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 roubleless 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
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 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

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
tyrrannies 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**

(Oct '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
dead-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.

Pushkin 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  
\textit{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
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.
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 Luxembourg 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
censorious enceinturement

*

Austria

The Austrian monarchy— the Hapsburgs—
rule 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
t 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 siege
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
The state paid the landowners cash,  
and the peasants were supposed to pay the state  
for the land for 49 years at 6.5 per cent interest.

*  

The Traditional Peasant Commune  
The land was handed over to the traditional peasant commune,  
with control over it contained in the village assembly, or Mir.

Bakunin declared that the Russian peasants were “born socialists,”  
and others agreed—  

The Mir, the communal body  
in charge of village affairs  
and other traditional collectivist mores  
made the Populists hope that Russian socialism  
might grow from the villages  
and by-pass the road predicted by Marx  
that socialism would only come  
after ghastly exploitative capitalism  
and mercantilism  
leading to ghastly proletarian impoverishment  
leading to rev

*  

Faith in Nobodaddy  
The peasants swayed bitter, bent,  
broke, and bashed  
but even the bitter-bent need  
a fascicle of future to  
keep them from  
hacking their masters with scythes  
in the rouse of the Now.

The myth of the tsar  
as the Deliverer  
was like a drug  
to the Peas’  

There was a “blind trust” in the tsar
who was thought to be tricked by the nobles:

“When the Tsar finds out what they’ve done, he’ll give us land”
was the grief-groan

as the peasants waited patiently for
“Tsar Liberator,”
to set aside his own passivity and stir theirs.

* 

**The Great Reforms**

As for the political apparatus, for ten years beginning in the early 1860s there were what they called The Great Reforms

Trials by jury replaced secret, often hideous, written trials.

There was a slight, but insufficient, relaxation of press censorship

And laws were promulgated granting rights to special classes of Jews to have unrestricted residence and the opportunity for gov’t service

* 

**Zemstvos**

Semiautonomous, elected local administrative units called “Zemstvos” were set up in rural areas

Under the zemstvos tsarist Russia offered free medical, dental and surgical care in village hospitals.

When he became a physician, Anton Chekhov worked in the Zemstvo hospitals,

and a number of his stories and letters show how the Zemstvo system worked.
* 

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
policing to a halt.

In the underground
Everything is anything,
that is,
only 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 bourgeoisie 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
There’s only so long
that greed-heads
can op
without
serving the potatoes
of class warfare

The flamma revolution is could not be denied
The flamma of class strife
The flamma that so horrified the right wing cartoonists
The flamma

to tear down the old order
to tear it down
to trample down the centuries of serf-beating vom

The Flamma Aeterna
in Plato’s cave
& its clusters of sentience

no peace no peace
till all
are free fed and fed free
Flamma Aeterna

Break it down tear it down
and the exploiters will reconnoiter

*Dum spiro pro revolutione spero*

& then break down the new order of exploiters
again and again
century ‘pon century

*Dum spiro pro revolutione spero*

Till the Spires of Sharing arise
in the Black Soil

*Dum spiro pro revolutione spero*

15.

**Taganrog**

In a zinc-roofed one-story house
with green shutters
on Police Street in Taganrog
Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born
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 spikéd 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

\[\text{ta-tum} \]

ghastly public killings

\[\text{ta-tum ta-tum} \]

where they broke a sword

\[\text{ta-tum} \]

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

—идти в народ.

* 

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

“went to the people”
serving as teachers, agricultural experts,
veternarian 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 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
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,
saw that Maria and Mikhail went to school
instead of house-moping
and banned corporal punishment
and the lists of rules
from the visiting father.

* 

Chekhov apparently had
a Creeley-like
hunger for order
of personal array.

* 

**First Ink**

December 24, 1879, Chekhov’s first ink!!
in a mag named Dragonfly

20.

**Ha-Ha Mags**

His older brothers both
submitted to the Ha-Ha mags
so, purely for scratch,
from 1880-1885
he wrote around 300 humorous works
‘neath numbersome names:

A. Ch-te
Anche
A. Tchekhonte
Antosha Tchekhonte
Antonson
Baldastov
My Brother’s Brother
A Doctor Without Patients
A Quick-Tempered Man
A Man Without a Spleen
Rover
Ulysses

21.
**The People’s Will**

In ’78 there was the “Trial of the 193” Narodkniki 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
the painter Isaac Levitan
had to move with his family
to a village outside Moscow
and come by train each day
to the School of Painting.

*

**Assassination**

On Sunday March 1, 1881
tsar Alexander II's
horse drawn sledge
passed by a cheese factory
on a side street

The first bomb thrown killed
the tsar's two guards
Alexander went to help the men

The second bomb killed him.

The history books never
mention the fate of the
horses

22.

**Pogroms and Reaction**

The right wing did very poorly
protecting the tsar
but managed
to crush the People's Will
in the next two years
Five members of Narodnaia Volia were executed.

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

* 

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil Branch</th>
<th>Military Branch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imperial Chancellor</td>
<td>Field Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down to</td>
<td>down to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Registrar</td>
<td>ensign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
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.”

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

That summer he worked
in the *zemstvo* 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 plaque 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*
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 begining 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 Autumn.”

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 alude 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
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 accurséd 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 scriptore.

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 Vrema, 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 Chekhov’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
so I can’t recall working on a story for more than a day

‘The Huntsman’ which everybody likes
I wrote when I was out swimming.”

28.

The Glory of Youth Fame

The shy young man of 26 still not using his own name paid a visit to the Capitol:

“I was overwhelmed by the reception extended to me by the Petersburg people. Welcome, acclaim, glorification—all of which scared me, because I had been writing sloppily. In an offhand way.

If I had known that I was being read in this way, I would not have written so much like a hack.”

*

I discovered Chekhov

Voice A

I discovered Chekhov

Voice B

No, Rat, I discovered him

Voice C

What are you saying? I, in my universal skill, did him find!

Voice D

No! no!

I! I! I! am the one who sprouted him from the dimness
29.

**The Song of the Malevolent Clique**

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

\[\text{sneering \& leering \& spearing} \]
\[\text{the malevolent literary clique} \]

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

\[\text{grousing \& groaning \& grailing} \]
\[\text{the malevolent literary clique} \]

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

\[\text{staring \& stealing \& stoning} \]
\[\text{the malevolent literary clique} \]

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
Clique Hack B:

A toad dries
when the stone falls

Clique Hack C:

He doesn’t deserve the book stalls!
He’s a hack
He’s badly attired
This doctor who thinks
in a dead man’s sack
I hate him, even though
I’ve just kissed him
and toasted him
the joy of Russia!

All Chant:

I love him
I wrap him in a line

I love him
with cords of ink

He's safer then
and soon to sink

* 

“Were I to shoot myself,”
Anton Chekhov wrote,
“it would give great pleasure
to nine-tenths of
my friends and admirers.”

* 

That April of ’86
he yearned to get back
to St. Petersburg
to savor the once-only thrill
of being the “latest thing”

but he had no money to spare
and he was exhausted
from a cycle
of blood-coughs
but he was afraid
to be examined by another doctor
“It’s not so much the lungs as the throat,”
he told himself

and, bleeding gone,
he hastened again to St. Petersburg
for the fame-flame

*

In the fall of ’86
he brought his sister to the Capitol
so she too could savor the Gloire

30.

**On the Eve**

Lenin’s older brother, Alexander,
was a member of Narodnaia Volia,
(The People’s Will)

They’d met in Alexander’s St. Petersburg apt.
to plan the killing of Alexander III
on March 1, the sixth anniversary
of People’s Will killing his father

They’d written a manifesto to be given out
upon the tsaricide.

The plotters were arrested
and at the trial
Alexander sought to take the blame:
“I am not afraid to die,” he told the court,
“because there is no death more honorable
than death for the common good.”

On May 8, 1887, Lenin’s brother
and four comrades were hanged.
Reading the news in the paper, the 16 year old Lenin cried,

“I’ll make them pay for this! I swear it!”

*

Chekhov talked four hours one night
with the magnate Alexei Suvorin
and at 1 AM
Suvorin made an offer! *New Times* would publish a collection of stories, plus fork over an advance of 300 rubles against new stories.

Ahh the thrill! beyond just a concept, of a literary ruble-thrust!

The collection, I believe, was *At Twilight*.

He leaped back to Moscow, tossed off three stories, then made a sacred list of 16 others he intended to write and mailed the package to Suvorin.

Then, energied with cash, Chekhov spent his advance on a trip to his boyhood city of Taganrog

*

**The Lure of Traveling and Fleeing**

Every now and then throughout his career the seething genius fled

He was easily bored and craved complications—the more complications the more material for short stories

and, the grandson of serfs who'd been slaves to one piece of land at least since the early 17th century had a hatred of shackles.

There was the constant pressure of his cash-starved family & the attention-dazing fact-blizzards of the literary world,

& the need of a doctor's mind ever dyed with the dieing
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—
a three-week “cowardly melancholy”
as he called it
and decided to write himself out of
the Down Zone
with the play,
that took ten days to finish:
Ivanov

A man named Fyodor Korsh owned
a theater in Moscow
and had been urging
Anton to do a play

*  

The Aeschylus Option

It’s as ancient as
Aeschylus
designing and directing
or Shakespeare
sweating
a perf of Hamlet

the insistent, demanding
insertion of
the writer
into his/her play’s production.

Chekhov sweated Ivanov
He argued with actors
“I’m constantly at war with them--
had I known,
I’d never have gotten involved in it.”

Sure, Anton, sure
You with
your hunger for greasepaint
and lissome allure.

Then came the play’s premiere
to a full house
at the Korsh Theater
November 19, 1887
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 Dostoevsky

and had stood with Fyodor
before the firing squad
and then just
  before bullet-slam
Nicholas I commuted the off
to soul-twist Siberia.
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
Russian critics used their reviews of books and plays to criticize the culture and writers could be demonized for not being “useful” enough not enough on the line for social change & for not overtly opposing the demons of the police state.

A writer is never right enough for the right nor left enough for the left

*

**Famous Words from Oct. o’ 88**

“The people I fear are those who look for a particular program between the lines and are determined to see me as either liberal or conservative. I am neither liberal, nor conservative, nor gradualist, nor monk, nor indifferentist. I should like to be a free artist and nothing else, and I regret God has not given me the strength to be one.

I hate lies and violence in all their forms.... Pharisaitism, dull-wittedness, and tyranny reign not only in merchants’ homes and police stations—

I see them in science, in literature, among the younger generation. That is why I cultivate no particular predilection for policemen, butchers, scientists, writers, or the younger generation.

I look upon tags and labels as prejudices. My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love,
and the most absolute freedom imaginable,
freedom from violence and lies.”

* 

**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.
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 Suvorin 

*
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 Vrema 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 Vrema,
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 guards reserved
the youngest and prettiest
for themselves
Parents sold their daughters

“I saw starving children,
I saw thirteen-year-old kept women,
and pregnant fifteen-year-olds.
Girls start practicing prostitution at the age of 12,
sometimes before the start of menstruation.”

*

In the book he was to write
the fiercest words were against the
colonial violence of the convict settlers
who were exterminating the indigenous
Gilyak and Ainu people in Sakhalin

*

He spent exactly two months
on Sakhalin
and had enough research
completed
to bring a message of prison reform
He thought of visiting the
United States
before returning to Moscow
but couldn’t afford it

He came home by boat
south on the Tatar Straights
trough the
Sea of Japan
past Vladivostok
past Korea,
through the Korean Straits
to Hong Kong.

Then
uh oh, a typhoon,
so mortally whirly-swirly
the captain told him
to keep a pistol handy
for self-shoot
if the ship went down
in the shark-swarmed
South China Sea.
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 Bosporus
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 Suvorin

That he needed those distant convicts to find some facts to stir his dried-out dearth
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
and worked with the poorest people.

*

Up at dawn
Made some coffee
wrote at a windowsill
    not a desk
At 11
    he went out
to pick mushrooms
Lunch at 1
    then a nap
then to write
till evening—
Chekhov's schedule
the summer of '91
deep in debt
    from a year of travel

36.

**Bad Harvests**

'Tween '91 and '14
there were 12 bad harvests
    soil was exhausted
even the Black Earth region of the Ukraine

Two straight years
    '90-'91 and '91-'92
there were full-scale famines.

Because of Russia’s expansionist foreign policy,
the gov't encouraged export of grains
    It needed the foreign exchange
to pay its foreign debt.

    Hungry stomachs
    Slithery borders.

*

Some of the peasants
    were so psychologically demonic
that during the famine
    they invaded the towns along the Volga
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
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 gnomic 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 Vrema)

& 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
Some were stunned by his writing
Others were attracted by his style of living
Some came to the household
    as friends of his sister Maria

Some were writers themselves
    hoping to join a precious circle

Many were stunners
    what Balzac called “stingrays”
and were exquisitely beautiful.

*

In ’91 to Suvorin
    “In women
        I like beauty
            most of all”

He wanted them gay, witty
    and full of élan

but hesitated
    to “fall” in love.

Pretty women surrounded him
    in love, in secret love
        or prone to love

*

Year after year,
    say from 1982 through ’96
he aloofed himself
    from those in love with him

using some love-dodge ploys
    in his letters
    more brilliant than Ovid’s
    *Ars Amatoria*

*

He was,
    in current parlance,
        “afraid to commit”

*
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

*
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 doggerel

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.”

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, Lydya, 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, briskly, and tsk-tsky
* 

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 Khodyinka
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 indispensible 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
going 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
He traveled around the countryside
Supervising a group of other census takers
putting together the final report

* 

**February 19, 1897**

There was a grand dinner
at the Continental
for the 35th anniversary
of the Emancipation
described in his diary:

“To dine, drink champagne,
make a racket
& give speeches on national consciousness,
the conscience of the people,
freedom, and the like,
while slaves in tail coats
are running around your tables,
veritable serfs, and your coachmen
wait outside in the street,
in the bitter cold,
this is lying to the Holy Ghost.”

* 

Early march
he was helping the Zemstvo in
Melikhovo
build a school

* 

**The Attack in the Hermitage**

March 22, 1897

In the ritzy restaurant
called The Hermitage
with Suvorin
he opened his mouth to speak
during the first course
& the blood started pouring from his mouth
A flow of shame to his cheeks
when ice could not
stop the flow
from his lips
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”
“The Peasants” had a difficult time passing the creepy censors. They cut a number of sections—Any way of going into the post-Soviet archives and restoring those cuts?

“The Peasants” appeared in Russian Thought created a lit-storm. The Narodniki and Tolstoyans complained he was showing the sacred peasants in a bad view.

After the hemorrhea, the doctors told him he’d have to give up medicine & live three-quarters of the year in a warm climate: the Crimea or the Riviera.

In September he left Russia for Nice on the Riviera where he stayed till the following spring.

Chekhov’s Diary
11-15-’97

Monte Carlo
I saw how the croupier stole a louis d’or
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

“The 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 defendant nor his attorney, and law abiding people saw in this a fundamental violation of the law.”
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 Vrema*
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 received 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 Vremia.

* 

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
he again crossed

life-tracks
with the dark-tressed actress.
Took her to an exhibit of
Levitan's paintings
Met her family.

50.

Chekhov in Yalta
had not seen any performances
of *The Seagull's* sold out run

He asked Stanislavsky & Nemirovich-Danchenko
to view it

The season was over
& the scenery stored already in a barn

but the genius insisted
so a special perf
at the Nikitsky Theater
was held for Chekhov & ten others

He invited Maxim Gorky to attend
but the police banned him from
coming to Moscow

The genius was very unimpressed
with the run-through
and wanted one actress dismissed
(not Olga Knipper)

& threatened to take the play away
from Stanislavsky.

He wrote Gorky,
“The seagull herself
 gave such an abominable performance
 She blubbered very loudly through it all
 and the Trigorin strode
 around the stage
 speaking like a paralytic”
May 5, he gave Olga Knipper a picture of Melikhovo inscribed,
“My house, where The Seagull was written.
To Olga Leonardovna Knipper with best wishes.”

When Chekhov returned to Melikhovo
from Yalta that month,
he asked her to visit
for the fruit flowers, the lindens
and the Japanese iris.

That May, Chekhov put Melikhovo up for sale at 25,000 rubles,
They packed to leave it for good,
mother and sister to Yalta.

In June of ’99 Olga wrote that they meet in the south.
They agreed to rendezvous at Novorossiisk on July 18.
Then they went to Yalta
where Chekhov’s new house was under construction
outside town at a place called Autka

She was all that he wanted at 39
Strong-willed
keen for life
She had bundles of ardor and energy,
and a love of newness
that shook with her lush, black hair—
She had abrupt mood changes—
She made him laugh—
She was, after all, a very good actress—
& could be, on whim,
coquettish, dreamy, melancholic, dissatisfied—
Just what he wanted at 39.

August 2, Olga and Chekhov went to Moscow.
She had rehearsals
for the Art Theater’s second season.

He had offered Uncle Vanya to the Maly Theater
but the Maly wanted changes in the script—
They couldn’t allow, for instance, that a
Russian university professor
should be fired at on stage
so he gave it to Nemirovich-Danchenko

* 

He went to several rehearsals
where he heard again the soft chant
“Aeschylus  Aeschylus”
set aside his shyness
to intervene
and chided
both cast and director
when it seemed
to wobble away from his plan.

* 

Moscow grew chilly
and grey with rain
and seizures of coughing
drove him back to Yalta

* 

“Cough cough cough
Living with the concept that one must die
is not pleasant at all
cough cough cough
but realizing that one will perish
before one’s time
is totally ridiculous”
Chekhov told Gorky

* 

The villa was done
and the family moved in on September 9
He planted many trees and shrubs
His garden up against
the ancient Tartar cemetery
and a newfangled thing called a phone
with which
he could call the author of
War and Peace.
“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 tuberculars
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 sanitorium 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 & shussshes
    coffee and bread at midnight
and then up the creaking staircase
    to their separate rooms

* 

**The Fascination Continued**

Olga danced
herself
short of breath
in a plunging neckline
the fall of ’00

and wrote about it
breathlessly to her
short-of-breath
playwright beau

* 

October 16,
he finished the final dialogue
for The Three Sisters
and hastened to Moscow
for a six-week stay at the Hotel Dresden

There was a reading of
the play
in the Art Theater’s lobby

and when it was over
there was a nervous silence
the coughs of actors
and toe-stare

Some were not sure whether
it was a tragedy or a comedy

“It’s not really a play yet,
it’s more of an outline,”
someone said.

Chekhov sulked away
but rewrote much of the first
two acts

* 

The early-hitting Moscow winter
drove him to Nice on the Riviera
in December

It was partly the lure of fleeing
that drove him,
& partly the pressure of
Three Sisters final revisions
& partly the lung-soothing clime.
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 alseep
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.”
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.”

1903

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.

*
A friend of his wife
invited them to spend the spring
at an estate outside Moscow
near Naro-Fominskoe

In this huge dacha he learned of
a horrible pogrom in Kishinev
in southern Russia
with 49 killed and 500 injured

There was nothing about it in
the gov'-groveling press
In fact, the Russian gov't censored
all telegraph messages
from Kishinev

* 

The gossip was that the pogrom was the
work of right wing nuts instigated or protected by the police

Chekhov asked Suvorin
to send him the clandestine Marxist newspaper
Liberation, in which Gorky had
written an open letter about Kishinev.

57.

**The Kishinev Pogrom**

On Feb 16
'03

a young man was
murdered in a village
not far from the Bessarabian town
of Kishinev

(the murderer later turned
out to be a relative
wanting part of the victim's fortune)

The rumor arose
that Jews had killed
him for Christian blood in the Passover bread.

A local anti-Semitic paper, The Bessarabetz,
kept up the charge
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 Vremia
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:


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.

*
Party Time

There was a New Year's party at
  The Moscow Art Theater early in '04

They feasted
  then danced

The beautiful Olga was asked to the floor
while Chekhov and Gorky
  tried to talk o'er the music and party purr
Soon both were coughing
  coughing  coughing

Chekhov leaned over to
  the author of The Lower Depths:

“People might say of us,
  They exchanged some highly interesting coughs.”

*

Aeschylus— Part IV
The Cherry Orchard

Chekhov attended rehearsals,
  didn't like what they were doing to his play
& Stanislavsky didn't like Chekhov butting in.

There's a problem
when an author thinks he's written a comedy
and the director thinks its a social drama

*

Strokes, Folks

Stanislavsky had called it
  “a truly great tragedy”

Chekhov had replied,
  “It is a farce.”
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 hurrahed 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 mysł._
(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
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

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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 apparent 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  
\textit{Ivanov}, a play in four acts  
\textit{Innocent Talk} (or \textit{Innocent Words}), a collection of stories

1888  
12 stories, including:  
“\textit{The Steppe}”  
“\textit{Sleepy}”  
“\textit{Lights}”  
“\textit{The Birthday Party}” or “\textit{The Name-Day Party}”  
“\textit{The Belles}”  
“\textit{Nervous Breakdown}” or “\textit{An Attack of Nerves}”  
“\textit{The Fit}”  
“\textit{An Unpleasantness}”  
“\textit{First-Class Passenger}”  
“\textit{The Gardiner and the Evil Spirit}”  
“\textit{No Comment}”  
“\textit{Let Me Sleep}”  
\textit{The Bear}, a one act farce  
“\textit{Moscow Hypocrites}” — unsigned editorial in Novoye Vremia  
“\textit{In Praise of Explorers}”  
\textit{Stories}, a collection of nine tales

1889  
\textit{The Wood Demon}, a comedy in four acts  
“\textit{A Tedious Story}” or “\textit{A Dreary Story}”  
\textit{The Proposal}, a one act farce  
\textit{The Forced Declaration}, an anonymous brief skit  
\textit{Morose People} or \textit{Gloomy People}

1890  
\textit{A Tragedian Against His Will}, a one act farce  
“\textit{The Demons}” or “\textit{The Thieves}”  
“\textit{Gusev}”  
“\textit{Champagne}”  
“\textit{Siberian Notes},” series of articles in Novoye Vremia in the summer.

1891  
“\textit{The Duel}”  
“\textit{Women}”  
“\textit{Kashtanka}” (children’s story)

1892  
“\textit{Ward Number 6}”  
“\textit{The Grasshopper}”  
“\textit{The Wife}” or “\textit{My Wife}” (summer)  
“\textit{In Exile}”  
“\textit{The Neighbors}”  
“\textit{The Duel}”  
“\textit{My Patient’s Story}”

1893  
“\textit{The Chorus Girl}”  
“\textit{The Story of an Unknown Man}”  
“\textit{Big Volodya and Little Volodya}”  
\textit{Sakhalin Island: Notes of a Journey} (serialized in \textit{Russkaia Mysl})
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>“The Black Monk”</td>
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<td>“A Woman’s Kingdom”</td>
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<td>“The Story of the Head Gardener”</td>
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<td><em>Tales and Stories</em></td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>“The House with a Mansard”</td>
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<td><em>The Island of Sakhalin: Travel Notes</em> (as a book)</td>
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<td><em>The Seagull, a comedy in four acts</em> (first version)</td>
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<td>“Three Years”</td>
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<td>“The Murder”</td>
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<td>“Ariadne”</td>
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<td>“The Wife”</td>
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<td>“Anna on the Neck”</td>
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<td>“White Brow” (children’s story)</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>“My Life”</td>
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<td><em>The Seagull</em> (second version)</td>
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<td>1897</td>
<td>“Peasants”</td>
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<td>“In a Native Spot”</td>
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<td>“In the Cart”</td>
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<td>“The Homecoming” (“At Home”?)</td>
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<td>“The Pecheneg”</td>
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<td>1898</td>
<td><em>Uncle Vanya, scenes from country life in four acts</em></td>
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<td>“A Man in a Case” or “The Man in a Shell”</td>
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<td>“A Visit with Friends”</td>
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<td>“Ionych”</td>
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<td>“The Lodger”</td>
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<td>“The Husband”</td>
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<td>“The Darling”</td>
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<td>“Gooseberries”</td>
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<td>“On Love” or “About Love”</td>
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<td>“The New Villa” (late in year)</td>
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<td>1899</td>
<td>“The Lady with a Dog”</td>
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<td>“The New Bungalow”</td>
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<td>“On Official Business”</td>
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<td>“The Darling”</td>
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<td>“In the Ravine”</td>
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<td>1900</td>
<td><em>Three Sisters, a drama in four acts</em></td>
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<td>“At Christmas Time”</td>
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<td>1901</td>
<td>“Women”</td>
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<td>1902</td>
<td>“The Bishop”</td>
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<td>“A Letter” —unfinished story</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>“The Bride” (Feb.)</td>
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<td><em>The Cherry Orchard, a comedy in four acts</em></td>
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</tbody>
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