stressed the triune importance
of education, propaganda and agitation
among the masses.

The second, larger group was
Narodnaia Volia
(The People's Will),
which believed a mass uprising was impossible,
and that the only way to a democratic government
in the Russian autocracy
would come through killing gov't leaders.

The People's Will's Executive Committee
voted to kill the tsar for failing to set up a
Representative Government.

19.

Med School for Anton

In April of '77
Anton visited Moscow for Easter
and was horrified to find his family
sleeping on a single mattress
in a rented room

His father nevertheless
had a list of rules for deportment
on the wall

and beat the younger kids
for transgressions

But dad was drinking
instead of looking for work.
There was no money to

send Maria to school
 One of his older brothers had seduced
 a married woman, who'd left her husband for him.

The med student
 knew it was his destiny
 to lead his family intact
 out of poverty

*

1879

Anton graduated from high school
 (One of his final exams
 required him to spiel for three hours
 on the topic: "There is nothing
 worse than Anarchy")

He moved to Moscow
 to study medicine at the university

In med school he received a stipend
 of 25 rubles a month
 from the city of Taganrog.

Young, brilliant, self-contained
 he scanned the stutter of his family
 and took over leadership

They'd been living in the basement
 of a tenement
 in the red light district

with the tiny windows
 showing at night
 the loitering feet of hookers

They took in boarders
 so that ten people lived in a single room!

His two older brothers, Alexander and Nicolai,
 lead "independent lives." His dad by then worked elsewhere
 and visited once a week.

At home were his two younger brothers, Ivan & Mikhail,
 younger sister Maria, and mother Eugenia,
 plus boarders.

Anton took over,
 forced them to move to a better pad,

The People's Will

In '78 there was the
 "Trial of the 193" Narodniki
 in St. Petersburg
 with sentences given out

so cruel
 a heave of disgust
 rippled throughout the culture

*

The Executive Committee
 of People's Will
 (Narodnaia Volia)
 announced in its sec-pub
 it would kill the tsarist functionaries
 conducting the suppression.

*

Then the People's Will
 under the leadership of Sophia Perovskaia
 and A.I. Zheliabov
 began their executive action

Feb. '79, killed Prince Kropotkin, Gov-Gen of Kharkov
 Mar. '79 unsuccessful attempt on General Drenton,
 head of The Third Section
 April '79 attempted killing of Governor of Kiev
 May '79 Arkhangelsk Chief of Police stabbed
 Sept. '79 they sentenced the tsar to death
 Nov. '79 they tried to derail the royal train
 Feb. '80 the banquet hall of the Winter Palace
 was blown up just as the tsar and family
 were about to sit down to a party
 60 guards were killed

*

When in '79 a member of Zemlia i Volia
 named Soloviev
 tried to kill Alexander II

Jews were forbidden
 to live in Moscow

Chekhov was in med school
 and one of his friends

Five members of
Narodnaia Volia were executed.

Others were sent to Siberia.
Some were imprisoned for decades
in the dungeons of Schlusselfortress.

*

Long-living rumors
stippled with people-pain
were always
part of life
in the rural parts of Russia

So that when Alex II was bombed
the rumor flicked
through th' sticks
he'd been killed
by landlords to prevent
new land distribution

or that the Jews and landlords
in cahoots
killed the tsar
to reintroduce serfdom

& that a secret imperial decree (ukaz)
had been promulgated
allowing for attacks on Jews.

(The same rumor was spread
twenty-two years later,
during the Kishinev pogrom)

*

Pogroms

Pogrom is Russian for "devastation."

Within a few weeks of the tsar's death
the government inspired
a series of pogroms--

The right wing press
stabbed forth
again and again
that some in People's Will were Jewish

*

Pogrom agitation was
 spread by handbills and posters
 tacked on fences, walls, trees
 or tossed in the streets
 calling on people
 to go after the Jews

*

Townies, unemployed workers
 & wandering mouziks looking for jobs
 ransacked Jewish homes and shops,
 doing the My Lai:
 rapes, murders, beatings

The police were slow, slow
 to stop it.

*

Almost 5 million Jews
 lived in the Pale of Settlement
 the legal zone set up
 through the centuries
 where they were made
 to reside

(In '35 the Pale had been
 clearly defined: Lithuania, White Russia
 —that is, Vitbsk and Mogilev minus the
 villages, Little Russia, New Russia,
 and the Baltic provinces)

and with the pogroms of '81
 thousands of Jews fled to the boundaries
 of the Pale

crossing into the German frontier
 the Bohemian frontier
 the Rumanian frontier

*

The Manifesto of April 28, 1881

The new tsar
 the magnificent Alexander III
 announced

he would not discuss the destiny
of Russia
with anyone but God.

*

The Okhrana

The Secret Police expanded
after
th' tsaricide

Okhrana agents were everywhere
They watched every train station
Agents were disguised as
bellhops in every hotel
Agents worked as ushers in theaters
They excelled at the *agent provocateur*
All mail was opened and read
There was a 24-hour store in St. Petersburg
used to supply agents with disguises any time

*

In May of '82
a bunch of "temporary rules"
(which lasted 30 years
and led to massive emigration)
prohibited Jews
from buying or leasing land
or moving from towns to villages
or doing biz on Christian holy days

The gov't wanted to keep them
away from the peasants.

Then quotas were set up
limiting Jewish access
to secondary and university education
to legal and medical professions
to municipal and local governments.

All of it stirred by the Okhrana
and a psychologically demonic
multi-century knownothingism
that pickled rural & townie brains
by the tens of millions

*

Reaction Time

Eras of right wing “reaction”
 seem to foam forth
 every few decades.

Those to whom the word “No,”
 thundered forth with
 a thousand exclamation points,
 !!,
 is the sweet tune of angels,

always rise up,
 as far as they can,
 with their
 tsk-tsking neantifications.

Russian society
 was in the iron grasp
 of a multigrade bureaucracy
 known as the Chin.

The chin was a highly disciplined
 group of guys
 who strutted around
 in splendid uniforms
 with golden-fringed shoulders
 and chests made important
 with ribbons and medals.

The Chin had a network of grades
 divided into 14 levels:

Civil Branch	Military Branch
Imperial Chancellor	Field Marshall
down to	down to
College Registrar	ensign

Everybody from the eighth rank upward
 was automatically
 raised to the nobility.

In the ranks of the Chin,
 the hereditary nobility

and rightist officer corps,
 a belief was formed
 that Nihilism, Rev, and, shudder shudder,
 Anarchism
 came from the secular spirit—

from a sense of being citizens of Europe
 or the world

and rev's only remedy
 (as in the early part of the 19th century)
 lay in the dungeony triad:
 Nationality, Orthodoxy and Autocracy.

*

The plan was to
 force th' Russian language and culture
 on the nationalities and ethnic groups
 in the empire

such as Finland, the Baltic provinces, Polish and the Yiddish
 speaking southwest provinces,
 Tatar-speaking muslims in the Crimea,
 and others

*

Therefore there was a systematic
 police-state persecution
 of Jews, schismatics and so-called heretics.

*

The Wobblies used
 to talk about OBU
 One Big Union--

This was OBR

One Big Russia

and way before Lenin

23.

Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev
(1827-'07)

Pobedonostsev was a professor of constitutional law
at Moscow U

He tutored the sons of Alexander II
and drilled into the tsarlings'
late-Romanov minds
his right wing viewscapes

In 1880 he was appointed the lay head of
the Russian Orthodox Church
(Procurator of the Holy Synod)
a position he filled till the pre-rev rev of '05

He had such a grip on the tsars that
from 1881 through 1904
Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev virtually RAN Russia
He could hire and fire government ministers

He was the J. Edgar Hoover of his era,
and maybe worse.

“Parliaments,” he said,
“are the greatest lie of our time.”

Dostoievsky may have based
The Grand Inquisitor
in *The Brothers Karamazov*
on Pobedonostsev

Any personal opinion was subversive.
Suspicion was the nation's motto.
No more women in higher educational courses
Secondary schools only open to children of the rich
No more administrative autonomy in the universities.
The strictest possible censorship.

*

He persecuted religious groups
such as the Dukhobors
Tolstoy intervened
and helped them emigrate to Canada
and the United States



“The mad clamor for a Constitution
 spells the ruin of Russia.”
 — K.P. Pobedonostsev

*

Chekhov and The Summer of '82

Tall
 broad shouldered
 a wide-brimmed black hat

good manners
 pumping people
 for interesting anecdotes

*

1883

Chekhov was writing a monthly
 column called “Fragments of Moscow Life”
 which brought him close to crimes
 and more importantly
 to the painted parades of the stage.

An editor complained
 some of his stories
 were getting too serious

and then there were final exams
 working in clinics
 visits to hospitals
 the slicing of corpses

and the tossing of ink for the ha-ha's

24.

Medical Practice

1884

In June Anton Chekhov
finished his medical studies
and opened his practice

That summer he worked
in the *zemstsva* system
at the rural hospital in the village of Chikino
not far from Moscow
then at another country hospital at Zvenigorod

First fees:
five rubles for curing a toothache
a ruble for ridding a monk of dysentery
three rubles for the upset stomach of
a vacationing actress

*

He saw the underside
of peas-pov

the evidence of drunkenness, meanness,
tapeworms, diarrhea, suppurating wounds

how vodka was the crack
of the underclass.

In September, back in Moscow
he put a copper placque by the door:
“Anton Chekhov, Medical Doctor.”

How thrilling are middle class accoutrements
after a youth of pov!
rubles for new chairs and furniture
rubles for a piano
and evenings of music!
rubles for paying the grocer with cash not credit

though half of his patients, he noted
“I treat for free, and the other half
give me three or five rubles.”

Doing the Whitman—
publishing his own book,
The Tales of Melpomene

six stories, 96 pages, 60 kopecks
under the name Antosha Chekhonte

Then just a few months
after graduating from med school
possibly from exhaustion
a writer with deadlines
and so many sick patients

there came a dry cough
a bitter taste in the mouth
and blood-spit for three days.
“It’s not tb,” he said.
“It’s likely a ruptured blood vessel.”

*

The Drums

TB is almost always caused
by inhalation of infectious material

breathing in in dried residues of droplets
aerosolized by a cough

Droplets
that can remain
suspended in the air
for long times
and can reach terminal
air passages.

Early in the infection
there’s
a silent bloodstream
spread
seeding
the lymphatic system
& other organs
throughout the body

It can have long periods of latency
th’ bacillus sealed over with tissue

The most prominent
source of infection
is a person with
TB prior to diagnosis—
the closer the contact
and the younger the age

the greater the risk

Just the sort of disease
the young doctor
might have gotten
among the poverty

or it may have lain dormant
from his days going house to house
as a Taganrog tutor

25.

Arise O Workers

1885

Gradually, through the concepts of Workers Circles and Workers Clubs, the workers were organized.

In 1885 was the first mass strike in Russia, in a large textile factory outside Moscow, involving 8,000 workers.

One journalist at the time wrote that “workers are beginning to voice the same demands as the proletariat of Western Europe. The ideas of Marx and the International have begun to infect the Russian proletariat.”

1886

Around 35,000 workers in St. Petersburg went on strike for a shorter work day— ten hours.

Arise O Anton

In '85

he published 129 stories and sketches

26.

Censorship in Late 19th Century Russia

All of his plays and every story
had to be sent to a State censor
before production or printing

Taboo: rad sheets mean streets
 bed sheets church cheats

that is, wild sex, any kind of criticism
of the military or the tsar or
nobility or church or foreign policy,
the promotion of land distribution
or the riling up of the poor—

It's not easy to get
from American libraries
the mechanics of that censorship

A good number of Chekhov's stories were either
chopped up by the Nobodaddies
or rejected.

Maybe scholars
could go into the archives
late in this century
and reinstall the cuts
of late last century?

*

His first run-in came
in '85, when he wrote a one-act play,
On the High Road, adapted from his story, "In Autumnn."

It was set in a decrepit inn on a stormy night,
and starred various derelicts.

It was banned *in toto* by a drama censor named
Kaiser von Nilckheim, on the grounds it
was filthy and morbid.

Is *On the High Road* in the post-Sov archives?

*

Certain right wing newspapers
such as Alexei Suvorin's *Novoya Vrema*
were exempt from pre-censorship
but the editors were responsible
if anything objectionable
blacked the paper

*

Chekhov wrote for *Fragments*,
Nikolai Leikin's well known St. Petersburg humor mag

Leikin would pre-censor Chekhov's stories. If a Chekhov tale, say, spoke of the peasants being drunk at Easter, then, scritch scratch, the pencil would edit it out.

Even so, the censor would still blue-pencil sections that seemed allude to the tsar, the army, the church, & eros

*

The censorship agency for printed works was apparently called "The Bureau of Press Affairs."

*

In early '86
Chekhov's
"For the Information
of Husbands"
was so badly cut
by the censors
its fee
in *Fragments*
was reduced by 10 rubles!!

*

Around 1887
He sketched a tale
"The Story of My Patient,"
about a rev
who does underground work
and over time concludes
that the ethical implications
of what he does
mean more to him
than the implications
of Ideology

He had, in '87, no hope of publishing
anything so lucid and open
about rev violence

In an 1891 letter to one Mikhail Albov, editor of *The Northern Herald*, Chekhov announced he's sending the story, and said he doubted it would pass censorship: "Once you've read it, you can decide what to do. If you feel the censors will pass it, have it set and announce its publication, but if when you've read it you find my doubts well founded, please return it to me without having it set or read by the censors, because if the censors reject it, it will be awkward

for me to send it to a censorship-free publication: once a publisher finds out the story has already failed to pass, he'll be afraid to publish it."

In the fall of '91 he worked more on the story
and read the first few lines
to Suvorin who said he could
never dare to publish it in *Novoye Vremya*,

but in the writer's mode of
Never Give Up
he revised the manuscript in the fall of '92
(self-censorship) and Vakol Lavrov's
left-liberal *Russian Thought (Russkaya Mysl)*
published it in Feb. of '93
as "An Unknown Man's Story." — passing through
censorship without a single change.

*

In a letter to Anna Yevreinova,
publisher of *Northern Herald*,
in March of '89, he told her he
was working on a novel:

"Oh what a novel! If it weren't for the accursed censorship situation, I'd promise it to you in November. There's nothing in the novel inciting anyone to revolution, but the censors will ruin it anyway. Half the characters say, 'I don't believe in God,' it has a father whose son has been sent to life-long forced labor for armed resistance, a police chief who is ashamed of his uniform, a marshal of the nobility whom everyone hates, etc. There's a wealth of material for the red pencil."

*

In another lengthy story, "Three Years," about the decline of a family in the mercantile atmosphere of Moscow,
the censors cut a number of sections that talked of religion.

*

When he was writing *The Wood Demon*, he
wrote to Suvorin
"My only fear is that the censors
won't pass it."

*

From Chekhov's 1896 Diary

"N. stayed with me from the 15th to 18th August. He has been forbidden (by the authorities) to publish anything: he speaks contemptuously now of the younger G, who said to the new Chief of the Central Press Bureau that he was not going to sacrifice his weekly *Nedelya* for N.'s sake and that 'we have always anticipated the wishes of the censorship'... From me he went on to L.N. Tolstoy."

*

The Censors' power slowly ebbed
during Chekhov's career.

but right up to the end of his life
such as when he finished *The Cherry Orchard*
great Chekhov
groveled his work past
the Nobodaddies

*

Censors as Critics

A censor's certificate
was needed
to do *The Lower Depths*
at the Moscow Art Theater
in '03

They refused it.

Nemirovich-Danchenko
went to St. Petersburg
for Gorky

and fought
with the censors
sentence by sentence
and word by word

Finally they granted
permission

Why?
Because the authorities
were sure the play would bomb
and have no effect.

*

And now we return
to Chekhov's early fame

27.

1885

On holiday
at a friend's estate

he was using a sewing-machine lid
as a scriptoire.

The peasants
heard there was a doctor there
& hundreds if them
came for care
"I've earned a total of one ruble,"
he wrote a friend

*

After a brain-rack sess'
with a friend
one of the titles
for his new book
(published as *Motley Tales*)
was
"Buy This Book or You'll Get
A Punch in the Mouth"

*

Getting Noticed

Alexei Suvorin
right wing press magnate
(former liberal)
read Chekhov's "The Huntsman"

and asked him to write
for *Novoye Vremya*, or
New Times,
his big-time daily.

It was big-time money
for the first time

—on the level of Hemingway
 or Fitzgerald
 writing for the glossy monthlies

*

The celebrated writer Dmitry Grigorovich
 who forty years earlier
 had “discovered” Dostoevsky

wrote Chekhov
 in March of '86

urging him to give up his pseudonym:

“You have *real* talent,
 one which elevates you above
 the generation of young writers”

and insisted on Chek’s new book,
Varicolored Stories, or
 Motley Tales, Jan. '86,
 appear with his real name

but Anton wrote back it
 had already been printed,
 and how dissatisfied
 he was with *Motley Tales*

“It’s a hodge podge
 an indiscriminate conglomeration
 of the tripe I wrote as a student,

PLUCKED BARE BY THE CENSORS
 and humor sheet editors.

I have 100s of friends
 in Moscow
 a few of whom are writers

& I don’t recall a single one of them
 reading my things
 or viewing me as an artist

In the five years I have hung around
 newspaper offices
 I have grown used to the
 overall view that my writing is insignificant.

I am a doctor, and up to my eyeballs in medicine

29.

The Song of the Malevolent Clique

They've babbled in Babylon
 addled in Akkad
 and mumbled in Memphis

sneering & leering & spearing
the malevolent literary clique

Through all of the time of letters:
 through Greece, Rome, Byzantium,
 and the 1302 Florence of Dante—
 through Paris, through Pushkin, through Poe

grousing & groaning & grailing
the malevolent literary clique

He hated the clans of the literati,
 their stupid intrigues
 their fierce ambitions
 the gravity pulling
 the drool to their lips
 as they bowed and scraped

The bitten-turnip world of the
 doomed and elderly scribe
 and the rutabaga tart
 of the youth-pack hack

staring & stealing & stoning
the malevolent literary clique

As Chekhov wrote to his brother,
 "Newspaper guys suffer from a sickness
 named jealousy. Instead of rejoicing
 in your good fortune,
 they ooze out their venom!"

Clique Hack A:

I do adore the *eau*
 of these euphuistic eulogies—
 this twilight twitter—
 but only fire can make a fritter

to flee in the name of *mens sana*.

Raw Thrill is always the finest thrill
 and in his early career
 no thrill out-thrilled
 the one-time excitement
 of visiting places
 where he was famous

 and where the marching bands
 of honor and accolade
 (for at least the first visit)
 would oompah
 his arrival

*

When Lenin
 went to Kazan U
 in the fall of '87

he was drawn
 almost at once
 to student disorders

Ahh, student disorders!
 when you are
 not yet bewebbed
 by career and family
 dust and duty

Ahh, student disorders!
 when you stand
 at the
 Outer Surface

and dare to gaze
 at Eternity

Lenin was thrown out of school
 after three months
 and escorted by the police
 to the city limits

*

That same fall
 Chekhov was troughed in depression—

31.

The Rubles of Ivanov

1.

Chekhov
 was promised
 8%
 of th' box office
 for the premiere run
 of *Ivanov*

& eagerly
 tallied the possible cash

It looked
 like the then huge
 6,000 rubles!!

Sacred Russia!

2.

Then
 the rehearsals,
 supposed to be 10,
 were cut to 4

uh oh

3.

On opening night
 some of
 the actors
 ad libbed
 forgotten lines
 & were drunk
 by Act IV

Thespis forbid

4.

Though there were
 curtain calls

at the end of several acts,

the final act
brought tensions of yes-no,
what Chekhov called
“applausamento-hissing”

so dear later on
to The Futurists—

There were knuckles on faces,
 hisses and stamping feet,
 spittle and elegant shovings--
till the cops were called
 to cleave 'tween boos and hurrahs

all of which shortened the run,
and a wreck of the rubles for Chekhov

*

Never Give Up

Ivanov closed after two perf's
& Chekhov went to Petersburg
where he gave a reading
 of *Ivanov*
 to a “literary circle”
 and stared down at his shoes
 during the
 mighty applause
 at the end

At a dinner party
he met the poet Alexei Pleshcheev
who 38 years before
had been in the
 “Petrashevsky Circle”
 with Dostoievsky

and had stood with Fyodor
before the firing squad
and then just
 before bullet-slam
Nicholas I commuted the off
to soul-twist Siberia.

32.

1888

He began his great story, "The Steppe"
in January

It was published in March
in the Northern Herald
to the shouts of "Genius! Genius!"
from public and critic

*

The Lure of Natural Beauty for Writing

In May, he rented a dacha on an estate, in the Ukraine,
near the village called Luka
on the Psyol River.

There was more room
for the 8-person family
he supported

*

The Lure of Lissome Grease Paint

After the round-the-clock work
on "The Steppe"

he fluffed forth
a one-act farce, *The Bear*,
a great source of royalties

& wrote such "curtain-raisers" as
The Swan Song &
The Proposal
in 1888

for the money, and for the lissomeness—
for he seemed always willing to hang out
with beautiful actresses.

*

Readers in a police state
search lines for the hidden
forbidden

and the most absolute freedom imaginable,
freedom from violence and lies.”

*

Chorus of Critics:

Tell us your views take a stance
Take a stance take a stance

Chekhov:

simplicity
 sincerity
precise
 and non-slop descriptions
combined with “nonintervention”
by the author

because the author
by stating his/her
solution to
 to the problem
is taking unfair
 advantage
 of the reader

Th’ reader must
draw its own conclusions
based on the evidence
with complete freedom

*

Two Interesting Events

At the end of the year
 the Pushkin Prize
 from the Academy of Sciences
 to Chekhov
 for his collection, *At Twilight*

and in the kitchen of
 his family’s house,
 Lenin at 18 first read Marx.

33.

The Year of the Wood Demon
1889

February

The revised version of Ivanov
at the Alexandrinsky Theater in Petersburg.

Chekhov made last minute changes
and the famous lead actor
threatened to quit

—Aeschylus Aeschylus—

It was a triumph of whacked palms
Chekhov joined the actors on stage
his legs feeling weak and buckly
his ticker tick-pounding

in the ego-bronze
of tossed flowers
and weeping fans

*

In March, '89
Chekhov wrote to Suvorin,
“Guess what, I’m writing a novel!!!
And what an intricate plot!
I’ve called it
Stories from the Lives of My Friends.”

*

By late winter the
novel was taking up all his time
This was when he wrote his friend Anna Yevreinova
“Oh, what a novel!
If it were not for the curséd censorship,
I’d promise it to you in November.
There’s nothing in the book
inciting anyone to revolution
but the censors will
ruin it anyway.
Half the characters say,
‘I do not believe in God,’
and there is a father

whose son
 has been sentenced to life at hard labor
 for armed struggle.”

By the end of '89
 Chekhov felt it
 would never pass the censor
 & decided to destroy the manuscript—

or did he?
 Time to look for it in the post-Sov
 archives

*

Also in March, '89
 his older brother Nikolai, nicknamed Kolya,
 described in the Chekhov literature as a
 painter with many unfinished canvases
 & a grumpy alcoholic,
 came down with typhus.
 Chekhov cured him, but discovered
 what they call “galloping consumption”

For the second straight spring and summer
 Chekhov rented a house
 for his family in the Ukraine

He brought Nikolai with him
 but his brother wasted quickly, sleeping in a chair

*

May 4

“Last night
 I remembered I'd promised
 a farce for the actor Konstantin Varlamov

Today I wrote it
A Tragedian in Spite of Himself
 and I've already sent it off.”

*

Chekhov tended to his brother
 till mid-June

when his older brother Alexander
arrived to replace him

& he went away with friends
for a five-day rest.

“Never in my life shall I forget
the muddy road, the grey sky,
the tears on the trees”

when in the morning
a peasant came from the town
with a wet telegram,
“Nikolai is dead.”

It was the first time
the Chekhov family
had seen a coffin in their house.

*

Later in the summer
he went to Odessa

and then to Yalta
in the hot south

wrote a major tale,
“A Dreary Story,”

which shook up the critics
who had long begun
to assemble in smile-snarls
looking for Chekhov to fall

During this
he finished *The Wood Demon*

It had begun as a collaboration
between Chekhov and Suvorin

but after one scene Suvorin lost interest
and Anton continued it.

On October 5, Chekhov submitted it to the censor.
and then an “unofficial theatrical committee”
of three liberal professors
convened in St. Pete

to determine whether
The Wood Demon

was suitable for production
 at the gov't-run Imperial Theater

Tough luck, Anton

They decreed that *The Wood Demon*
 was a
 “beautiful dramatized novel,
 unsuitable for the stage.”

*

Never Give Up— Part II

Chekhov
 immediately reworked it
 and the Abramov Theater in Moscow
 put it on,
 with an opening night of 12-27-'89.

*

The hero of *The Wood Demon*
 is a doctor who vehemently
 tries to save forests and wild species
 from stupid destruction

—Chekhov constantly mentioned
 the degradation of the environment,
 excessive clearcutting,
 river-fouling and illness
 from industrial pollution
 in his oeuvres
 (see, for instance, “The Steppe,” or “In the Ravine”)

In *The Wood Demon* the doctor gives
 a speech
 that might in our era have
 been delivered at a convention
 of the Sierra Club:

“The timberlands of Russia
 are moaning beneath the ax
 Billions die
 The habitat of birds and animals
 are destroyed
 Rivers go shallow and dry up

They shapes of landforms
 are gone forever
 The climate devastated
 and each day finds the earth
 more poor and ugly.”

*

The critics devoured the play
 down to the spine
 and Chekhov withdrew it
 from his works.

*

Never Give Up— Part III

During th’ next few seasons
 he reworked it very much,
 and it appeared eight years later
 as *Uncle Vanya*.

*

It’s all batter
 for the Divine Waffle

*

The Hovering Minus Sign

Chekhov was feeling
 down down down
 at year’s end ’89

In January he was turning thirty
 The failure of his play
 The death of his brother
 He distrusted his own work
 It was so hasty

“As a writer I’m a complete ignoramus”
 he wrote to Alexei Suvorin.

Around that time
 he chanced upon some notes
 his brother Mikhail had taken at a criminal law
 course.

It made him meditate about prisons:

“We focus all our thought on the
 criminal BEFORE his sentence
 is given. Then, once in prison,
 we pay no attention at all.

WHAT HAPPENS IN PRISON?”

(It sounds like the million-prisoner (plus) USA of the '90s.)

He decided to travel to a distant penal colony,
 bleak and recently acquired,
 on the island of Sakhalin
 in the Pacific just north of Japan.

where convict-colonizers
 were sent

and write what he saw.

He would escape the
 blasts of bitter-shitter critics
 (and the relentless pressure
 of his era
 on writers
 to “be useful”)

and go where suffering and injustice
 were touchable

*

Not many cared.
 The subject of prison colonies
 in 1890
 was about as popular
 as, say, discussing
 waste reduction in a big U.S. city
 in 1990

“The much glorified 1860s
 did NOTHING
 for the sick
 and the people in prison,”
 he wrote to Suvarin

*

Research Methods

Chekhov researched in St. Petersburg,
 compiling 65 books—
 penology, history of Sakhalin's colonization,
 the island's native people, memoirs of travelers,
 wildlife and natural resources.

*

Chekhov met with the head
 of the National Prison Administration,
 who immediately wrote to the director
 of the prison at Sakhalin
 to keep Chekhov from interviewing political prisoners.

*

Back in Moscow
 his sister Maria
 and her student friends
 at the women's teachers college

were his research assistants
 looking up articles in periodicals
 and translating from languages he couldn't read

*

Suvorin gave him a 1,500 ruble advance
 for a series
 he would write
 for *Novoye Vremya*
 called "Travels Across Siberia"

34.

1890

His sixth book of stories,
 Morose People,
 dedicated to his friend Tchaikovsky.

*

That late winter or spring o' '90 were
 student demonstrations--
 they wanted autonomy for the university
 the admission of Jews & women without quotas

the lowering of tuition
and the ending of police surveillance.

There were fights with the Cossacks
arbitrary arrests

Chekhov followed the dems
picked up a leaflet
and wrote the demands
to his friend Suvorin,
in a letter that shows Chekhov's
struggle with anti-Semitism
and cynicogyny:

"I think the flames are being fanned most forcefully
by a bunch of young Jews and by the sex
that is dying to get into the university,
though five times worse prepared than the men,
while even the men are miserable prepared
and with rare exceptions make
abominable students."

*

Sakhalin

The journey to Sakhalin
was 10,000 versts
by train, boat, and back twisting coach

A verst is ca. 3,500 feet: so the trip was 6,629 miles.

*

Gasping
at the edge of
the huge Siberian plain.

Writing five articles for *Novoye Vremya*,
as he paused to rest for a week
in Tomsk, Siberia.

*

July 9, Chekhov
journeyed through the Tatar straights
viewing the island of Sakhalin
looming nigh

arrived on July 11

*

Sakhalin had five penal colonies.
 There was an element of
 Hotel California about it—
 You could check out
 but never leave

and so when a prisoner served his/her time,
 he/she had to remain as a settler

*

The military governor
 allowed him access to the archives
 and to talk to all
 but the political prisoners

*

He drew up a 13-point questionnaire
 for the residents
 and had the local print shop print it

Every morning at 5 AM he began his
 rounds to question the prisoners.

□ He compiled a census on 10,000 convicts & settlers

He saw daily beatings

& convicts chained to wheelbarrows
 slaving on their stomachs
 in the mines

*

The Barrows of Evil

“I had conversations with convicts
 handcuffed to wheelbarrows.”



*

He asked to view a lashing

The prisoner had been sentenced to 90 blows
A doctor took a look
to see if the whipee could stand all 90

Other convicts
milled around the whip zone
while the victim was strapped
to the bench

A guard counted off the lashes
"1, 2, 3....."
in a hellcalm chant

The whipper whipped five times on one side
then waited thirty seconds

walked to the other side of the victim
and whipped five more

The victim screamed
his nakedness swelling in red-blue welts
of pain-skin

He shouted for mercy, then screamed, then vomited
then moaned & rasp-gasped
& no more words

For nights it swirled in Chekhov's sleep:
"I dreamed of the torturer
and the disgusting whipping-bench."

*

All women practiced prostitution

The Fates
 snipped not his
 golden threads

and he steamed past Vietnam
 to Singapore, and up the
 Straits of Malacca
 past Sumatra to Ceylon/Sri Lanka
 where he had
 some wild hours
 in a coconut grove
 one night
 with a dark-eyed damsel

he could brag about
 among males
 back in Moscow.

From Sri Lanka
 up the Red Sea through
 the Suez Canal

up past Mt. Sinai,
 past the glory of Ionia
 up the Bosphorus
 past Constantinople
 to the Black Sea
 to dock at Odessa
 at the mouth of the Dniester

on 12-1-'90
 a voyage of 2 months.

*

Chant Against Torture and Cruel Punishment

Chekhov:

“It may be pointed out
 relevantly
 that jurists and penologists
 consider corporal punishment to include more
 than beating with fists or birch rods

It also includes shackling, the ‘cold’ treatment,
 the schoolboy ‘no dinner,’ ‘bread and water,’ prolonged
 kneeling, repeated touching of the forehead to the ground,
 and binding the arms.

This inventory has made me suffer.

Corporal punishment has a
bad effect on physical health.”

*

It took Chekhov five years
amidst his medical practice,
the crafting of tales,
and a bewilderingly complicated
life as a scientist, bon vivant
and a person
keeping up contacts

to turn out his book on Sakhalin

*

He did not
investigate
the dungeons of
Schusselburg fortress

where so many
political prisoners
died or went insane.

*

Whis... Whis... Whisper

The trip to Sakhalin
seemed to displease
the big city
intelligentsia

They whispered he was dried up
Lost his chops
That he was just a product
of the right wing nut
Alexei Suvarin

That he needed
those distant convicts
to find some facts

to stir his dried-out dearth

35.

1891

In January, he went to St. Petersburg, but was
depressed and put off by the geekiness
of the hungry-for-others'-failure of the literati.

It was then he wrote,
"Were I to shoot myself, it would afford great pleasure
to nine-tenths of my friends and admirers."

*

As if to defy the whisperers
in March of '91
he went to Western Europe
for the first time

with Alexei Suvorin.

Vienna, then Venice, Rome, and Naples

*

It's all Material for Short Stories

"I road horseback to
the foot of Vesuvius
It was so rough
I felt as if I'd been to the secret police
and been flogged!"

What a torture to climb Vesuvius
Mountains of lava
congealed waves of molten minerals
You take one step forward
and fall a half step back
sometimes in ashes up to the knees!

Two and a half hours it took!
You're ashamed to turn back
for fear of ridicule
I stood at the edge of the crater
and looked down into it
as if I were looking into a teacup
The surrounding earth
is covered with a thick

coating of sulphur
and gives off a dense vapor

Sparks and red-hot rocks fly everywhere
and smoke pours out of the crater,
while Satan lies snoring beneath the smoke.

I now believe in hell
The lava is so hot
that a copper coin
will melt in it”

*

Then Nice, then Paris —saw the Paris World Exposition
and the Eiffel Tower
and back to Moscow, May 2.

*

Pogroms of '91

The tsar's anti-Semitic uncle
became governor-general of Moscow
and all 30,000 Jews were brutally expelled
on the first day of Passover

The sick were moved on stretchers.

This happened in other Russian cities
and I've not found a word about it
in Chekhov's letters

*

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin
was living “under restrictions”
in Samara, 1,000 miles away from St. Petersburg

but his mother, who had pull,
convinced officialdom
to let him take the law exams
in St. Petersburg

In the fall of '91, he passed the bar exams with honors
and was admitted to the bar.

He opened a law practice
in his home city in Samara, Simbirsk

trashing hospitals and attacking the doctors
who had come to fight the cholera epidemic, whom
the mouziks accused of poisoning their wells.

*

Lenin on Famine

At twenty-four, the utterly obsessed Lenin
already looked old, bald and scorch-faced.

When the peasants gathered in the city where Lenin lived,
a committee was formed to help the hungry.

He had the same weakness
as other leftists
in viewing the famine as a goad for the growth of
the urban proletariat:

“The famine is the direct consequence
of a particular order.
So long as that order exists,
famines are inevitable.”

*

The police state feared riots
and censored
newspaper accounts
of the hunger

It forbade private collections
for the victims
Only the Red Cross and the Church
were allowed to help

Tolstoy
defied them,
collected large sums
and with his daughters
set up 100s of soup kitchens

*

Chekhov followed Tolstoy

The peasants were eating the horses
that would have pulled their plows
the upcoming spring
or selling them for nothing.

His plan was to purchase horses
 in the provinces
 East of Moscow,
 fatten them over the winter
 then give them to the peasants
 in time for planting.

He placed ads in journals
 wrote 100s of letters to friends
 and gathered rubles
 from rich landowners

*

During famines the peasants
 would strip the thatch
 from their roofs
 to feed livestock



*

And in his mode
 of knowing for himself
 he traveled twice
 in the cold, dread winter
 to the provinces

helping to distribute
 grain, coal and portable stoves

Don't kill your horses
 he went by sleigh
 Don't sell your horses
 by sleigh by sleigh
 in the utter cold
 village to village
 One night he was lost in a snowstorm
 and risked getting buried

37.

Melikhovo

Because of his fame
 his time-track was spilling
 with admirers & sightseers
 He was feeling “rickety”
 He HAD to get out of Moscow

so in February of '92
 the winter of the famine
 he purchased an estate
 near the village of Melikhovo
 two hours from Moscow

It had a ten-room one-story house
 on 575 acres
 250 of which were forests
 with two ponds

The price was 13,000 rubles
 His friend Suvorin advanced
 him 5,000 and co-signed
 the mortgage

*

**Even in the 19th Century
 There Were Hideous Closing
 Costs**

It cost about
 1,000 rubles
 in various
 scam-fees

(sounds like our own era)

to get past the greed-heads
 and own Melikhovo

*

At the age of 32
 the boy from Taganrog
 with snow-soggy shoes—
 The grandson of serfs
 an estate!

A gift from his memory lobes
his language lobes
vast vim
& flowin' ink!

*

Few things more thrilling
than watching great Gaia shoot green
through melting snow
in a new country home

working on the hotbeds
building starling houses
hanging curtains
moving curtains
digging a well
patching the roof
cementing the stove tiles
repairing fences and sheds
and installing an indoor toilet!

*

He planted 80 apple trees, 60 cherries
and firs and elms,
rose and lilac bushes.

"We have sowed 38 acres of rye
I busy myself with the orchard
Such a wealth of raspberries and strawberries!
Many plum and apple trees

The best thing is our alley of lindens."

*

In years to come
a reputation
among the locals
for a way
with roses

*

Dialogue

Stare at the pond's edge
for an hour or two

mark out new paths through the woods
go horseback riding
loving the smell of fresh mown hay

then head to his study
to work on "The Grasshopper."

*

The slight
"thwocking" sound
of mushrooms being plucked
and arranged
in a wicker basket

in the woods
after a rain

*

Maria's narrow room
at Melikhovo
with a large photo
of her brother
above the bed

*

She hated being away from him
She was his confident
A tireless researcher & letter writer
Did the accounts
Protected his privacy
Gave up marriage

*

Love of Houseguests

The family loved the action
from fame

His mother Yevgenia
spent much of her time cooking

His father stayed out of the way
but kept a log of guests

Ahh the mooches and visitors!
Painters, poets, young women
with manuscripts,
brothers with children, local doctors,
playwrights, editors buzzing for Gaia

Guests slept four to a room
they snored in the hallways
or any available prone-zone
throughout the house.

*

Trying to finish “Ward #6”
on Easter weekend '92
with the ink-addling aura of guests
and “I haven’t
gotten a single line written!”

*

The Woodcock

One of the houseguests
was the landscape painter Isaac Levitan
a friend of Chekhov
from his days at the university

Russian men loved to
traipsed in the copse
with guns
to give little animals
some lead

So it was on a fine spring day
in Melikhovo
—April 18, '92—
such a famous day
as to be a gnomish warning
to be careful around
minds great or small
—you’ll wind up in their books and plays!

Levitan shot at a bird
which fell wounded
by his feet

“It had a long beak, large dark eyes,
and fine plumage.”

It looked at the painter and writer
with astonishment
Levitan closed his eyes
and begged Doctor Chekhov,

“Kill it.”

“I can’t.”

The bird continued its stunned stare.
Finally Chekhov killed it.

“One lovely, amorous creature less,”
he wrote,
“and two imbeciles went back home
and sat down to table.”

*

Wait a Minute, I’m in Your Story!

Just few days after the shooting
a literary bitter-buzz
came out of Moscow
over Chekhov’s latest story,
“The Grasshopper,”

Isaac Levitan was having an affair
with Sofia Kuvchinnikova
the wife of a doctor
friend of Chekhov

and Levitan saw himself
limned in “The Grasshopper”
as the cynical, leching painter
whom the wife of a doctor was balling

Levitan severed with Chekhov
and contemplated a
Pushkinian duel challenge
and Sofia Kuvchinnikova
reproached her husband’s friend
for the ink

“I was in Moscow yesterday,”
Anton wrote on April 29,
“and almost smothered there

from boredom and all kinds of reproach

An acquaintance of mine, a woman of 42,
has recognized herself in the 20 year old heroine
of my story

and all Moscow is accusing me of libel.”

Chekhov stood firm in the
adage of ink:
“hang with me
hang in my stories”

*

Vladimir Lenin
was 22 when he read
“Ward # 6”
(the last story Chekhov
published in Suvorin’s *Novoye Vremya*)

& it gave the future leader of Russia
an attack of “genuine anxiety...
I could no longer
stay in my room
I stood up & went outside.
I felt that I myself
was locked up
in Ward #6.”

38.

Femina Femina

Women fall for Chekhov
Even in 1996

He’s viewed as one of the most fair
most sensitive
and for a man just about
the best scope on the
women of 19th century Russia

& a century ago
they came to Melikhovo
the lissome damozels of ‘92-‘95
to visit the fatal genius

He had a male perception
of women as voracious grabbers:

“Women grab men’s youth,
but not mine”
he wrote to Alexei Suvorin

*

Through his sister
he met an 18-year-old teaching assistant
at the school where Maria taught:
Lika Mizinova

She was beautiful,
and had a fine singing voice.

Chekhov and Lika Mizinova
had met before he went to Sakhalin
back in '90

and he invited her to Melikhovo
that first spring.

In his letters to her, ordinarily
very cagy and tinged with aloofness
lines of need spun through:
“I’m looking forward to seeing you,
dreaming of your arrival
as a Bedouin in the desert
dreams for water.”

and, “I miss you. I’d give five rubles for a chance
to speak to you, if only for five minutes.”

*

Lydia Yavorskaya

Another visitor that summer was the actress
Lydia Yavorskaya
Henri Troyat says Yavorskaya
was “young and sinuous”
with “flirtatious ways”

She was an “exquisitely beautiful blonde”
wrote exceptional Chekhov scholar Simon Karlinsky

*

Tatyana Shchepkina-Kupernik

And then there was the
 stunning teen-age perf-poet
 Tatyana Shchepkina-Kupernik
 who showed up on the scene
 in the early '90s

Karlinsky avers there were
 low standards in Russian poetry
 that she wrote trite doggeral

 but three of her comedies had been produced
 at the Maly and Korsh Theaters
 by the time she was 20

Karlinsky says she formed with
 her friend Lydia Yavorskaya
 a kind of a sexual freedom league
 and that they balled
 both Chekhov and Suvorin

*

Pushy stunners
 are barrier-breakers
 It was Kupernik
 who three years later
 helped patch up
 Chekhov's quarrel
 with the painter Levitan

*

And then there was the tiny, raven-tressed, elegant
 and married writer Lydia Avilova
 who fell for Mr. Aloof too
 chased him for years
 & wrote a book about it

*

Plus also the "ravishing Ukrainian actress"
 Maria Zankovetskaya
 with whom he spent time in early '93
 told her he'd write a play for her,
 sure, Anton, sure
 spent a night with her drinking champagne,
 and they toboganned together

down an icy hill near St. Petersburg

*

And others
You can find them
in the archives

39.

A Hunger to Cure

*an actual earth of value to
construct one....*

—Charles Olson

The peasants lined up at dawn
from as far as 25 miles from Melikhovo

He saw them for free
giving out free the medications brought from Moscow

*

July Cholera Epidemic

1892

He was the medical supervisor
of the district around Melikhovo
to fight the oncoming cholera

He gave free treatment
to over 1,000 peasants
that summer

Stopped writing, to heal.

*

Cholera

An acute, watery diarrheal disease
caused by *Vibrio cholerae*
anaerobic bacteria
that grow “on relatively
simple media”

Fluid loss may be extreme
exceeding one liter per hour

Cholera
 in epidemics
 is mainly waterborne
 from voluminous liquid stools
 soaking the clothing and linens

The setting for epidemics
 is extreme poverty
 & lack of pure water

It can kill
 you in 4-6 hours

sunken eyes, hoarse voice,
 thirst, faint heart sounds,
 severe muscle cramps

*

I am Utterly Alone (the summer of '92)

Chekhov:

“We district doctors are prepared; we have a definite plan of action, and there is every reason to believe that we will also decrease the percentage of cholera deaths in our regions. We are without assistants; we will have to be doctors and attendants at one and the same time. The peasants are crude, unsanitary and mistrustful, but the thought that our labors will not be in vain makes it all almost unnoticeable.

Of all the Serpukhov doctors
 I am the most pitiful,
 my carriage and horses are mangy,

I don't know the roads,
 I can't see anything at night,
 I have no money,

I tire very quickly,
 and most of all— I can't forget
 that I ought to be writing.....

I am completely and utterly alone.”

*

The fall of '92 the epidemic ebbed.

*

Chekhov: Cosmologist

“Perhaps the universe
is suspended on the
tooth of some
monster.”

40.

Idti v Narod: Not Just Talking About It 1893-1896

He supervised and planned the building of a local school
and later two more schools in
neighboring villages the next 3 years

collected books for libraries,
including his hometown Taganrog
to which he directed, o’er time,
1,000s of books

He talked local officials into building a local highway
and built for the locals a beautiful bell tower
for their church

Doing it, not just talking theory
Doing it not just talking

*

Walking
through the garden
with his two dachhunds
Bromide & Quinine
the summer of '93

*

The Writings of '93

“The Chorus Girl”
“Story of An Unknown Man”
“Sakhalin Island”

(the latter published
in six installments
in *Russkaia Mysl*)

*

A famous young novelist
named Ignaty Potapenko
came to Melikhovo
the summer o' '93

He played the violin
and had a passable baritone
Lika Mizinova had a beautiful voice
& Chekhov liked to hear them
at the piano
singing the art songs
of Glinka and Tchaikovsky

*

Fun in Five

In Moscow from Melikhovo
He met his women friends
in room 5
at the Grand Hotel

Lika, Lydia, Lydia, Tatyana
and a couple of others

*

Thirty-three
& maybe slightly actress-batty
in fin de siecle Moscow

known
in his visits to Moscow that fall
for his partying:

“Never have I felt so free
I have no apartment
so I live wherever I please
I still don't have a passport,
and..... girls girls girls.”

*

In Nov. '93

Lydia Yavorskaya signed one of her
letters to him from Rome,
a measure of her flame:

“I miss you and love you.
Your Lydia.”

Yavorskaya later destroyed her
letters from Chekhov
when she married
a nobleman in late '96
and became a Princess

*

Birth Control

Famous in his own time
& a hundred years since
for his ethical behavior
and as a doctor
Chekhov no doubt
knew what there was to know
about birth control

but there's nothing in the textbooks
about birth control techniques
in the randy late-19th century Russian theater

Actress and author interruptus
was an obvious possibility

and the literature says that
sheaths of sheep's-gut
were used

and by the 1880s the Germans
and perhaps the Dutch
had invented cervical caps

plus old remedies
for early miscarriage:
pennyroyal
or other herbal combinations.

The whole subject, then as now,
of private touching private:
risky, brisky, and tssk-tssky

*

That fall Lika Mizinova
 learned about her
 hot rival Lydia Yavorskaya

and sent him
 a mock-dread letter:

“Mme Yavorskaya spent the evening with us
 She told us Chekhov was charming &
 she wanted to marry him,
 whatever it took,
 & I promised to do all in my power
 for your mutual happiness.....”

Write me a few lines
 to tell me whether
 you are in love with Lydia Yavorskaya—
 Write them to me, of course,
 and not to her!

Write, I beg you!”

*

Chekhov aloofed himself
 & just weeks later Lika
 and Ignaty Potapenko
 began an affair

Potapenko abandoned his wife and kids
 and traveled to Paris with Lika
 where soon she was pregnant

*

Chekhov stored the affair
 for a later oeuvre-insertion.

41.

1894

A cough cough
 shakes the soul
 cough cough
 tears the key from the latch
 cough cough

axes the life-roots
 cough cough
 cuts thought
 guts art

In February of '94
 the cough was such a threat
 though he tried to foist it off
 as bronchitis

that he went south to the Crimea
 like someone now
 might fly to Barbados
 to shake the flu

*

Had a small
 studio
 built behind the
 Cherry Orchard

to hide
 for ink-glide

He called it the "Oven" or his "Doll's House"
 and there he wrote
 "The Peasants,"
 "The Story of an Unknown Man"
 "Three Years," "Ariadne"
 and *The 'Gull*

*

The Haystack-Eros Synapse

In one of his letters
 almost a haiku
 on the curves and smells
 of fresh-tossed grass:

"Two hours on a haystack
 & you'll think yourself
 in the arms of a naked woman!"

*

In early fall
 He made his second trip to the West
 first to Yalta in the south, then over to Odessa

at the mouth of the Dniester River
to Vienna, to Abbazia on the Adriatic,
to Trieste, Venice, Milan, Genoa.

In Milan Chekhov visited a crematorium,
and, from youth a fan of
 strolls in cemeteries
looked forward to the
upcoming walk through
 th' thanatopolis in Genoa

 which made his travelmate Suvorin
 scratch notes in his diary
 about his friends morbid tastes

but the author whose cough shook the life-roots
and the Doctor long dyed with the dieing
 felt peace in the
 sod towns of Gaia

*

Lika wrote him from Switzerland
7 months pregnant

Potapenko had gone with his wife to Italy

She begged Chekhov to detour through Zurich
but Chekhov wrote back he had to go to
Paris with Suvorin
 and then back to Melikhovo.

She too was
 cruising for an oeuvre-insert

42.

1895

The Island of Sakhalin: travel notes,
came out as a book in June.

*

The censors that year
cut out a number of sections
that spoke about religion.
in his story, "Three Years,"
about the decline of a family

in the pond-culture business world of Moscow,

*

In the summer, spitting blood.

*

Maria was taking medical courses
to help her brother
with the peasants

*

Tolstoy

August 8, 1895
Chekhov went to see Tolstoy
at Yasnaya Polyana

They went skinny dipping in the river
and had their first chat
in the neck-deep current.

*

Lika visited Melikhovo
three times the summer of '95
after her baby had died.
In September he began *The Seagull*.
He finished the first draft in a month,
then re-scored weak sections.

*

Hey, I'm in Your Play!

There's always
that oh-no-ing dread
of a friend
scanning text
for
maskéd mention

*

December '95

In Lydia Yavorskaya's Moscow flat
he read *The Seagull* to friends, and was shocked
they believed it depicted Lika Mizinova's

affair with Potapenko

& that they i.d'd
Potapenko's wife with Arkadina

*

In early 1896 he totally rewrote it.

*

One thing
Chekhov
 points out
 in *Th' 'Gull:*
there isn't
the same
 intoxicating praise
for Perf-Art
 in the country
as the city

*

Suvorin,
 seeing his pal
 scattered
 like a dropped
 bag of marbles
urged him to marry.

"I'm afraid of a wife
& a domestic routine
that will hamper me.....
But, it's still better than
 bobbing on the life-sea
and tossing in the frail skiff of debauchery.

I don't care for mistresses anymore
& I'm gradually growing impotent with them."

*

Lenin

On December 20, '95
Lenin was arrested by the Okhrana
for conspiracy
 to publish a secret newspaper

The proofs of issue one were seized.

In the St. Petersburg prison
 he wrote pamphlets
 in invisible ink

*

inkwells
 in
 globs of
 black bread,
 swallowable

*

In '97 he
 was exiled three years to Siberia.

43.

1896

The Coronation of a New Tsar
 May

Alexander III passed on to the
 cosmic Kremlin
 and for the coronation of his son
 Nicholas II
 a huge throng
 was lured to a huge open space
 called Khodynka
 near Moscow
 for free food, trinkets and drink

2,000 were trampled to death
 in the grab-surge

Chekhov and Suvorin
 went to the cemetery
 to watch the victims' burial

The guy from Taganrog
 startled in the red-eyed silence
 at the coffins of children

*

Good Works in '96

Urging local authorities to repair roads
 urging for a telegraph and post office
 urging to have a bridge rebuilt
 urging to have a church rebuilt

and the new school at Talezh completed.

He organized fundraising efforts, concerts, and
 and amateur theatrical productions to finance it

he drew up the plans for the school, bought the construction
 materials, supervised the carpenters and masons.

The school opened in August o' '96
 priests blessed the walls
 the peasants gave Chekhov an ikon
 several loaves of bread,
 and silver saltshakers.

*

July 27, '96, diary:
 "In the editorial offices
 of *Russian Thought*—
 bugs in the sofa"

*

In July of '96
 submitted *The Seagull*
 to the censors in St. Petersburg.

*

He'd written it for the Alexandrinsky Theater
 in St. Pete,
 site of the '89 triumph of Ivanov

The very great actress
 Vera Kommissarevskaya
 at the beginning of her career
 stepped forth to play
 the role of Nina

*

He was moved to tears

at one of the rehearsals

*

There was the exhaustion from new rounds of blood-spit.
He still refused to learn from other doctors what it was.

44.

The Premiere of the Sea Gull

10-17-96

The first performance of *The Seagull*
found Chekhov enmeshed
in the Theory of Fluff

He allowed it to be a benefit
for a comic actress friend
and the audience was packed
with the partisans of
Overt Ha-Ha.

In the middle of the first act
ebullient drama critics
and journalists
leaped from their seats
and lunged for the bar

where they toasted one another,
“He’s through”

“He’s written himself dry.”

“No, no, no, on the contrary,
it’s all so watery.”

“Whatever—the sign is on his
window: No talent Here”

Sudden Hatred
Clink Clink
Sip Sip
Sudden Hatred

Malevolent literati, he once wrote,
are “not people,
they’re some kind of walking mildew.”

At last,
 ah at long last
 they could demonize the too-famous Doctor—
 Lines at the bar,
 and lines of ink as the bars of a jail
 to sentence the criminal playwright
 to the Lost Lethé of Losers

*

It was one of the more famous
 of hiss-&-boo nights
 such as those that greeted
The Rite of Spring, Carmen,
La Traviata, Aeschylus' Archers
 or Dylan's electric guitar.

*

When Vera Kommissarzhevskaya
 began intoning Nina's
 play within a play

there was a spew of laughter
 then boos.

The sibilant component of
 applausamento-hissing
 filled the theater
 with a million cobras
 at the end of Act One

& when the Act Three curtain came down
 the ire-fire had engulfed the souls of the room
 & the mildew moaned with glee.

Chekhov went to a restaurant
 then walked walked walked
 till he was exhausted.

"I roamed the streets
 I sat
 I kept thinking about the performance
 I'll never allow another theater
 one of my plays
 In theater, I'm doomed."

*

The Humiliation of Perf

Chekhov's diary
 for 10-17-96
 is brisk & brief:
 "Performance of my *Seagull*
 at the Alexandrinsky Theater.
 It was not a success."

*

One thing about the
 humiliation of trashed perf,
 it did not prevent the genius
 from trying to save
 a medical journal called
The Surgical Chronicle

It was going to fold
 and was, said Chekhov,
 "an absolutely indispensable journal."

"I promised
 to find them a publisher,"
 he wrote

"I searched
 I begged
 I humiliated myself
 I drove here and there
 I had dinner with the damnedest people
 but I found no one—
 If I weren't building the school
 which will cost me about 1,500
 I'd do the pub
 at my own expense"

He finally lined up the \$
 but there was trouble
 getting the authorities
 to approve the editor

--police state--

45.

Census Till Sick (early '97)

Chekhov took part in the first national census
 ever conducted in Russia

Crystal decor
 perfect cuisine
 napkins of blood

& a shy playwright
 who did not want to make a scene.

*

Once the blood-spits began
 they persisted
 for weeks
 as he tried to heal
 the ink-killing coughs

Chekhov:

“I must subject myself
 to various deprivations.
 Can’t leave the house after 3
 Can’t drink, or eat anything hot.

Can’t walk fast
 It annoys me
 and puts me to anger

I cough. I cough. I cough
 and so far,
 it slowly subsides

and I survive once again.”

*

For the first time
 he had to admit
 he had tuberculosis

*

Blood and Ink

In the TB clinic
 after the Hermitage attack
 he corrected the
 proofs of
 “The Peasants”

46.

J'Accuse

On January 1, 1898 Émile Zola
published his famous "J'Accuse"
in L'Aurore



a letter to the president of France
tracing the conspiracy that had framed
Captain Alfred Dreyfus and later which
acquitted the evil Esterhazy

Chekhov read "J'Accuse" in Nice
and followed the case closely

"On Zola's side is the entire European intelligentsia
and opposed to him is everything that is vile
and of doubtful character."

2-22-98

He asked Alexei Suvorin
to send him a banned Marxist paper
with an article by Maxim Gorky

"I acquainted myself with the
case by reading the stenographic
reports, which are quite different from
what you find in the papers, and Zola's
stand is clear to me."

*

The Background

Alfred Dreyfus was a career military officer
on the General Staff of
the French army
with the rank of Captain

In October of 1894 Dreyfus was arrested for
selling military secrets to Germany

He was put on trial with faked evidence and on
 Jan 4, 1895, condemned to life imprisonment
 and was “publically degraded”
 in a frenzied public arousal of
 hatred

(Chekhov noted
 in a letter to Suvorin
 how Dreyfus during the
 Degradation Ritual behaved
 “like a decent, well-disciplined officer”
 and yet journalists on hand had shouted
 things like “Shut up, you Judas!”
 at Dreyfus.)

Captain Dreyfus was taken in March
 to the Ile du Diable, French Guiana.

The right wing press went hate-crazed
 with tauntings of Jews

*

Dreyfus’ family stood by him
 and investigated the case
 proceeding carefully
 for the anti-Semitics of France
 had seized the era

Those who had conspired to frame Dreyfus
 leaked forged letters
 Dreyfus was alleged to have
 sent to foreign military attachés

and finally,
 Dreyfus’ family went public
 Major Esterhazy in ’97 was courtmartialed
 for forging the documents
 but in a trial held in secrecy he was acquitted

*

Chekhov to Suvorin 2-6-98:
 “Little by little people became convinced
 that Dreyfus had in fact been convicted
 on the basis of a secret document which
 had been shown neither to the defendent
 nor his attorney, and law abiding people
 saw in this a fundamental violation of
 the law.”

*

Zola on Trial

Zola wanted the government
to prosecute him for libel

It worked.
In February of '98,
two months after "J'Accuse"
there was a trial in Paris
which flashed "a fierce flood of light"
on the case

The army worked up a sweat to crush him
and Zola was found guilty
sentenced to a year in prison
& thrown
from The Legion of Honor

He appealed. There was a second
trial in July and not waiting for the guilty verdict
Zola fled to England
for a year

till he could return.

Chekhov:

"In court Zola represents French common sense, and so the
French love him and are proud of him, although they applaud the
generals who, simple-minded as they are, frighten them first with
the honor of the army and then with the threat of war."

*

Following the
Zola case
Chekhov
finally became
fluent in French

*

Suvorin's *Novoye Vremya*
kept running articles
that those who offered proof
of Dreyfus' innocence
were in the pay of an

“International Jewish Syndicate”

*

It's exasperating
to have a close friend
with a right wing mean streak

but Chekhov could not break
with the magnate,
whose grandparents also were serfs,
who had first brought
Chekhov to the world
of big-time publishing
loaned him money to buy Melikhovo
though he had years ago
stopped writing for *Novoye Vrema*.

*

He wrote Suvorin a long letter
resembling a legal brief
to convince him to change his views
but refused to go public against him
when *New Times*
went on and on and on
against Zola.

He condemned Suvorin
in a letter to his brother Alexander
for vilifying Zola
in *Novoye Vrema*

while serializing Zola's new novel
without paying royalties

*

Aroused by Phantoms

The concept of an “International Jewish Syndicate”
had the support of the Russian government

For instance, “The Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion”
has been traced
to the Paris office of the Okhrana
produced
by one Ratchkovsky,
chief of the Paris Station of the Okhrana

in the 1890s

The Okhrana's Protocols
 were being quoted in newspapers
 in France
 right after Zola's "J'Accuse" was published.

The people are aroused
 Aroused by spectres
 Aroused by lingering lies

Every kind of rumor
 was believed in police state Russia:
 the Masons were trying to free Captain Dreyfus
 or the ever-wheeling Kaiser Wilhelm,
 a Syndicate of Rabbis, the Jesuits, them French guys,
 or maybe
 that most evil of tendencies:
 the German-Jewish-Protestant-Freemason
 Conspiracy.

Chekhov,
 a famous gardener
 knew what it really was:

"An evil plant began
 growing in the soil of anti-Semitism
 in a soil stinking of the slaughter-house."

And Zola helped keep France
 from swerving to the evil of
 50 years later:

"It is for the best people,"
 said Chekhov,
 "always ahead of their nations,
 to be the first to sound the alarm."

*

Chekhov
 went to the place of action
 spent a month in Paris
 where he met Dreyfus' brother Mathieu.

47.

Not Forgetting his Home Town

When Chekhov returned from France that spring
 he brought back for his home city of Taganrog
 a statue of Peter the Great by
 the then famous Mark Antokolsky

and 300 or so books of classic French writers
 plus a big packet
 on the Dreyfus case

for the Taganrog library

*

That summer he decided to built another school
 in Melikhovo, his third.

Meantime, he rented a hut,
 bought desks,
 hired a teacher

*

And against doctors' orders
 resumed treating the peasants

while writing a trio of tales,

“Gooseberries,” “A Hard Case” and
 “Concerning Love.”

*

Meanwhile, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, a
 left-leaning playwright
 & drama teacher

and Konstantin Stanislavsky
 a wealthy actor and producer
 who also ran a factory
 in Moscow where
 gold and silver threads were
 produced

formed forces
 for a revolutionary new theater

first called The People's Theater
and soon The Moscow Art Theater

Nemirovich-Danchenko wrote Chekhov
begging to be allowed
to produce *The Seagull*
the theater's first season

Anton turned him down
but Danchenko kept writing
& volunteered to come to Melikhovo
to explain his production ideas

As then, as now
the pushiest producer produces

and Chekhov allowed it

(It was playing all over Russia anyway, and getting
rave reviews in places like Odessa and Kharkov

plus never forget
the hunger for
r's from r's

rubles from royalties)

48.

Meeting Olga Knipper September, '98

In early September he
went to Moscow
on the way to Yalta

and attended rehearsals
in the Aeschylus mode
and offered suggestions.

(He urged Stanislavsky to
to get rid of the actor that
was playing Trigorin, for instance)

In his role
of "Inspector of Actresses"

he noticed 28 year old Olga Knipper

who was playing the role of Arkadina

Knipper had studied acting
at Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko drama school
and soon to become one of the
best known actresses.

Yes, he noticed the Arkadina
but scantily,
he was so upset over what
they were doing to his play

as he sat in the back
of the chilly hall
in an overcoat
coughing and touching his beard
the stage lit up by candles in cups.

A few days later
Chekhov also watched Olga rehearsing in
Alexei Tolstoy's blank verse drama, *Tsar Fyodor*
based on the life of Ivan the Terrible's son
—Olga Knipper played the tsar's wife Irina

It was the first production of the Art Theater
with vastly lavish costumes

From the gloom her voice, her voice
a *vox flammae* that thrilled the chill—

“Irina, in my opinion, is superb.
What a voice, what dignity, what feeling!”
Chekhov wrote his friend Suvorin
“If I remained in Moscow
I would fall in love with
this Irina.”

*

Moves South to Yalta

The next day he left for the Crimea
He'd been coughing blood

Settled in a villa in the suburb of Yalta
He was to use Yalta
as a healing, home base
the rest of his life

*

His father died in the fall
 and he decided to move
 his mother and sister

 to Yalta too

*

Success in the Sticks

Oct 26, 1898

“My *Uncle Vanya*
 is making the rounds
 of the provinces”
 he wrote his brother Mikhail,
 “and it’s been successful everywhere
 You never know when
 you’re going to win
 and when you’re going to lose

I’d had no hope at all
 in that play”

*

He was purchasing a plot of land
 next to a Tatar cemetery
 outside of town
 to have a house built

There was a baker nearby
 and a market for food
 and the woods in the fall
 had chanterelles
 and butter-’shrooms

*

And bought for 2,000 rubles
 a cottage 18 miles
 away on a steep hillside
 above the sea

*

Gorky
 Late '98

In October young Maxim Gorky

sent him a letter and two volumes
of his Stories.

and thus began
a longlasting friendship

*

Maria Chekhov
begged Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko
to cancel the *Seagull's* run

His health was not good
He'd not liked the rehearsals

She was afraid a reprise of
wolf pack journalism
might kill him

but, according to Stanislavsky's memoirs,
the Art Theater was in a
desperate fiscal position
and very badly needed
the *'Gull* box office.

December 17 it opened to
huge success.

*

In the Crimea
Chekhov would
have those maddening and
weakening spells of coughing

Then he'd get back his energy.

Though theoretically no longer practicing
he saw patients, toured schools,

worked for the local Red Cross
and raised money for the
famine victims of Samara

49.

Rubles from Marx
1899

Alexei Suvorin was supposed
to publish Anton's
Collected Works
and Chekhov
was miffed at
Suvorin's slowness

In January, Chekhov signed a deal giving
the publisher Adolf Marx the rights to all his publications,
past and future, except plays,
for 75,000 rubles

Tolstoy
set up the deal
because he thought
Chekhov's moral tales
would reach millions of Russians
through Marx's inexpensive editions.

*

His inner circle
all tsk-tsk'd the deal—

but he told them
he'd still be selling
his stories to magazines

and he'd reserved for himself
all royalties from plays
and he was to receive additional monies
for future books—
200 rubles for each 16 pages
he wrote the next five years
though the TB drums gave him only time
for 9 more tales—

*

Marx made back his money
the first printing
but Chekhov
refused to demand
a new deal

When some of the
 most famous authors of Russia
 including Bunin, Gorky and Andreyev
 put together a petition to Marx
 Chekhov wouldn't let them send it

*

There was a payment schedule—
 and when the first money came
 he gave 5,000 rubles
 to build a school in Yalta
 & 1,000 to help brother Alexander
 buy a house

*

Student riots spread from Petersburg throughout Russia,
 and young people were thrown into jail
 after violent fights with police.

Mounted police
 whacked youth-backs
 with riding crops

And then the government banned any mention
 of the riots in the press.

Universities were occupied by the police
 and before students were allowed to return
 each had to prove his pro-tsarist politics

Alexei Suvorin drooled with support
 of the government
 and was reviled across Russia

Chekhov was asked to make a public statement for the students,
 but, as always, was reticent--

though behind the scenes, in letters to Suvorin,
 he criticized Suvorin's defense
 of the indefensible government in *Novoye Vremya*.

*

Chekhov wrote him

“Grant freedom of the press
 & freedom of conscience

& you will have the quiescence
you so desire—

True, it may not last too long,
but it will at least be enough
for our lifetimes.”

*

The author of so many
core-seething tales
held to his faith
in Gradual Betterment:

*

Chekhov's Hymn to Gradualism

February 22, 1899

“It's not the government's fault
It's the intelligentsia's
As long as our boys and girls are students
they're honest and good
but as soon as they have to grow up and
stand on their own,
all hope and Russia's hope
go up in smoke
and all that's left
is cottage-owning doctors, rapacious public officials
and thieving engineers

I have no faith in our intelligentsia
They're hypocritical, dishonest, hysterical
ill-bred and lazy

Its oppressors emerge from its own midst.

I see salvation in individuals scattered here and there,
all over Russia,
whether intellectuals or peasants,
for they're the ones who really matter,
however few they are.

No man is a prophet in his own country,
and the individuals for whom I speak
play an inconspicuous role in society.
They do not dominate,
yet their work is visible.”

*

Health ever ebbing
 he kept up the constant work
 for the good

In the first 3 months of '99
 he was appointed honorary chair of the local girls' school
 started a drive to raise money
 for victims of famine in Samara Province
 and was on a commission to celebrate the
 centenary of the birth of Pushkin

*

He had six months to get
 all his fiction ready
 for Marx.

He did not have copies of early stuff
 and could not recall
 some of the plots and titles

His brother Alexander helped
 and his friend Lydia Avilov

Copyists were hired
 and exercise books were shipped to Yalta

amidst which
 were prizes of literature
 though some were a
 shocking disgorgement of quickies and medschoolia

“What gibberish!”
 he wrote to Lydia
 as he reworked some of them.

By mid-May he'd sent Marx 400 tales
 marking about half not for use
 which were published from '99 to '02
 in a ten volume Collected Works

*

During the winter,
 —how is not clear from the archives—
 Olga Knipper grew close to Chekhov's sister
 so that when he left Yalta for Moscow on April 10

*

“In the Ravine,”
 one of this greatest
 was written in the fall
 in his freshly plastered writing room
 with lily-of-the-valley wallpaper
 and a view of the sea

It spoke for all time
 of the difficulty
 often the impossibility
 of the weak but good
 to protect and defend
 themselves
 against those
 wielding the weapons
 of greed and selfishness

*

There were two gray
 clip-winged cranes
 in the garden
 and when the gardener
 came back from town
 made waltzlike motions
 and shrieks of joy.

*

Just about every day a
 letter to Olga, dipped in his genius,
 such as the one beginning:

“Dear wonderful actress!
 Remarkable woman!
 If you only knew what joy
 your letter gave me!
 I make so low an obeisance
 to you that
 my forehead touches
 the bottom of my well
 which had been dug
 to the depth of 55 feet!

*

Uncle Vanya
 had its premiere on October 26
 at the Moscow Art Theater.

Chekhov:

It was the first time my so-called glory had kept me awake.

The telegrams started arriving in the night.
 They awakened me to read them over and over on the phone
 I kept running barefoot over the cold floor to the phone,
 I got a bad chill.

Just when asleep, it would ring again.

But the next night I brought my slippers and
 robe by the bed
 and there were no telegrams
 Such is fame

*

What a season for the Art Theater!
 2,500 lined up for tickets the first day
 and many waited overnight.

51.

Easing the Pain of Living
 November, 1899

Doctors and families
 kept shipping their
 sick penniless consumptives
 to Yalta

Chekhov

They turn to me for help, and I'm at a loss
 to know what to do

Narrator

Chekhov
 raised
 40,000 rubles
 to open

a sanatorium
in Yalta

The tuberculers
came up to him
beseeching, begging

like
the shades
to Odysseus

Chekhov

It's so painful to watch their faces
as they beg, their pitiful blankets as they die

Narrator

The sanatorium was set up
and still exists
bearing his name

52.

1900

Chekhov and Tolstoy were elected
honorary members
of the literary section
of the Academy of Sciences
early in the year.

Pining for Olga
Chekhov proposed that the Art Theater
tour the Crimea.
Stanislavsky finally agreed and
Olga and Anton were together in early April.

Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky
were starved for
his new play

but Chekhov stalled
He wanted to see *Uncle Vanya*
so the trip to the Crimea fit both
sets of desires

of Chekhov for Olga
and Nem/Stan for drama

The Art Theater by March of '00
had already paid Chekhov 3,500 rubles
in royalties for the *'Gull* and *Vanya*
and told him if he wanted more
they were willing to pay him 10% of gross receipts.

They came in a whole railroad car
singing songs
and sending weird telegrams to friends
to the white sand
and white houses
of Sevastopol

His mother Yevgenia
put on her antique silk dress
to see a play by her boy

*

Olga Came to Yalta in July of '00

They met in Yalta again in July, till August 5.

Each night they kissed
in his study
she in her long white dress
that showed off her curly erotic hair
She'd humm-sing Glinka's "Don't Tempt Me In Vain,"

They fucked
and whispered softly with
hands entwined

They tried to stay discrete
in the quiet house
with laughter & kisses & shusshes
coffee and bread at midnight
and then up the creaking staircase
to their separate rooms

*

The Fascination Continued

Olga danced
herself

From Nice to Florence and Rome
and then back to Yalta
“to write and write.”

*

On Dec. 24, 1900
Lenin and the Marxists
began *Iskra* (The Spark)

It was printed with small, crowded type
on onionskin
for easy smug/dist

and a secret network
was set up
to get it to readers
throughout the Russian empire

53.

Olga Knipper and Marriage 1901

January 31, the premiere of *The Three Sisters*
at Moscow Art Theater.

*

On March 4, Cossacks charged students
in front of St. Petersburg's Kazan cathedral
lashing with their *nagaiki*
The students were protesting new laws
restricting academic freedom—

Gorky wrote Chekhov an eyewitness account:

Cossacks grabbed women by the hair
and whacked them with whips
They smashed into the protestors
in front of the Cathedral
killed two

*

The night of the massacre
the Art Theater played
Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*
in St. Petersburg

Stanislavsky expected instant arrests
 Gov't censors sat in the audience
 to make sure only the censored text was used.

“The audience was very excited,”
 wrote Stanislavsky,
 “and answered even the slightest hints
 about liberty
 in every word
 of Stockman’s protest.”

*

Royalties for the
 St. Petersburg’s season o’ ’01
 for *Three Sisters* and *Seagull*:
 3,000 rubles!
 Sacred Russia!

*

At the end of March Olga
 came for ten days to Yalta

She was eager to get married
 and avoid the ritual
 of the creaking staircase

*

May 25, Olga and Anton were married
 in a church in Moscow.
 He did not tell his sister or mom
 They sent telegrams to their friends
 then bride and groom took a train to the East
 to visit Maxim Gorky for a day
 (under house arrest for
 taking part in the March demonstrations)

then down the Volga
 to a sanitorium
 for the in-vogue “Koumiss cure.”

*

Visits to what Skip James
 immortally sang as the
 “Killing Floor”
 come even to great writers and actresses

as when
 on their honeymoon
 they missed a steamer
 at a place called Drunken Market
 and slept on the floor of a
 hut
 waiting for the whistle

*

Maria Chekhov viewed her brother's marriage
 about as sourly
 as Dorothy Wordsworth

*

Koumiss is fermented mare's milk
 from the people of the steppes
 who made it from camel's milk

For a month he drank four bottles a day
 and stopped coughing almost entirely

then they returned to Yalta.

Olga went to Moscow in the early fall for rehearsals
 and a time-sparged modern marriage

She was already
 one of the era's most famous.

Actresses in Russia
 were treated to Total Adoration—
 Audiences that wept actual tears
 and twenty minute curtain calls

She loved it
 She could not give up the thrill

“I am not young enough
 to shatter
 in one second
 what it has taken me such pains
 to achieve.”

*

“If you and I
 cannot live together,”
 he wrote her

“it is neither you nor I
 who are guilty
 but the demon
 who fills me
 with bacilli
 and you with the love of art.”

*

Their time-tracks met thereafter
 in supercharged sections
 rather than a long, ropy
 taffyflow



54.

Gorky and the Police Guard

In the fall of '01
 Gorky ignored his travel restrictions
 and stayed for a week at Chekhov's house in Yalta

Gorky had been allowed by
 tsar-raff
 to go to the Crimea

but was barred from staying
in any of the Crimea's bigger cities

Chekhov's village, Autka,
was an unincorporated suburb of Yalta
and thus, on a technicality,
Gorky could crash with Chekhov.

And as for Yalta,
Gorky could visit ,
but not stay there overnight.

A policeman stood guard at the garden gate
and the record is silent
on whether Chekhov's pet cranes
would shriek and waltz with joy
at the guard
but whenever Gorky left the chief of police called Chekhov
and asked where he had gone.

"Gorky (whom Chekhov calls Alexei Maximovich)
is here and in good health

He's staying at my house
and is officially registered here

A policeman came by today."

*

Also living near Yalta
that late '01 was Leo Tolstoy

There was a gov't ban
on mentioning Tolstoy in telegrams

and because the Orthodox church
had excommunicated him

the press was prevented from
carrying news

Tolstoy was extremely well known
and the rumors on him
wended weirdly—
that he was near death, for instance,
which wasn't true

Chekhov wrote Olga
he'd refer to Tolstoy

as "grandpa"
 when he talked about
 him in telegrams to her

55.

A Few From 1902

Bad health.

His "standard remedies:"
 cod liver oil and creosote.

*

In February Olga came to Yalta
 for five days of love,

and then rushed back to star
 when the Art Theatre
 did *Three Sisters*
 for tsar Nicholas II.

Also in February

Gorky was elected honorary member
 of Imperial Academy of Sciences
 (literary division),

This was during wild student disturbances
 and the closing of universities
 in Petersburg and Kiev

In March

secret police chief
 sent Gorky's police record
 to the tsar

and on March 9

the president of the Imperial Academy
 was informed the tsar was pissed

at the election of a human
 who was under police surveillance

March 10, the gov't ordered the Academy
 to cancel the Gorky election

Throughout the spring

people wrote Chekhov
in Yalta to get involved.

*

Olga was pregnant
and miscarried during
the season in St. Petersburg

was taken to a hospital
for an emergency operation.

She came to Yalta in April
carried from the steamer
on a stretcher

She seemed to improve
and they went to Moscow in May

where she was badly ill again
with peritonitis.

He nursed her day and night
till she pulled well in June.

*

That month he visited a mine and foundries
in the Ural Mountains
owned by one Savva Morozov
a rich backer of the Moscow Art Theater

He scolded Morozov
like a Norman Thomas Social Democrat
and persuaded him to lower
his workers' workday
from 12 to 8.

Idti v narod

*

The summer of '02

he carried a flask
& spat
thrombs of blood
into it

*

While he was staying in the Urals
 a young engineering student named Tikhonov
 was assigned to attend to the writer.

He slept in the next room
 & heard Chekhov heezing & hacking
 get up to pace
 drink from a glass

till finally
 the house was asleep
 in thunder and lightning and rain
 when Chekhov began to groan
 with a sound like vomiting
 Tikhonov ran to the room

to find him
 on his side
 in a jumble of sheets
 trembling convulsively,
 his long neck over the bed edge
 coughing jerks of blood
 into a blue enamel basin.

Chekhov wiped the blood from his beard
 and said softly,
 "I have disturbed your sleep
 forgive me my friend."

*

At the end of August,
 under pressure from friends, he resigned his membership
 in the Academy of Sciences
 to protest the banning of Gorky.

A few weeks later he began *The Cherry Orchard*,
 and the nudging began from his wife
 & of course from Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko,
 who wrote him,
 "Don't read the papers.
 I find that reading the press
 destroys ones desire to work."

*

Body Fading
Brain Boiling

*

Striving for Bios

“I wanted to
take Hunyadi Janos
as usual,”
he wrote to Olga
“but in Yalta
it seemed not
to be the real thing
& gave me palpitations
for two days afterward”

and a few days later:
“as soon as
you learn from
my letter or telegram
I’m coming

send at once
to the chemist
and get me
1/2 lb
pure refined codliver oil
& 10 gr. of *creosoti-fagi*”

*

He wrote his elegant wife
he knew he was badly dressed

There been a bumpkinization of attire
He realized he’d lost his
big city big-time-writer
sartorial fluff

“My nails are long
 & there is no one
 to snip them
In my mouth a tooth has broken
A button has dropped
 off my
 waistcoat.”

*

Body fading
Brain boiling

56.

1903

Olga's wavering guilt that she was in Moscow
and her husband in Yalta.

January 20, he wrote her: "Try and be sensible: if you lived with me in Yalta all winter, your life would be ruined and I'd feel pangs of conscience, which would hardly be better. I knew I was marrying an actress, after all; what I mean is, when I married you, I was fully aware you'd be spending winters in Moscow. I don't feel a millionth bit hurt or cheated; on the contrary, I think things are just fine or as they should be, so don't bother me with your conscience anymore, sweetheart."

*

Lenin in Geneva

In April, '03, Vladimir Lenin
and his wife Krupskaya
settled in Geneva.

He was very combative
Highly disciplined, good organizer, didn't need sleep.
Everything, every act, each dot of ink
suffused with the anxious malady
known as
"Last Leaflet Before the Rev."

He divided the world in two:
those with him/those against him
as he built a political structure
that looked to him for every nuance:
the future cloth of
the Communist Party

*

Lenin's Law:
Salus revolutionis lex suprema est

*

The Change in Images

'82

Tall
 broad shouldered
 a wide-brimmed black hat

good manners
 pumping people
 for interesting anecdotes

'03

The exhausted look
 Th' funereal clothing
 The tattery beard
 The pince-nez

*

However shaky and sick,
 Chekhov became an editor of *Russkaya mysl*
 (Russian Thought) in the late Yalta winter.
 Just a short walk in his garden with his dogs
 would make him sit and catch his breath.

His last story, "Betrothed" or "The Bride."
 He began *The Cherry Orchard* in Feb. '03.

Visitors, such as Bunin and Gorky, would visit to cheer him up.
 But he had "an indifference bordering on lethargy,"
 cane between his legs,
 staring to the distance.

All energy: art

*

In the spring he escaped to Moscow,
 but it took half an hour
 huffing and heezing
 stopping every five steps

to his third floor flat.

*

It was the only gov't-licensed paper
in the area

The owner of *The Bessarabetz*, one Krushevan,
also had a paper published in St. Petersburg.

*

An Okhrana agent, Baron Levandel
had been sent to Kishinev to destroy
the town's burgeoning rev movement
ten months before the pogrom

and anti-semitic agitation increased
after the Okh'-barf's arrival

*

According to a writer named
Michael Davitt
who spent 8 days in Kishinev
just after the pogroms

(for a book *Within the Pale*,
published in N.Y. in 1903)

the Chief Rabbi of Kishinev
went to the Orthodox bishop
and asked him to calm the populace
by saying no such ritual
was practiced

but the bishop replied
that yes he feared
some Jewish sect did exist
which used Christian blood
in the "Paschal ceremonies"

and therefore he refused to speak out.

*

The riot-slime smashed and beat
Somehow they tore apart featherbeds and pillows,
probably looking for money

so that the streets were filled
with squalls of feathers
that eerily drifted
on thug thick streets

*

To his eternal discredit
 Suvorin's *Novoye Vremya*
 repeated the hemic slander
 from the right wing Kishinev press

*

June 18, the great writer Sholem Aleichem
 asked Chekhov for a story for an anthology
 to benefit the victims of Kishinev.

He was too ill to write one afresh
 but "Difficult People" was translated into Yiddish
 for the collection published in Warsaw

58.

A Few Results

On June 15, '03 the Russian gov't
 abolished a few penalties
 in hard labor compounds,
 and in the Siberian and Sakhalin penal colonies:

- shaving of the head
- lashing
- prisoners shackled to wheel-barrows

The wheel-barrow punishment existed only on Sakhalin and was
 described in Chekhov's book, and therefore
 it could be argued, that the reform
 came about through the influence
 of *The Island of Sakhalin*.

*

The Birth of the Bolsheviks

In July of '03
 delegates from secret socialist groups
 from all over Russia
 quietly came to Geneva
 for the second congress of the
 All-Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
 They kept apart from one another in public
 and from the Russian émigré community

in Geneva.

The congress was adjourned to Brussels
but there were tsarist informers
and hostility from Brussels officialdom

so the congress moved,
with 57 delegates,
to London.

This was the congress that saw the famous split
between the Bolskeviks (Lenin's "majority")
and the Mensheviks.

*

Lenin was very interested in the descriptions
of violent street action in Kiev:

"The time when protestors
unfurled the Red flag, shouted
'Down with Absolutism!'
then fled in all directions, is over!

It is necessary to begin its *physical* destruction
by mass attack
The bullies of absolutism
must receive two, or better, four blows
for each dealt out to a worker, a student, or a peasant."

*

September 26, a telegram to Olga in Moscow:
"Four acts completely ready. Copying.
Shall send you. Health improving. Warm.
Kiss you. Antoine."

Chekhov submitted *The Cherry Orchard*
to the censorship apparatus
for a final kiss from the Nobodaddy
who banned some lines
on workers' living conditions
and on the lasting demoralization
passed on from serfdom

(Have these been restored?)

“To Moscow! To Moscow!”

He lived the winter of '03-'04 in Moscow
 The writer Ivan Bunin spent just about
 every night with Chekhov
 Olga would party
 and trail home late

“Every evening I visit Chekhov
 and stay with him till three or four A.M.
 Until Olga Leonardova came home

She usually went to the theater
 or to a charity concert

Nemirovich-Danchenko would fetch her
 in white tie and tails
 smelling of cigars and eau-de-Cologne

She wore an evening dress,
 beautiful, young and scented

I would kiss her hand and they would leave
 Chekhov would never let me go before
 their return.”

*

To Ivan Bunin
 dry eyes, no tears:
 “I’ll be forgotten in seven years.”

*

One Reason for Cigarettes

In December of '03
 a right wing nut tried to stab Gorky
 as he walked along the Volga at night

The knife pierced his coat and jacket
 but was blunted
 by Maxim’s cigarette case.

*

60.

1904

The Cherry Orchard premiered January 17
his 44th birthday.
at the Moscow Art Theater

Chekhov stayed home.

At the end of Act 2 Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko
sent him a note that th' audience had been
calling for him

He arrived at the end of Act 3,
was hurrahd onstage,
while the audience cheered and thunder-clapped,
the author striving mightily not to cough

There were gifts and flowers in piles in front of him,
and speeches of glorification from
journalists, actors and heads of literary societies
in a contest of quick-planned praise

There was an element in it as if he were already
in the grave.

It took an hour, and Chekhov could not say a word,
but left the footlights exhausted.

*

The Russo-Japanese War of '04

Both countries thirsted
to thrust into Manchuria and Korea
Japan attacked the Russian fleet
and made much death and ship-sink
another humiliation for Russia

about which the failing Chekhov
was very little attentive

"It is not the Russian people, but the Autocracy
that has suffered shameful defeat,"

Lenin wrote.

"This defeat is the prologue to the
capitulation of Tsarism!!"

*

The Cherry Orchard was touring the provinces to full houses.

He ever more greatly
 had trouble breathing
 He'd quake with fever
 Acute pains in his arms and legs

His doctor gave him morphine
 shoot-ups

yet the brain-vim
 could not be killed
 He wrote oodles of letters

and arranged for more books to be sent
 to the Taganrog library

and scanned and marked up manuscripts
 for *Russkaya mysl.*
 (Russian Thought)

*

Body Fading, Brain Boiling

Toward the end
 he was glutted with visitors,

 too weak to write
 though he hatched new plays in his mind
 and recopied in ink his notebooks

*

He told Ivan Bunin,
 "I'm going away to peg out."

Bunin thought he went
 so as not to die in front of his family.

*

On June 3rd
 with Olga by train
 to a German health resort
 at Badenweiler

in the Black Forest

June 29 a hideous body-wracking attack,
the doctor gave him morphine and O2

then another wracking.

He told his bank in Berlin
to make all payments in his wife's name.

*

At the same time
Vladimir Lenin
and his wife Krupskaya
began a month-long walk,
with knapsacks, through the Swiss countryside

Lenin was near a nervous breakdown
from months of shrilly-dilly factionalism

and allowed the waterfalls, the blue lakes,
the glaciers: Geneva to Lausanne to Interlaken
to Lucerne
—in the whirling patterns of Gaia
to ease the mania.

61.

At 2 a.m. the doctor arrived,
Chekhov covered in sweat,
and spotting the doctor
Chekhov sat up,
leaned against his pillows,
and said, "Ich sterbe."

The doctor gave him a
camphor injection
and was sending for an
oxygen pillow

but Chekhov said,
"What's the use?
Before it arrives
I'll be a corpse."

In response Dr. Schwohrer

sent for champagne,
Chekhov held a glass
and said to Olga
“It’s been so long since
I’ve had champagne,”

and ever slowly drank it down
then lay upon his side

A black-winged moth
had come through the window
and was beating
its wild wings
against the lamp.

Appendices

Books consulted during the creation of Chekhov:

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A life of Chekhov, Irene Nemirovsky, London, Grey Walls Press 1950
Chekhov, A Biography, Ernest J. Simmons, Atlantic Monthly Book; Little, Brown & Company, 1962
Chekhov— A Spirit Set Free, V.S. Pritchett Random House '88
A New Life of Chekhov, Ronald Hingley Knopf 1976
Letters of Anton Pavlovitch Tchekhov to Olga Leonardovna Knipper, translated by Constance Garnett George Doran Co., N.Y. ca 1924
The Life and Letters of Anton Tchekhov, translated and edited by S.S. Koteliansky and Philip Tomlinson, George Doran Company, N.Y., ca 1923
Letters of Anton Chekhov, selected and edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky Viking 1973
The Portable Chekhov, with intro by Avrahm Yarmolinsky Viking 1947
The Short Stories of Anton Chekhov, with introduction by Robert Linscott The Modern Library 1959
The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov, edited and with an introduction by Lillian Hellman, Farrar Straus Giroux 1955-1984
Plays Penguin Classics edition, introduction by Elisaveta Fen '59
Gorky-- A Biography, Henry Troyat Crown 1989
The Notebooks of Anton Chekhov, B. W. Huebsch, Inc. N.Y. '22
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Turgenev-- The Man, His Art and His Age, Avrahm Yarmolinsky The Orion Press 1959
My Life in Art, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Routledge/Theater Arts Books, N.Y. 1994
Stanislavsky, A Life, David Magarshack, Faber and Faber, 1986

plus various editions of the stories of Anton Chekhov.

On Pre-Revolutionary Russia and Europe:

- Numerous entries on Russia, the Ottoman Empire, anti-Semitism, et alia multa, in *the Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Edition, 1911*
The First Russian Revolution, 1825, Anatole Mazour, Stanford University Press, 1978
Lenin, David Shub Penguin Books 1967
The Evolution of Russia, Otto Hoetzsch Harcourt, Brace and World 1966
A Dictionary of Modern History, 1789-1945 Penguin Books 1967
The Russian Revolution, Marcel Liebman Vintage '67
The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Bantam Classic 1992

Pushkin, Selected Verse with an introduction by John Fennell Penguin 1964

- William Blake and the Age of Revolution*, J. Bronowski Harper & Row 1965
The KGB, Graham Yost Facts on File N.Y. 1989
Revolutions of 1848, Priscilla Robertson Harper Torchbooks 1960
Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime, Dominic Lieven
 Yale University Press 1990
Europe, Mother of Revolutions, Friedrich Heer Praeger 1972
The Revolutionary Catechism, International Workers of the World
 Reprint, N.Y., 1970
*The Keys to Happiness-- Sex and the Search for Modernity
 in Fin-de-Siecle Russia*, Laura Engelstein, Cornell U. Press, 1992
Village Life in Late Tsarist Russia, by Olga Semyonova Tian-Shanskaia,
 Indiana U. Press, 1993
*Hidden From History: Rediscovering Women in History from the 17th Century
 to the Present*, Sheila Rowbotham Random House 1974 (Chapter,
 "Birth Control and Early Nineteenth Century Radicalism")
Sex & Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility, Germaine Greer Harper
 Colophon '85 (Chapter, "The Short History of Contraception")
The Nature of Russia, John Massey Stewart Boxtree Ltd., London, 1992
Muzhik and Muscovite, Joseph Bradley University of California Press, 1985

On Pogroms and Anti-Semitism in Russia:

- Cops & Rebels-- A Study of Provocation*, Paul Chevigny Pantheon 1972
World of Our Fathers, Irving Howe Schocken Books '89
The Voice of America on Kishineff, edited by Cyrus Adler
 The Jewish Publication Society of America 1904
Easter in Kishinev— Anatomy of a Pogrom, Edward H. Judge New York
 University Press, 1992
Troubled Waters—The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia,
 I. Michael Aronson, University of Pittsburgh, 1990
Within the Pale— The True Story of Anti-Semitic Persecutions in Russia,
 Michael Davitt, A. S. Barnes & Co, N.Y. 1903
The Jews in Russia Volume I The Struggle for Emancipation, Louis Greenberg,
 Yale University Press 1944
The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets, Salo W. Baron, Macmillan N.Y.
Zola & the Dreyfus Case, Gordon Press N.Y. 1972
Agents of Deceit: Frauds, Forgeries and Political Intrigue Among Nations, Paul W.
 Blackstock, Quadrangle Book, Chicago 1966

On the Writing of *Chekhov*

When I came to New York City in the late '50s, the first play I saw was *Ivanov*. In the '60s when I opened the Peace Eye Bookstore in the Lower East Side, I stocked as many of Chekhov's books as I could find, and began to read his short stories. "Rothschild's Fiddle," "The Grasshopper," and "In the Ravine" were among my favorites.

When my family moved to Woodstock in '74, I discovered the local library had the 13-volume collection of Constant Garnett's translations of Chekhov, which that year I read in its entirety.

After moving to Woodstock, I began writing musicals, among which were "The Karen Silkwood Cantata" and "Star Peace," and I made plans to write a musical drama based on Chekhov's 1884 tale, "Rothschild's Fiddle." For this, I have created a poem version of "Rothschild's Fiddle, but not yet the music.

In 1985 I was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for a literary festival and I visited the painter Alice Codrescu, who showed me her painting "Chekhov and Gorky." The images of Gorky and Chekhov in her painting stayed with me, so a few years later, in 1990, I began a poem called "The Paintings of Chekhov," in which I urged Alice to paint other scenes from Chekhov's life, such as when he built schools or organized famine relief or provided free medical care in rural areas.

Later, in 1991, I made notes for a "Hymn to Chekhov," an investigative poem in the tradition of extended works I had written such as "Melville's Father," "Hymn to Archilochus," "Yiddish Speaking Socialists of the Lower East Side," and a long poem I was working on at the time, "Cassandra."

In 1992 and 1993 I was very occupied in the writing and staging of a musical drama, *Cassandra*, on the life of the ancient Trojan prophetess. There was a production in Woodstock in the late summer of '93 during which time I began thinking about writing another musical drama and was just about to commit to a musical on the life of Sappho.

One evening while I was driving to the theater for a performance of *Cassandra* the word "Chekhov" came into my mind. Yes! I thought, why not do a musical drama on his life that would also feature some of the history and political movements in Russia in the late 19th/early 20th century?

In the fall of '93 I started research on Chekhov's life in libraries, and began work on song ideas, dialogue and characters. I decided to assemble a detailed chronology on his life and times. The material on Chekhov is very extensive, even in English, and it didn't take much reading to realize just how complicated and interesting his life and milieu were. There was so much material that I was bewildered as to how to translate these gluts of particulars into a play.

It was then, after I had assembled a tentative chronology, that I decided to write a poem on his life and times. It seemed apparant that the method I had developed for writing *Cassandra* would work for creating a musical drama on the life of Chekhov. For *Cassandra* I created a 26-page poem that served as the treatment for the drama. The poem

“Cassandra” was published in my collection, *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe*.

My hope was that, as in the case of Cassandra, out of the poem’s text would come ideas for songs, dramatic vignette, narrator, chorus and structure for the drama. When I began, I thought the poem on Chekhov might be thirty or forty pages long.

I worked every day on *Chekhov* for six months till completing a draft in early 1994. I read sections from it at performances throughout the year, testing its strength. Then there was additional research, visiting libraries and gathering books from stores and the lists and catalogues of book dealers, during which time I reworked the poem and finished it in the late fall.

The biography of a genius like Chekhov is somewhat like an anthology of great poetry. One selects and sequences what seems the very best, but realize that other minds might select and sequence somewhat differently.

Of course, I owe a great debt to the scholarship of others. There are a number of excellent books on Chekhov and his era, some of which are listed in the Appendix.

It was my training as a bard-- reading poetry and living poetry and writing poetry almost every day for forty years that prepared me to create Chekhov. Never had I experienced such fun in a long writing project as during the months of Chekhov. I found myself swept up in his vitality, his creativity and his burning desire to enmesh himself in his era. It was a time of joy for me to bring my studies in meter, my musical training, my sense of visuality and line break, and my theoretical work on “Investigative Poetry” to such a challenging project.

It was apparent as I began to mix and arrange the flow of information that a verse biography of Chekhov could extend to five or ten thousand pages. That was part of the fun, the thrill of choosing with bardic mind the meters, the line breaks, the “data clusters,” the vignettes, the historical data, the selections from letters and memoirs, to form the sequences of vowels, consonants and syllables that in their thousandfold array give life to this poem on Chekhov.

One of my goals is to create from *Chekhov* a musical drama tracing his life.

In addition, it occurred to me during the research is that there may be considerable additional material— notes, diaries, letters, and maybe even manuscripts that have been held back by the Soviets and by his family. I wonder if parts of the novel he was working on in 1889, *Stories from the Lives of My Friends*, which he abandoned in good part because he feared the censors would never allow its publication, may still exist. There may also be additional letters of Chekhov in the unshared archives of friends and associates which in the post-Soviet era could safely be published. No doubt Chekhov scholars are already examining these possibilities.

I am very, very grateful to John and Barbara Martin and the staff at Black Sparrow Press for publishing this study of the life and times of a very great writer and beacon for human betterment, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.

Edward Sanders
Woodstock, New York

A Chronology of Many of the Works of Anton Chekhov

- 1878 Sample juvenalia:
 “Why the Hen Clucked,” a farce (lost)
 “He’s Met His Match,” a satirical comedy (lost)
- 1879 (Dec 24) First ink: “A Letter from a Don Squire Stepan Vladimirovich N. to His Learned Neighbor Doctor Friedrich,” published in *Strekoza* (The Dragonfly)
- 1881 *Platonov*, a four-act play, destroyed, but early draft later found in Chekhov’s archives
 “St. Peter’s Day”
- 1880-1884 Wrote around 300 humorous pieces for mags under an assortment of nommes de ha-ha, among them:
- “Things Most Frequently Encountered in Novels, Stories and Other Such Things”
 “Appropriate Measures”
 “Surgery”
 “The Medal”
 “Promotion by Examination”
 “A Horsey Name”
 “The Lady of the Manor”
 “For Little Apples”
- 1882 Serialized satirical novel, *A Useless Victory*, in 8 parts.
 “The Late-Blooming Flowers”
- 1883 “The Portrait” (unpublished story rejected by *Strekhosa*, ’83)
 “Intercession”
 “Rapture”
 “The Death of a Civil Servant” or “The Death of an Official”
 “The Daughter of Albion”
 “Fat and Thin”
 “An Enigmatic Character”
 “The Only Remedy”
 “Thief” (“The Culprit”?)
 “Willow”
 “Fragments of Moscow Life” (monthly column in *Fragments*)
- 1884 *Melpomene* A collection of humorous tales by Antosha Tchekhonté
The Shooting Party, unpublished murder mystery
 “The Corpse”
 “A Dreadful Night”
 “The Complaints Book”
 “Rothschild’s Fiddle”
 “The Chameleon”

1885 Chekhov published 129 stories and sketches, including:

“The Criminal” or “The Malefactor”
 “The Huntsman”
 “The Requiem”
 “A Man of Ideas”
 “Sadness” (“The Misfortune”?)
 “Sgt. Prishibeyev”

1886 Chekhov 112 stories and sketches, including:

“Agafya”
 “Other People’s Misfortune”
 “Romance with Double Bass”
 “Dreams”
 “Grisha”
 “Good People”
 “Kids”
 “Revenge”
 “Easter Night”
 “The Witch”
 “The Objet d’Art”
 “Heartache”
 “The Requiem”
 “The Chorus Girl”
 “Mire”
 “On the Road”
 “Anyuta”
 “A Calamity”
 “Vanka”
 “The Orator”
 “The Privy Councilor”
Motley Tales or *Varicolored Stories*, 375 page collection
 The Swan Song one act play
 “For the Information of Husbands” —nearly totally cut by censors
 On the High Road, a play banned by censor

1887 66 stories and sketches (he’s writing fewer and better),
 including:

“The Mystery”
 “A Cossack” (April)
 “Typhus”
 “A Drama”
 “The Beggar”
 “The Kiss”
 “The Siren”
 “An Encounter”
 “The Letter”
 “The Weariness of Life”
 “Verochka”
 “Notes from the Journal of a Quick-Tempered Man”
 “The Reed Pipe”

At Twilight a collection of stories
Ivanov, a play in four acts
Innocent Talk (or *Innocent Words*), a collection of stories

- 1888 12 stories, including:
 “The Steppe”
 “Sleepy”
 “Lights”
 “The Birthday Party” or “The Name-Day Party”
 “The Belles”
 “Nervous Breakdown” or “An Attack of Nerves”
 “The Fit”
 “An Unpleasantness”
 “First-Class Passenger”
 “The Gardiner and the Evil Spirit”
 “No Comment”
 “Let Me Sleep”
The Bear, a one act farce
 “Moscow Hypocrites” — unsigned editorial in *Novoye Vremya*
 “In Praise of Explorers” “ ” “ ” “ ” “ ”
Stories, a collection of nine tales
- 1889 *The Wood Demon*, a comedy in four acts
 “A Tedious Story” or “A Dreary Story”
The Proposal, a one act farce
The Forced Declaration, an anonymous brief skit
Morose People or *Gloomy People*
- 1890 *A Tragedian Against His Will*, a one act farce
 “The Demons” or “The Thieves”
 “Gusev”
 “Champagne”
 “Siberian Notes,” series of articles in *Novoye Vremya* in the summer.
- 1891 “The Duel”
 “Women”
 “Kashtanka” (children’s story)
- 1892 “Ward Number 6”
 “The Grasshopper”
 “The Wife” or “My Wife” (summer)
 “In Exile”
 “The Neighbors”
 “The Duel”
 “My Patient’s Story”
- 1893 “The Chorus Girl”
 “The Story of an Unknown Man”
 “Big Volodya and Little Volodya”
Sakhalin Island: Notes of a Journey (serialized in *Russkaia Mysl*)

- 1894 "The Black Monk"
 "A Woman's Kingdom"
 "The Story of the Head Gardener"
Tales and Stories
- 1895 "The House with a Mansard"
The Island of Sakhalin: Travel Notes (as a book)
The Seagull, a comedy in four acts (first version)
 "Three Years"
 "The Murder"
 "Ariadne"
 "The Wife"
 "Anna on the Neck"
 "White Brow" (children's story)
- 1896 "My Life"
The Seagull (second version)
- 1897 "Peasants"
 "In a Native Spot"
 "In the Cart"
 "The Homecoming" ("At Home"?)
 "The Pecheneg"
- 1898 *Uncle Vanya, scenes from country life in four acts*
 "A Man in a Case" or "The Man in a Shell"
 "A Visit with Friends"
 "Ionych"
 "The Lodger"
 "The Husband"
 "The Darling"
 "Gooseberries"
 "On Love" or "About Love"
 "The New Villa" (late in year)
- 1899 "The Lady with a Dog"
 "The New Bungalow"
 "On Official Business"
 "The Darling"
 "In the Ravine"
- 1900 *Three Sisters, a drama in four acts*
 "At Christmas Time"
- 1901 "Women"
- 1902 "The Bishop"
 "A Letter" —unfinished story
- 1903 "The Bride" (Feb.)
The Cherry Orchard, a comedy in four acts

