

MELODRAMATIC SCENARIOS AND MODES OF MARGINALITY:
THE POETICS OF ANTON CHEKHOV'S EARLY DRAMA AND OF
FIN-DE-SIÈCLE RUSSIAN POPULAR DRAMA

by

Mila B. Shevchenko

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Slavic Languages and Literatures)
in The University of Michigan
2008

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Michael Makin, Chair
Professor Bogdana Carpenter
Associate Professor Alina M. Clej
Associate Professor Herbert J. Eagle

© Mila B. Shevchenko 2008
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

To my mother Stefanka,
my sister Maya,
and in loving memory of my father,
Boris Alekseevich Shevchenko.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been blessed with an incredible support system: my family, my teachers and mentors, my fellow graduate students and colleagues, my friends. Every one of them supported me and inspired me in his/her own unique way for which I am eternally grateful and indebted.

I express my profound gratitude to my dissertation committee: Professor Michael Makin, Professor Bogdana Carpenter, Professor Herbert Eagle, and Professor Alina Clej. Michael Makin stepped in as my thesis advisor and chair at a crucial moment of my graduate tenure. His patience, support, encouragement, and great ideas were invaluable, but more importantly, he believed in me and my project and that was the driving force behind my writing and my success in my debut on the job market. Michael has one of the most generous and kind hearts I know. Herbert Eagle, with all his busy schedule of a Department Chair, was more than generous with his time, comments, insights, and encouragement. Professor Carpenter was that member of committee who was with me from the very inception of my project. She has been my female role model in academia. We share a passion for close reading and theater and her course in *Slavic Drama* taught me a great deal about analysis of dramatic writing and teaching drama. Alina Clej's course in *Fin-de-Siècle: Representations of Women*

was my great inspiration in my choosing the topic of my dissertation. I was fascinated by her style of teaching— you do not see that often such ease, elegance and sophistication all together.

My “second round of applause” goes to the institutions which supported me throughout the years. My home Slavic Department was more than generous with all kind of support: funding, logistics, encouragement. For my summer teaching, the regular trips to conferences, the research trip to Russia and many, many more, I owe thanks to the incredible help of the Department. I feel there at home and hope to stay this way. Horace. H. Rachkam School of Graduate Studies and the Center for Russian and East European Studies also supported immensely my research and my professional development. The Center for the Education of Women’s 2004-2005 *CEW Margaret Dow Towsley Scholarship* was my main resource to fund my research trip to Moscow – thank you! Here is the place to extend my gratitude to Sheri Sytsema-Geiger, Amanda Apostol, Sara Hallum, and Rachell Grubb for their time, attention and support.

A heartfelt thank you to all the amazing teachers and mentors in my life who breathed in me the love and passion for teaching that became my calling. In particular, I owe a debt of gratitude to my teachers, friends and colleagues from the National Lyceum of Ancient Languages and Cultures, Sofia; Bulgaria, my professors from University of Sofia, Bulgaria, and my professors in the Department of Slavic Language and Literatures, University of Michigan.

Let me reiterate that I have been blessed with the most incredible, generous, loving and supportive friends. I was accepted to the program with other four fellow gentlemen who challenged me, stimulated me, listen to me, comforted me: Brad,

Christopher, Sergei and Vadim – thank you! Christopher has been one of my first readers and his attention, time, help and generosity were amazing. The same thing goes to Brad without whom the last year would be unbearable in every possible way. He helped and supported me intellectually, psychologically, logistically – you name it! Ewa, Rachel, Margarita, Kelly, Minjin, Annie, Elek, and Masha touched me in so many ways – thank you! Svitlana Rogovyk, Ewa Pasek and Sylvia Meloche in countless ways and on numerous occasions were there for me: you helped, helped, helped, and ... you listened! With Marina, well, where should I start with: you fed me, took care of me, you challenged me, you supported me, you loved me and I love you too – thank you!

Snejana Tempest and Andreas Schönle (my first advisor and with whom this journey started) were the professors who welcomed me to the department, who became my mentors and friends. This is a privilege which I cherish dearly. Adelina and Galin cheered for me in England and not for a moment allowed me to have any hesitations about the final outcome. Their intellectual and academic insights were my guiding light. Daniela and Ivan cheered for me from Sweden – a 39-year friendship, I think it says it all. Maia and Valeri (let he rest in peace) cheered for me in Bulgaria as Albena did. Ani and Asen, Margaret (my best friend and my soul mate), her husband Liubomir and their daughter Ivana (the daughter I never had) loved me unconditionally, supported me immensely and never let me quit. My dear aunt Vesselina, my uncle Liuben and my cousin Liudmila were a precious support and presence. My brother-in-law's, Nikolay, sense of humor and endless optimism navigated me through tough times.

My mother taught me to love literature, arts and music. Her great passion for Russian literature and culture was my major inspiration. She taught me love, friendship, generosity, grace, and humbleness. My sister is my best friend, my first reader, my alter ego, my everything. My late father, to whom I owe my Russian language, my profession, my theatrical nature and whose last name I proudly hold, taught to me never to quit and that honor and decency are the most important things in life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
I. Forgotten Estates, Forgotten Virtues: The Familial Narratives of the Popular Drama of the 1880s-1890s.....	12
Melodrama of Adultery, Melodrama of Narcissism: Luka Antropov’s <i>Wandering Lights</i>.....	14
The “Idyllic Myopia” of The Garden of Eden: Ippolit Shpazhinskii’s <i>On a Forgotten Estate</i>.....	28
The Quest for the “Positive Hero”: Piotr Boborykin’s <i>Doctor Moshkov</i>.....	54
The Advent of the “New People”: Aleksandr Sumbatov-Iuzhin’s <i>The Arkazanovs</i>.....	63
II. Paradigms of Marginality in Chekhov’s Early Drama.....	76
Between ‘Holy Foolishness’ and ‘Jestership’: <i>Platonov</i>.....	77
Katabasis and Misplacement as Poetic Stratagems: <i>On the High Road</i>.....	107
III. The Dialectics of Internal and External Space in Chekhov’s Prose.....	125
CONCLUSION.....	155
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	159

INTRODUCTION

It has long been a tradition in the scholarship of Russian drama to refer to the last two decades of the nineteenth century as a “theatrical interregnum”. This term roughly qualifies the period between Aleksandr Ostrovsky and Anton Chekhov. Unquestionably, both playwrights are the ultimate expression of the dramaturgical genius of the time. Nonetheless, during the period marked by Ostrovsky’s late works and Chekhov’s theatrical debut, the Russian stage continued to draw big and appreciative audiences. Ostracized and stigmatized by theoreticians and critics, persistently typecast as artistic pariahs (“dramatic carpenters” / “*dramodely*”), the popular playwrights of the 1880s and 1890s only recently attracted closer attention. The dramatic output of this period has been discussed only in passing, predominantly as part of the general history of Russian drama. Likewise, Chekhov’s early oeuvre has been considered mainly as a stepping stone to his major plays. This study offers a new reading of the early dramaturgical legacy of Anton Chekhov in light of fin-de-siècle popular (also known as mass) drama, foregrounding their treatment of social and cultural marginality. The dissertation also reconsiders the popular drama as a valuable cultural phenomenon in itself. It analyzes Chekhov’s work and mass dramatists’ production in the context of the institutional and aesthetic changes that took place in fin-de-siècle Russian drama and focuses on the ways melodrama serves in their works as a vehicle for the discussion of socio-cultural marginality. Approaching

the material as a cultural representation of the intellectual and spiritual anxieties of Russian society, I examine how the melodramatic mode facilitates the expression of ideological crisis and psychological trauma.

The 1880s and 1890s are one of the most complex and controversial eras in the Russian social and intellectual history. As a transitional period, they were marked by a multiplicity of discrepancies in the socio-political and cultural domains. The severe political suppression and the ideological vacuum that followed the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 (this era was known as the period of “timelessness”/*bezvremenie*) were taking place simultaneously with the country’s industrialization and modernization, which generated social mobility and fluidity of cultural identity. The collapse of populist ideology, the painful quest for “common idea” (*obshchaia idea*), the overall disappointment and disorientation of society, coupled with repression and harsh censorship (“counter-reforms”), justify to some extent the label of “timelessness”. On the other hand, the abolition of the monopoly of the imperial theaters in 1882 resulted in the rapid development of private entrepreneurship in the theater and the democratization of the audience. These processes transformed the social and cultural profiles of the audience, stimulated the enrichment of theatrical repertoire, and, last but not least, due to the declining authority of the novel as a predominant literary genre, shifted the focus of the literary scene. As a result, numerous private theatres emerged. They had to face the challenges of the restrictions of the censorship and, at the same time, to hold the interest of a much broader theatrical spectatorship, and to customize the topical dramatic vocabulary and aesthetics according to the taste of the new spectatorship. Consequently,

the relationship between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture became more porous, which was reflected in the emergence of melodramatic discourse as a major mode of representation.

The primary sources for this thesis consist of Chekhov’s earliest full-length plays and several prose works and a selected corpus of plays by the most popular, but now little known dramatists writing concurrently with Chekhov: Luka Antropov, Ippolit Shpazhinskii, Piotr Boborykin, and Aleksandr Sumbatov-Iuzhin. I consider the process of self-reflection and self-identification by which the fin-de-siècle individual constructs an identity somewhere between public and private, center and periphery, fictional and real, high and low. I concentrate on the period of development of Russian theater, during which playwrights continue to work within the traditional pattern of nineteenth-century drama, while beginning to appropriate features of modernity and to create new poetics.

The study examines how the playtexts reflect a society in which social shifts bring huge disruption into people’s attitudes and relationships. Special attention is paid to the problems of identity and marginality within the discourse of Russian fin-de-siècle theatre. The shattering of a traditional hierarchy of values changes drastically the boundaries of the previously established framework of individual and societal behavior. I use the concept of marginality as a functional tool to scrutinize the process of self-reflection and self-identification of the fin-de siècle individual as well as to conceptualize fundamental shifts in social and cultural forms, such as the hesitation between high and low, center and periphery, fictional and real, social and private. I address the position and status of an individual within everyday praxis of the provincial estate on the one hand, and that of urban life, on the other.

The last two decades of the 19th century witness a ‘new wave of Hamletism in Russian drama and offer a re-evaluation of the traditional concept of ‘superfluous man’ (*lishnii chelovek*), which dominates nineteenth-century Russian literature. The latter term encompasses a socio-psychological type in Russian literature, whose main features are “alienation from society”, “intellectual and spiritual anxiety”, “skepticism”, and sense of “historical guilt” (G. Time). Traditionally, it is associated predominately with the Russian gentry. The theatrical discourse of the 1880s and 1890s, though, introduces a broader social context in representing marginalization within nobility, intelligentsia, commercial-industrial stratum, etc.

During the period in question the social and cultural implications of *lishnii chelovek* are modified. While previously ‘superfluity’ is interpreted as being nobility’s key prerogative, the permanent state of hesitation, profound intellectual and spiritual dissatisfaction, ineffectiveness, and reflection develop into a widespread tendency. Furthermore, in terms of ideology, the literary process of the last two decades of the nineteenth century reflects society’s disillusionment in populism. Nevertheless, the ideological vacuum of the post-*narodnichestvo* (post-populism) period creates a certain nostalgia for the idealism of pre-reform rhetoric and the enthusiasm of the 1870s as well. The gesture of the “going to the people” (*khozhdenie v narod*) movement and the imperative of “small deeds” (*malye dela*) are still appealing and the dramaturgy of the period incorporates these ideologemes. Various social groups (upper and middle class, intelligentsia, entrepreneurs, etc.) display fascination with the aforesaid ‘missions’, which operate exactly on the energy of, or, to be more precise, through the unconscious inertia of the formulaic values of the previous epochs. Such ambiguity is reflected in

the manner of representation of the phenomena in question. It ranges from sheer melodramatic expression to biting ironic modus.

While the literature of the first seventy years of the century exploits “superfluity” mainly in terms of ideological and social category, fin-de-siècle theatrical discourse emphasizes the psychological and aesthetic aspects of the phenomenon, which explains the increasing vogue of the Hamletian theme. The inner conflict of a character, his incapability “of taking any action about anything – whether his own life, or the needs of his society”¹, develops into a virtually mandatory component of numerous dramatic works. The interpretation of this now ubiquitous iconic figure varies parallel to the way melodrama uses the clichéd love triangle. Both idioms split into multiple scenarios which examine paths of ideological, intellectual, or private dilemmas.

The key questions in which Shakespeare’s Hamlet is entangled: identity crisis, triggered by a world, which has been shattered, search for logical counteractions, and the “sense/sensibility” conflict, are appropriated as a means of discussing any type of psychological frustration or intellectual “procrastination”. ‘Hamletism’ is evoked whenever a character finds him/herself in a state of emotional disturbance or dilemma-driven situation. As R. Gilman puts it: “Hamlet types are everywhere in nineteenth-century Russian literature and the name kept popping up in dinner-party conversation, without, however, anyone showing much understanding of Shakespeare prince, who

¹ A. Smeliansky, “Chekhov at the Moscow Art Theatre” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, ed. by V Gotlieb and P. Allain, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 39.

was seen mainly in his aspect of indecision, ineffectuality, and dour introspection, in other words as the clichéd Hamlet of conventional meaning”.²

Thus the literature of the 1880s and 1890s and the popular drama, in particular, approach its two emblematic concepts—‘superfluous man’ and ‘Hamletism’—with, to some extent, hesitant attitude. Both phenomena stand engraved in the literary and cultural memory of the epoch, but they are now being used as a convenient, ready-made device. “Superfluity” and “inwardly conflicting human nature” (M. Sokolyansky) grow into a household name, which is abused considerably. At the same time, the incorporation and interpretation of the aforesaid notions are not entirely derivative. Mention also should be made of a newly emerged concept, which gains popularity over the period. It is the category of *izlomannye liudi* (broken people)³ that comes into use and begins to compete with the other two notions. In addition to them, this psychological group now represents individuals who display discomfort, caused by the chaotic state of society.

It is exactly the images of chaos, turmoil, vortex, and disruption that saturate the dramatic texture of the period. The political reaction and economic stagnation which follow the assassination of Alexander II intensify the sense of disorientation of the Russian fin-de-siècle society. The changes within social space, patterns of public behavior, organization of the family life, cultural affairs, etc., and reactions to their

² Richard Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays. An Opening into Eternity*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) pp. 39-40. V. Gotlieb also considers ‘Hamletism’ in Russian literature to be a specifically russified version: “This is not Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but the popular nineteenth-century Russian idea of Hamlet [...]”. V. Gotlieb, “Chekhov’s Comedy” *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*, ed by V Gotlieb and P. Allain, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)p. 234.

³ The term soon begins to share the fate of *lishnii chelovek* and Hamletian theme. Moreover, one of Vl. Aleksandrov’s long curtain raiser bears the same title: *Izlomannye liudi* (1893).

shifting borders lead to a revision of previously established dominant paradigms. The sense of bewilderment becomes the dominant dramatic discourse and “broken people” stand out as an allegory of a new generation which comes to the forefront of Russian life and finds its self-expression in the multitude of dramatic production during this time. Social decay of the gentry continues to be a productive source for the dramatic plot and country estate is still the focal topos of the dramatic action. It is the range and the quality of the changes they generate that differs.

As a result, fin-de-siècle drama concentrates on portraying individuals who inherit certain attributes of the “superfluous man” from the first half of the century. The key distinction between the aforesaid concept and that of the new generation of personages lies in the fact that the class membership ceases to be the major factor, which defines the limits of the category. The significance of the psychological parameters is what matters most now. What could possibly have in common an orphaned illegitimate girl raised on an estate as the princess’s plaything, a crippled ‘wood-demon’, a village schoolmaster, and, finally, a prince, returning to his estate in search of different sights and sounds? All these characters are united either by their difficulty or failure to adjust to the instability in their world and to respond to the challenges it brings in.

The state of alienation from one’s milieu and the sense of not belonging to any other are the principal components of the dramatic tension and conflict within the dramaturgy of the last two decades of the nineteenth century. When discussing the major tendencies in this discourse, I utilize the concept of marginality. This notion has been appropriated by different scholarly discourses. Sociology, the social branches of

philosophy and psychology, political theory, let alone cultural and gender studies incorporate the term according to their specific strategies and concepts. Hence, the application of marginality by these disciplines fluctuates. At the focal point of all of these disciplines, though, are the relations between a person and a community or between a particular group of people and the society as a whole, the analysis of the numerous (and heterogeneous) manifestations and sources generating the tension between them. Another principal aspect of the discourses in question is the balance between emblematic oppositions, such as: center/periphery,⁴ inside/outside, presence/absence, etc. Whether defining the parameters of certain discourse of power or developing the study of literary representation of a social/economic/cultural group, the contemporary theoretical movements identify the marginal as a participating subject. Whereas “superfluous man” and ‘new Hamlet’ continue to linger as a privileged discourse, the relation of *izlomannye liudi* to the prevailing paradigms is one of connectedness but difference.

Fin-de- siècle European literature and art appropriate melodrama as a major mode of representation. When experiencing, resisting and yet embracing modernity, Russian culture also articulates fascination with the melodramatic expression, although the reasons for this are genuinely Russian. As Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberg point out: “Commercial culture in general and melodrama in particular remain a central, if underappreciated, force in Russian society. As an alternative to the old intelligentsia’s

⁴ Deconstructive literary criticism, for example, within the context of reading practices, considers the problem of the marginal in terms of the hierarchy of its constituents. As J. Culler specifies: “This is an identification of the exclusions on which hierarchies may depend and by which they might be disrupted but it is also the beginning of an encounter with previous readings which, in separating a text into the essential and marginal elements, have created for the text an identity that the text itself, through the power of its marginal elements, can subvert” (p. 215). For further discussion of this deconstructive practice, see J. Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theories and Criticism after Structuralism*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982) 206-22.

valorization of reason, propriety, and public and political commitment, melodrama offered its audiences a world of feeling, sensation, and private moral dilemmas. [...] The Russian cult of the *idea* and a privileging of political thought and revolutionary ideology have obscured the genuine diversity of Russian cultural production and consumption. Just as boundaries separating classes had become more porous by the end of the nineteenth century and social identity had become more complex, artists of the period intentionally mixed genres that had previously been associated with specific classes.”⁵ I examine how Chekhov’s dramatic and prose work and different subgenres of the ‘popular’ drama situate modern experience and how the incorporation of melodramatic mode negotiate social shifts, ideological crisis, dramas of identity, psychological traumas, collapse of family ties, etc.

This study concentrates on the period of development of Russian theater, during which playwrights continue to work within the traditional pattern of nineteenth-century drama, while beginning to appropriate features of modernity as a consequence of the specific economic, social and political changes in the country and as a reflection of the general development of the European society. Fin-de-siècle implies more than a period in time: it is a paradigm that defines the configuration of the public scene in Europe. In turn, stage melodrama was brought into Russia from the West, but was reshaped according to the national, uniquely Russian concerns. The main genre under scrutiny in the thesis is the familial drama as a meeting point of the three instrumental concepts of the study: the modes of marginality as a cultural paradigm of modernity and the ways they were articulated by the melodramatic form. The dissertation consists of three

⁵ *Imitations of Life. Two Centuries of Melodrama in Russia*, Eds. Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberger, (Duke University Press & London, 2002) 3-4.

chapters which analyze these concepts, respectively, within the context of the popular drama of the late nineteenth century, Chekhov's early drama and Chekhov's prose of the same period. The goal of each four parts of Chapter I is to highlight particular types of popular drama's familial narratives ("melodrama of adultery", "revenge" melodrama, "socio-psychological drama"), the development of specific character types ("necessary woman" — the female equivalent of the "superfluous man" culturologeme — and "superfluous man"; "broken people" and "new woman"; "new people" and "the new positive hero.") These segments also explore the persistent themes and motifs that accompany the dramatic narration, such as the modifications of the "generation conflict", the "money-love" and the "sale-trade" motifs. All of the abovementioned aspects of the popular drama are examined against the backdrop of the idiosyncratic conventions of the melodramatic mode (representations of villainy, victimization, innocence, and martyrdom) through the prism of the "spatial-ethical hierarchy."

Chapters II and III analyze Chekhov's earliest drama and a selected body of prose works which bring into focus the spatial strategies which the writer employs in his exploration of social and psychological marginality. With his dramas, I show how the playwright, although employing one of the most conservative dramatic structures, subverts and rearranges its constituents in such a way that the readily identifiable "moral teleology" is frustrated. I analyze various paradigms of marginality as manifested in the figures of "the holy fool," "the jester," "the wood demon", and the "New Hamlet," and their appropriation within the Manichean configuration of the melodramatic mode. Thus characters peripheral to the plot become central to the dramatic conflict. The focal point of my analysis is the spatial devices which Chekhov

utilizes in his discussion of marginality: misplacement, katabasis, claustal space. The interaction of dramatic and stage space, and that between on- and off-stage domains are also given a special attention. Although the primary focus of the dissertation is the dramatic writing, Chekhov's prose works discussed in Chapter III consider the repertoire of tropes and devices which express the sense of disintegration and marginal existence discussed in the previous chapters. The problem of space serves as a main vehicle of meaning and the melodramatic mode permeates the narratives. Interior and exterior spaces signify not only physical or geographical loci but also existential conditions and crises. I discuss those texts in which spatiality functions as a central trope of marginality and, respectively, those spatial strategies which were to crystallize in his mature plays.

CHAPTER I

Forgotten Estates, Forgotten Virtues: The Familial Narratives of the Popular Drama of the 1880s-1890s.

In the study of popular culture the concept of “formula” has proved to be productive. “Formula” was proposed by John G. Cawelti⁶ in the late 1960s, just when different branches of academia registered a growing fascination with this field of study. In the mid-seventies, the idea was elaborated by Earl F. Bargainnier. Bargainnier⁷ adopted the term to the specific field of melodrama. Cawelti suggested his concept as a tool to better approach popular art. The necessity for that, as the scholar explained, was in the specific nature of the latter, namely its “collectiveness”: “When we are studying the fine arts, we are essentially interested in the unique achievement of the individual artist, while in the case of popular culture, we are dealing with a product that is in some sense collective.”⁸ Cawelti juxtaposes “high culture” and “popular culture” and arrives at the conclusion that methods of the analysis of their artistic product should be neither universal, nor identical. Further, he singles out a cluster of four supplementary notions which he considers to be fruitful in the studies of popular culture and cultural studies (in particular in the examination of literary genres as “detective stories”, “Westerns”, etc.): theme, medium, myth, and formula. For the purposes of our study, of immediate

⁶ John G. Cawelti, “The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Literature”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 3 (1969): pp. 381-90.

⁷ Earl F. Bargainnier, “Melodrama as Formula”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9 (1975): pp. 726-33.

⁸ Cawelti, *Op. cit.*, p. 382.

interest are the elements of myth and formula analysis although the question of medium could present a tempting point of research as well.⁹ Cawelti considers cultural constructs to be a combination of two basic elements: conventions and inventions. Conventions rely on the audience's previous familiarity with a certain set of themes, motifs, plots, characters, imagery, tropes, etc. Inventions "are elements which are uniquely imagined by the creator." Depending on which element is prevalent, literary works can also be regarded as cultural products which target a large and diverse audience or creations whose addressee's knowledge and intellectual demands are more selective. Further, Cawelti distinguishes formula and form as systems "for structuring cultural products." The scholar approaches formulaic and formal products not from the point of view of their artistic and aesthetic merits. He is interested in the degree of the conventionality and originality of their components and, more importantly, in the methods the artists utilize tradition and novelty in order to achieve "a new perception of familiar elements." Works in which formula prevails are historically and culturally more specific and, thus, limited. Cawelti concludes with the assertion that the first step in the exploration of formula stories should be examination of their narrative structure and, the second—a comparative analysis of different formulas and their implementation by different cultures.

Bargainnier found Cawelti's idea of formula "a promising method" for the study of nineteenth century melodrama since the traditional approach has always lead to its marginalization as a plebeian product of low culture. The scholar emphasizes the fact that "nineteenth century produced the first mass audience for the theatre, and the

⁹ What we mean here is the simple fact that within the studies of melodrama, especially over the last decades, stage melodrama has been vastly ignored.

melodrama cannot be separated from that audience” (p. 728).¹⁰ Respectively, the principal form of dramatic writing became melodramatic. Further, Bargainnier very briefly discerns the elements in the melodramatic formula and, correspondingly, outlines the major types of nineteenth century English melodrama. In this chapter by close reading of a selected set of plays which we find representative for the Russian stage of the 1880s our intention is to determine the formula of its narrative and poetical structure.

Melodrama of Adultery, Melodrama of Narcissism: Luka Antropov’s *Wandering Lights*

Wandering Lights (*Bluzhdaiushchie ogni*, 1873) belongs to a period that lies beyond the time framework of the present study. The play, however, is an important point of departure for the analysis of the mass dramaturgy since it shows signs of obvious thematic and structural parallels with Chekhov’s *Platonov*. Both plays, albeit still entrenched in the rhetorical gestures and the stylistic repertoire of the seventies, at the same time display certain features of transitional quality of the dramaturgical aesthetics of the 1880s. Luka Antropov (1841(?)/43-1881) left a comparatively small dramaturgical legacy. Among the literary circles he was known mainly for his numerous articles on theatre and literature in *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, *Golos*, *Zaria*, *Moskovskie vedomosti*. In particular he discussed the works of I. Goncharov, I. Turgenev, F. Dostoevskii. Piotr Boborykin, his fellow writer and dramatist, wrote in

¹⁰ Although Bargainnier’s primary object of study in the essay in question is nineteenth century English drama, his observations, to a greater extent are applicable to the Russian scene of the time. For example, parallels between the monopoly of Russian Imperial theaters and the status and function of the patent houses in England can be easily drawn. Similarities are also obvious with regard to the status of the playwright compared to that of the theatre manager, or to the problem of censorship.

his memoirs that Antropov's style was "fresh and sophisticated" and that he was "very devoted to the idea of the "pure art."¹¹

Unlike the rest of Antropov's dramatic oeuvre *Wandering Lights* enjoyed a very long stage life. It was performed for more than forty years and was extremely popular with the audience of the capitals and the province. In a letter to Mitrofan Shchepkin¹², Maria Ermolova¹³ expresses a great enthusiasm about her chance to play one of the major female parts in the play – "I was completely and utterly happy!"¹⁴ Vladimir Kataev detected the shared properties of Antropov's and Chekhov's works.¹⁵ He suggested that on account of the play's established reputation Chekhov most probably had the opportunity to see *Wandering Lights* already in Taganrog and then in Moscow. Kataev also calls attention to the presence of a quote from the play in Chekhov's *Posle benefisa* (1885) which provides another evidence of how well-known Antropov's play was.

Since "Chekhov begins with *Platonov*"¹⁶ and Kholmin, the central character of *Wandering Lights*, prefigured the title character of *Platonov*, it seems reasonable first to engage in registering the common elements in the aforementioned plays.¹⁷ We assume that both dramatists elaborated on a motif which was often utilized by

¹¹ Petr Boborykin. *Za polveka. Vospominaniia*. (Moscow: Zakharov, 2003), p. 373.

¹² Mitrofan Shchepkin (1832-1908) was a distant relative of the famous Russian actor Mikhail Shchepkin. He was a professor and a regular contributor to *Russkie vedomosti* and *Russkaia letopis'*. Shchepkin was a great supporter and admirer of Ermolova.

¹³ Maria Ermolova (1853-1928) was probably the most prominent actress the Russian stage has ever known. Her career became the epitome of the best years of Maly Theater.

¹⁴ Maria Ermolova, *Pis'ma. Iz literaturnogo naslediia. Vospominaniia sovremennikov*. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1955), p. 48.

¹⁵ Kataev, *Literaturnye sviazi Chekhova*. pp. 116-19

¹⁶ In this context by "Chekhov" Kataev implies Chekhov's drama. Kataev, *Op. cit.*, p.114

¹⁷ We are fully aware that by opening the discussion of this play with a reference to a play which is yet to be analyzed in the next chapter might create certain achronology. And yet, we are ready to take this risk since one of our main tasks is to show that Chekhov's early drama emerged from the popular drama of his time and that he borrowed many themes and strategies from his contemporary fellow playwrights.

Ostrovskii — the motif of “sale-trade” (“*pokupko-prodazha*”) — which, on his part, had drawn on a traditional opposition employed by sentimentalism. The topicality of this type of conflict is apparent from the fact that in his late works Ostrovsky continued to use and develop the theme. The close proximity between *Platonov* (1878) and *Without a Dowry* (1879) provides evidence that dramatists exploited the “money-love” conflict as a point of departure in constructing dramatic collisions. Along these lines the talks between Glagolyev and Vengerovich regarding Anna Voinitsev (*Platonov*) and the real scene of negotiation between Vozhevatov and Knurov (*Without a Dowry*) echo a crucial discussion in Antropov’s play which we will discuss later on.

Wandering Lights is set in a dacha in the outskirts of Peterburg and recounts a story of a highly intelligent, talented and attractive young man, Maksim (Maks) Kholmin, who finds himself caught up in a moral dilemma similar to the one Chekhov revises in the character of Platonov five years later. Kholmin is involved with a young widow, Lidiia Mareva, who lives with her sister (Liolia). Mareva is also mistress of an affluent entrepreneur, Dikovskii. Dikovskii does not have any illusions in regard to Mareva’s real feelings: she needs him for financial support, whereas her real affection is for Kholmin. Dikovskii, however, owes his wealth to his wife – a rich heiress. He is separated from her and keeps promising Mareva to marry her but soon he finds himself on the verge of bankruptcy. In order to improve his finances as well as his social prestige he decides to reunite with his wife. Yet, reluctant to lose Mareva, Dikovskii comes up with the idea to talk Kholmin into marrying her. He suggests that everyone would benefit from his “business proposal”: Mareva will get a husband and her reputation in the eyes of the society will be restored, Kholmin’s path to “wealth and

success” will be clear, and Dikovskii will keep his status. After a short hesitation (during which Liolia declares her love for Kholmin) Kholmin comes to a decision to accept the offer but discovers that Lidiia intends to chase Liolia away. Kholmin suddenly regains his ‘sight’ and chooses to save her. He marries Liolia and five years and three children later they live in poverty. Kholmin works as a journalist but hates his job and regrets every major decision he made in the past. He does not recognize anymore in his wife the pure, innocent girl who, as he hoped, would “save” his soul. He is bored with simple and submissive Liolia and is unhappy with his whole life. Meanwhile Lidiia enjoys great success as an opera diva. Kholmin is aware of her success which makes him twice as intolerant towards Liolia. Dikovskii reappears with his next ‘proposition’. He offers Kholmin a better job in his enterprise and passes along Lidiia’s wish to bring Kholmin to her salon. Kholmin succumbs to the temptation and stays home less and less often. Lidiia is torn between her long-lived desire for revenge on Liolia and her feelings for Kholmin. Eventually she visits her sister and after a heartbreaking scene she asks her sister for forgiveness for seducing Kholmin and for depriving his children from their father. But the repentance comes too late. At Lidiia’s namesake party Kholmin shoots himself.

If we consider the play from the point of view of its genre we might assert that it possesses traits of domestic drama and of so called problem play as well, although these dramatic forms are associated more with the Western drama of the period in question than with the Russian drama. Russian theatre specialists prefer the category of “socio-psychological drama” (*sotsial’no-psikhologicheskaiia drama*). Nonetheless, dramatic playtexts like *Wandering Lights* began to show a shift in the playwrights’

approach towards the major dramatic collision. In their persistent search for the positive hero of the epoch, they went deeper into the inner universe of their characters which led to the prevalence of the psychological and philosophical component of dramatic texture. Personages like Kholmin paved the way for protagonists like Platonov, Ivanov, Voinitskii, among many other examples, and, on the whole, anticipated the advent of the “new drama” which culminated in Chekhov’s plays.¹⁸ G. Time¹⁹ emphasizes the fact that the new trends in dramatic writing — both in terms of themes and plots and with regard to poetics — should be analyzed always alongside the “mass dramaturgy phenomenon” which also demonstrated a keen interest in psychological changes within the individuals, in dramatizing their “inner conflict” instead of merely “dramatizing events.”²⁰

Platonov’s cynicism and arrogance are easily recognizable in Kholmin’s general approach to what he calls “vanity fair” (*zhiznenny bazar*). Smart, articulate, well-traveled, Kholmin has almost everything except for purpose and sense of fulfillment. He hides behind a mask of arrogance and finds in Mareva a soul mate. They recognize in each other an identical boredom with life, emotional emptiness, and disappointment with themselves. Kholmin intellectualizes his infatuation with Lidiia in the following way:

KHOLMIN: The devil has brought us together, as the saying goes. Sometimes, you know, when I am bored, I reflect on our love and I came to the conclusion that we love ourselves in each other. Nature cut us from the same cloth with a slight difference in terms of ligature. You, like me, [...] are capable of grasping every minute detail. I admire your insatiable appetite for pleasures of life, your constant quest for new things, for the unknown. I love in you the audacity which the crowd find irresistible. I appreciate your skill at staking everything not because you like winning but because

¹⁸ Tolstoy’s late dramaturgy (*The Power of Darkness* [*Vlast’ t’my*], 1886, in particular) is also considered to be part of Russian “new drama”.

¹⁹ G. Time, *U istokov novoi dramaturgii v Rossii (1880 – 1890-e gody)*, (Leningrad: Nauka, 1991). p.9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

you thrive on anticipation... Besides, long time ago my artistic instinct had discerned in you a divine sparkle, a great talent. With this amazing voice of yours, only God knows why you are still stuck in this swamp rather than swimming in the vast sea of art. [...] You would grow; you would experience the genuine delight of inspiration! ... And, just think, what it would mean in terms of your predatory instincts! [...]

LIDIIA: Oh, you devil! How *broken*²¹ your soul is! You are so confused that you cannot tell the difference between truth and untruth. You like to go deep into people's souls and to torture them. You play with people as if you play with toys!

(pp. 7-8)²²

Kholmin's and Mareva's dynamics reverberate in the Platonov-Anna relationship. They are equally narcissistic and, without admitting it, to the same degree vulnerable. Bright and gifted—Mareva in performing arts, Kholmin in writing — they nevertheless fall victims to their insecurities. As we will see further, in *Platonov* Chekhov breaks up Lidiia's persona between the characters of Anna and Sophia. Anna's financial uncertainty, the burden of being responsible for her stepson's family, and the problem of the mortgaged estate²³ can be recognized in Mareva's complicated situation. She has not only to support herself but also to take care of her sister who does not have any skills or talents but her innocence. Both Anna and Lidiia possess *femme fatale* qualities. They challenge the men they love with their unconventionality and audacity; they attract them with their disarming frankness. Mareva appreciates Kholmin's caustic verbal dexterity and sober view of human existence. On the other hand, she gets annoyed with his proclivity to histrionics since this is where their general approach toward handling life situations differs. Whereas Kholmin indulges in self-abnegation camouflaged with exaggerated theatricality, Lidiia chooses to channel her creative

²¹ The adjective "broken" becomes used on a regular basis in popular drama. Having been turned into a constant epithet, (most frequently in combination with words like "soul", "man", "people") the collocation into which the adjective enters begins to epitomize a whole generation of people who inherited a lot from the "superfluous men" of the first half of the century but with an additional, new meaning.

²² All quotations are from Luka K. Antropov, *Bhuzhdaiushchie ogni* (Sankt Peterburg: Litofgrafskoe izdanie, 1878). Translation is mine.

²³ Mareva expects to face the same problem because Dikovskii rents the *dacha* she calls her home but with Dikovskii's decision to return to his wife that would mean that Mareva would lose the house.

talent into a career on the real stage. Thus the plot line shifts the center of the real dramatic clash. Kholmin's incapability of taking responsibility for the choices he makes in the spur of a moment and to cope with their consequences creates an inner conflict which he self-dramatizes. Thus the development of the characters of Mareva and Kholmin results in a narrative based on the opposition between theatricality and metatheatricality²⁴. Kholmin's demeanor displays "reversed mimesis" which Gary S. Morson considers to be a major attribute of the Chekhov's characters:

[Chekhov's] plays center on histrionic people who imitate theatrical performances and model themselves on other melodrama genres. They posture, seek grand romance, imagine that a tragic fatalism governs their lives, and indulge in utopian dreams while they neglect the ordinary virtues and ignore the daily processes that truly sustain them.²⁵

The difference between *Platonov* and *Kholmin* is that *Antropov's* protagonist does not fail to recognize the "ordinary virtues". In contrast, he finds them in *Liolia*. His drama begins when his expectations are not realized. They fail since, on the one hand, he sees his actions as an altruistic gesture, and, on the other hand, because he builds his decision on the egotistical premise that by "rescuing" *Liolia* he would "rescue" himself:

KHOLMIN [to *Liolia*]: I was young ... my whole life was ahead of me — secure, convenient...I had faith, I loved the whole world in the person of a woman who, as I used to think, was waiting for me in order to give me unknown happiness. In a state of such blissful self-oblivion I came back home.²⁶ [...] For a long time I had stood on the threshold of real life and reluctantly crossed it...I haven't found my lady [...] I have loved no one and I love no one. And this is my curse. [...] You listen and you hear. I am not ashamed to be myself with you. In your presence my jester's armor fall off and I am not afraid to stand in front of you with open heart. I, my child, was born in

²⁴ In *Platonov* one of the metatheatrical devices used by the dramatists is Sergei Voynitsev's intention to stage *Hamlet* and his contemplation on assigning of the main roles. Details like this function as ironic indicators of characters' penchant for self-dramatization. In *Wandering Lights* the most illustrative instance of implementation metatheatricality is the moment when Kholmin arrives at the decision to accept Dikovskii's offer: "What is the point in playing Hamlet: to be or not to be? Positively – to be" (p.25).

²⁵ Gary S. Morson. "Uncle Vanya as Prosaic Metadrama" in *Reading Chekhov Texts*. Ed Robert Louis Jackson, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993) p. 214

²⁶ Here Kholmin refers to a trip to Switzerland.

Arcadia. I didn't expect with what life had greeted me. I didn't prepare myself to what was required from me [...]. Teach me, Liolia how to live my life.

p. 14

In other words, Kholmin's endeavors fall into the paradigm of search for the "necessary woman" but Liolia does not succeed in developing into such a heroine. The latter term I borrow from Jehanne M Gheith who coined the idiom in order to give an approximate female equivalent of the superfluous man culturologeme.²⁷ Although the scholar specifies that she applies the term "provisionally", we think that it fits perfectly the context of the nineteenth-century literary development and serves its task very well. As flexible and historically specific as its male counterpart is, the term encompasses several groups of characteristics. First and foremost, the very adjective which enters the collocation — "necessary" — points instantly to the major difference between the two emblematic types. Whereas the superfluous man's most distinctive features are his social isolation (be it social or psychological) and sense of rejection on the part of society, the necessary woman stands out with her strong awareness of involvement. Needless to say, the nature of engagement is predictably different in light of the women's position in society. Yet heroine's psychological strength, capability of loving and commitment to serve and protect her beloved are remarkable. Compared to the constant vacillations and ineffectualness of the male protagonist her devotion and passion compensate for the inevitable limited range of her social activity. Since the female-protagonist's only domain of realization is the domestic sphere, the institutions of marriage and motherhood become her primary avenues of activity.

The "necessary woman" is actually either depicted through the "hero's eyes or is seen as important insofar as she affects him. She was created as a counterpart to the superfluous man, both as his ideal (she embodies the values to which he aspires), and

²⁷ Jehanne M Gheith, "The Superfluous Man and the Necessary Woman: A "Re-Vision", in *Russian Review*, Vol. 55, No. 2. (Apr., 1996), pp. 226-44.

as the measure of his superfluity (it is when she asks him to make a decision, usually to marry her, that she must face the fact that she is incapable of action). His drama is central; his failure necessitates her failure (in the sense that she is unable to save him, to join him in marriage).²⁸

Kholmin becomes the center of his own dramatic universe and unlike characters like Platonov whose representativeness is brought up by other dramatis personae, Kholmin claims such a quality on his own – he refers to himself as to the “hero of today”. With all her admiration, Mareva finds Kholmin’s playing roles distasteful. Moreover, she is convinced that the protagonist’s passion for histrionics is the reason for his blurred perception of reality. Even Kholmin’s infatuation with Lidiia compares to the way artists work with their models: they put them in various positions and try different angles until the model finally assumes the desired position and impression. Consequently, the inner conflict (that of the main protagonist) and the external conflict (the creative development of Kholmin and Mareva) reveal an intriguing dynamics that rests on a key gendered opposition: poser (*lomaka*) / model (*naturshchitsa*). In his social interactions, Kholmin thrives not only on his own continuous reincarnations but also on his efforts to mold the self-/ perception of others according to his own one. The protagonist characterizes the lifestyle pattern of his milieu as a “fancy dress orgy” (*kostiumirovannia orgiia*) which, as he asserts, justifies his own “masquerade”. Hence in Liolia Kholmin discovers an entirely different world. He does not fall in love with her but he is intrigued by her just in the way he manifests curiosity about any sensation he has not experienced. Kholmin follows a portentous existential ‘religion’ which he vests with epicurean ‘maxims.’ Here again analogy with Platonov is instantly recognizable. Platonov summarizes his philosophy in the sententious “*de omnibus aut*

²⁸ Gheith, Op. cit., p. 232

nihil, aut veritas”, Kholmin’s equivalent can be traced in his very own first name — Maksim. However, whereas Platonov at the end of his life proclaims his disillusionment with himself and displays public remorse for the harm he has done, in the same situation, Kholmin expresses regret for the damage he has inflicted only on himself:

KHOLMIN [to Lidiia]: Why do you despise me? What wrong have I done? All my crimes are only mistakes. My life weighs on my conscience. There is only one person before whom I am deeply guilty and that person is me!” p. 55

Platonov’s statement — “Platonov is wrong with me” — emphasizes his act of repentance and his readiness to take responsibility for his actions. Kholmin’s final speech in Lidiia’s salon is an affirmation of a hedonistic credo that ends in itself hidden under a layer of ostentatious verbiage:

KHOLMIN: We all worship one and the same cult. Some time ago I myself prayed to the same deities. But I betrayed them and that is why I have to leave. Keep sacred my bequest; do not renounce your fathers’ faith. Remember that pleasure is the only purpose in life and there should be no other. Idleness is a great thing in which we all indulge, in one way or another, but it wears people out very fast. Do not stay very long at one place; change everything possible to change ... wine, women, convictions. Get rid of your feelings, kill ideas. Be afraid of thinking. There is nothing more harmful than thinking. Once I pondered over something and because of that I have to leave. Learn to despise yourselves... That would be the price you’ll pay in order to despise the whole world and you’ll become free like Gods.

pp. 55-60

Analyzing *Wandering Lights* with regular references to *Platonov* is justifiable and useful not only because the plays follow comparable plot lines, share, to a certain degree, similar characters, and dramatize analogous situations. What is of more significant value is our conviction that the narrative structure of the plays reveals similar, albeit not identical, features. For this task we find fruitful Stepanov’s study of psychology of melodrama.²⁹ The scholar concentrates on a particular sub-genre of

²⁹ Andrei D. Stepanov, “Psikhologiiia melodramy” in *Drama i teatr. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*. (Tver’: Izdatel’stvo Tverskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2001), pp. 38-56.

familial melodrama which he labels as “melodrama of adultery.” It should be pointed out that there is a certain terminological inconsistency in the past as well as in the recent scholarship dedicated to the Russian mass dramaturgy. Balukhaty, for example, places most of the plays written over the period in question under “everyday life melodrama” (*bytovaia melodrama*)³⁰. But his classification belongs to a time when melodrama was examined only in terms of a genre. Stepanov approaches melodrama as a complex (“transhistorical”, “transgenre”, “deep-seated in human psyche”) phenomenon and, following Igor’ Smirnov, discusses the “text” of everyday life melodrama as a “text-symptom”, that is, using this type of drama as a general pattern and principle when analyzing other forms of popular drama. As a fundamental theme of “melodrama of adultery” Stepanov indicates the destruction of a family. As with the “victim’s support group” and the “villain’s support group” which he uses in his examination of the characters’ system in melodrama in general, in his study of this particular form, he introduces another functional dichotomy. Basically, Stepanov reduces main characters to two major categories: the person who leaves the family and the one, who is left behind. The former actively pursues his freedom; the latter stays in an emotional agony and gives her/himself up to suffering. In the cases in which the abandoner goes through a painful hesitation and qualms of conscience, this character pushes the development of the plot and becomes the carrier of the main suffering. If the plot has at its disposal the character of the seducer/seductress (which is the most common exploited situation) then the abandoned spouse becomes the focal point of the dramatic narrative since she/he maintains the suffering and hence the line of victimization. Stepanov selects this particular sub-category of familial drama as a

³⁰ Balukhaty, *Voprosy poetiki* (Leningrad: Izdatels’stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1990), pp. 30-80

paradigmatic form of melodrama because the “adultery melodrama” comprises all structural constituents representative for the melodramatic narrative: dysfunctionality, antithesis, and continuous pathos, accompanied by hyperbolic emotionalism. On the other hand, the disintegration of the family presents a quintessentially modern problem and “melodrama of adultery” dramatizes exactly that. Brooks finds the familial structure to be one of the most exploited patterns by melodrama. Martha Vicinus also underlines the artistic resourcefulness and productivity of the form:

The topical circumstances and realistic settings of melodrama successfully housed archetypal conflicts and reassurances. Domestic melodrama was a means for both minor and major authors to address themselves to the most powerful fantasies of the times. No other form could express so powerfully familial and social hopes and fears.³¹

The act of leaving a family — the escape — is undoubtedly the center of “melodrama of adultery.” Stepanov interprets this “archetypal” motif in Lotman’s fashion — a character chooses to leave because the current marriage is eventless and without an alternative: “Melodramatic thinking, similar to mythical thinking is personified and thus the moment of choice cannot occur prior to the appearance of the tempter/temptress... [who is always presented through contrast, being an epitome of what the character does not have in his previous life].”³² Kholmin’s reconnecting with Mareva is, as a matter of fact, not his first adulterous act. Lidiia interprets his marriage to Liolia as an act of betrayal and her life after that shows clear signs of a firm determination to take revenge on the cheaters: Kholmin and Liolia. As it has been previously mentioned, Kholmin’s first ‘escape’ is provoked by the protagonist’s (albeit reluctant) realization that his social behavior is not much different from that of the people he harshly criticizes. In Kholmin’s eyes society’s cynical decorum is the reason

³¹ Martha Vicinus, “Helpless and Unfriended: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama” in *New Literary History*, Vol. 13. No 1. (Autumn, 1991) p. 141

³² Stepanov, “Psikhologiiia melodramy”, p. 42

for his incapability of living the life he longs for. He compares societal conventions to public houses which demand and guarantee anonymity and this specific ‘rule’ serves as a justification of his own ‘masquerade’:

KHOLMIN: Life is boring... And what is even stranger is that nobody is bored like people who have a good time. Yes, this is an unbearable cross! Yes, damn it, it is wrong to live like that. Wasting one’s life...What a time we live in — you cannot live, nor die...And I begin dying: not me, but something inside me is already rotting and reeks of decay... I don’t like myself anymore. “Poser”, she said. Well, am I supposed to be the only person not wearing a mask at this fancy dressed orgy? [...] *There are certain establishments where it is not appropriate to ask the visitors about their names, so I also hide my identity within our society.*³³But I am so sick and tired of all this! I am so sick and tired of myself. It is wrong to live like that. pp. 10-11

In melodrama good and virtue have to stumble upon and overcome two major threatening forces: a villainous figure or a hostile society as a collective image. *Wandering Lights* illustrates ‘cooperation’ of both forces. In the construction of the plot Dikovskii’s interference and machinations play a crucial role. Dikovskii’s character collaborates with Mareva’s line. Additionally, the development of the heroine also bears traits of a character that cannot be easily branded merely as villainous or as that of a mere temptress. Lidiia exemplifies what a number of scholars consider as one of the signature marks of melodramatic characters — “reversibility”. With Mareva that would be her more-than-one- transitions from “love into vengeance” and back. While loosely utilizing the skeleton of “melodrama of adultery” Antropov intertwines a major theme that gained popularity in the decades ahead: the development of new socioeconomic reality brought by the rise of capitalism. Dikovskii represents the new power, the new “master”, and his conversation with Kholmin, during which he puts forward his suggestion about Kholmin’s marrying Mareva, illustrates the aspects of the new moral protocol:

³³ Emphasis mine.

DIKOVSKII: [Your marriage to Lidiia Grigor'evna] is going to be a decisive step for you. It will make both of us stronger and will bring our interests together. You will get yourself a smart, energetic wife who will be useful for both of us. She will open for you the road to wealth. And wealth becomes you like no one else. [...] The contentment of the rich and the covetousness of the pauper — these are the two forces of nature that created everything that existed, exists and will exist. [...] Money is everything. It is the material of which is made everything that is considered to be good and sublime in this world. . . There is no other God but money.

KHOLMIN: And you are his prophet?

DIKOVSKII: Yes, I am. Is it really that difficult to choose between the bright road to wealth, success and poverty with its *sour virtues*?³⁴ . . . You should adopt a much simpler approach—consider the problem as if it is an enterprise, a deal. If you don't make up your mind right away, you will never come up with a decision.

pp. 20-21

Dikovskii's philosophy and his dramatic function evoke strong parallels with Ostrovskii's late dramaturgy signature motif — the invasion of “the modern ‘European’ market cynicism”.³⁵ On the other hand, the hero supports his argument by prompting that Kholmin's marriage to Lidiia would reestablish her reputation in the eyes of society and in her own eyes. He does this with a cynical twist, mocking a populist gesture of “rescuing fallen women”: “From you liberal viewpoint it would be very noble to land a helping hand to a lost woman, to show her the right path . . . Would you say it isn't so? Your act [...] would be little short of a heroic deed...” (p. 22)

Whereas Dikovskii's first attempt at orchestrating Kholmin's life fails, his second one succeeds. The real reason behind Kholmin's leaving his family, however, is neither Dikovskii's ‘Mephistophelean’ plotting, nor Mareva's power over Kholmin. Although he admits the challenge of the sensual temptations in the fashion of Goethe's famous character, the protagonist reveals a more powerful drive:

KHOLMIN: [to Mareva] You made me recollect all of those things I thought I had forgotten and buried forever in my memory; you awoke in me the old Adam, whom I renounced a long time ago. You gave me back my previous life. [...] I love you because you are you, I love myself in you, but not the way I am now, crushed, but my

³⁴ As will see further, “sour virtues” (*kislye dobrodeteli*) re-appear as already an idiomatic expression in *On a Forgotten Estate*.

³⁵ Iulia Babicheva, “Ostrovskii v predverii ‘novoï dramy’”, in *A. N. Ostrovskii, A. P. Chekhov i literaturny process XIX-XX vv.* (Moscow: Intrada, 2003) p. 179

previous self: reckless, licentious, and yet full of bold hopes and valor. All of this, as preposterous and senseless as it seems, it is such a free and exciting life that I love in you! I have never loved anyone as I have loved you! p. 42

In reality, Kholmin's rekindled passion for Mareva voices the hero's revived hope of reconnecting with his own genuine self. However Kholmin's last quest for identity arrives at nowhere but at the initial point of departure: "There is only one person before whom I am deeply guilty and that person is me!" In Kholmin's existential 'pilgrimage' all roads end where they begin. Unlike personages, who are driven by a search for "new faces", Kholmin's narcissistic motivation can create only one possible image – the reflection in the mirror.

The "Idyllic Myopia" of The Garden of Eden: Ippolit Shpazhinskii's *On a Forgotten Estate*

Ippolit Shpazhinskii (1848-1917) was probably the most prolific and the most notorious Russian dramatist of the last quarter of the 19th century. Along with Viktor Krylov³⁶ (1838-1906), who himself also established a rather infamous reputation among the theatrical circles, Shpazhinskii had the 'talent' to write for the stage as fast as the 'supply' system, that demanded the theatrical repertoire of the time, requested. They also enjoyed the similar, albeit quite ambiguous, celebrity status of being *dramodely* ("dramatic carpenters"). The dramatists 'earned' this less than flattering label due to their enormous productivity³⁷. Yet, the amount of their output was not the main issue. Shpazhinskii and Krylov mastered the 'art' of dramaturgical recycling. Both playwrights knew theatre enterprise inside and out and once having established their own successful formula they continued reproducing cliché-ridden plots, identical

³⁶ Krylov published also under the pseudonym Victor Aleksandrov.

³⁷ Krylov wrote yearly no less than three-four plays.

conflicts and predictable situations. Whereas in his early works, Krylov strived to camouflage the mediocrity of his writing with the heightened topicality of the progressive ideas of the 1870s, in his mature plays he strived to compensate for the quotidian dramaturgical value with vaudevillian exuberance which became known as “*krylovshchina*”, a synonym of bad taste and an epitome of hack-work. If Krylov’s celebrated presentism reigned over the Russian stage for more than good thirty years, so did Shpazhinskii’s flamboyant theatricality. Shpazhinskii was the master of extravagance and dazzling effects. He was fascinated with the striking contrasts of melodramatic form. The playwright explored its numerous manifestations by populating his dramatic universe with evil forces and hapless innocence, whose clash and consequent resolution would have fit much more successfully into a gothic mise-en-scene, than into a Russian play.

Although Shpazhinskii’s popularity rested mainly on his propensity for spectacle and shock, for the purposes of this study we have selected a play that stands somewhat apart from the dramatist’s familiar dramaturgical pattern. *On a Forgotten Estate* (*V zabytoi usad’be*, 1880) has been very rarely discussed by critics and if so, it has been done in order to provide another example of a dramatic work that drew heavily on the heritage of the big figures of Russian classics. The play’s intriguing and unexpected feature that calls attention to it is Shpazhinskii’s work with structure. Another characteristic of the play is the way the dramatist organizes the elements of melodramatic form and how he recasts the master narrative of “superfluity”. Respectively, we will analyze the prominence of the play’s “ring” structure, its title, the

acts' loci; the interpretation of the principles of "contrast" and "dynamics"³⁸, and, last but not least, the importance of the various hypostases of marginality in the play.

Shpazhinskii builds the plotting on a triad of unrealized love, thwarted intrigue, and averted tragedy. All of these three components are familiar melodramatic techniques but the first one deserves special attention. It rests on several love triangles whose presence is almost reminiscent of Chekhov's deployment of intertwined mismatched or unrequited love stories in his early as well as in his mature dramaturgy. One might say that Shpazhinskii gives almost a sentimentalized treatment of the central relationship. In a quest for "different sounds," Prince Krasavin, the play's main protagonist, returns to his provincial estate from the glitter of the capital's salons, away from the crowd, far from the railroad. He falls in love with Tania, a girl from the village, an orphan, raised and educated by his late mother. The plot disentanglement follows a predictable melodramatic situation: the relationship between Krasavin and Tania is doomed and its failure is conditioned on several reasons. The obvious one would be the class gap between them, although the social inequality does not play the key role in the play. Rather it is a cluster of other devices characteristic for the melodramatic form that maintains the plot's rising action: the principle of contrast and the principle of dynamics. The play's compelling quality is the way the playwright interweaves the rhetoric of modality with the rhetoric of ideology: namely how he subjects the political topicality of the early 1880s to the melodramatic mode. The prince and the orphan occupy opposite sides of the social ladder. Such a contrast, however, does not take a principal place within the internal hierarchy of conflicts in the

³⁸ These formulations belong to Sergei Balukhaty. See, Sergei Balukhaty, "Poetika melodramy" in *Voprosy poetiki*. (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1990)

play. The obstacles the couple is fated to stumble upon are embedded, on the one hand, in the young girl's roots, and, on the other, in the hands of evil machinator, Glafira, the major villainous character. The contrast between goodness and evil assumes here a major role and the social implications of the Krasavin-Tania inequality are a circumstance of secondary importance. The clash of moral values — the principal conflict of the play — is somewhat overshadowed by an exterior layer of motifs close to the mythic and folklore tradition, and this layer exactly will serve for us as a point of departure in the play's analysis.

The mythic and folkloric references are introduced in the opening act which is situated in a forest. As previously mentioned, the function of the structural framework is central since it brings together the two key themes of the drama: the ideological void in the years of “timelessness” and the “forgotten” virtues of the national character. The composition follows a ‘topographical’³⁹ pattern: the first act takes place in a forest, the second act moves to the great hall of Krasavin's estate, the third one goes out to the garden, the fourth act shifts to another part of the garden, and finally, the last act concludes yet again in the forest. Such a ‘topography’/ ‘topology’ not only naturally accompanies the formal intrigue, but also highlights the connotation of the sites in question as cultural loci. The forest encompasses the entanglement and the resolution, the great hall takes in the rising action, the garden houses the climax, and a different area of the garden dramatizes the falling action. Thus Shpazhinskii establishes congruence between the plot's progression and the interior and exterior locales which accommodate the respective formal divisions of the playtext. Basically, the dramatic intrigue unfolds against the backdrop of three main topoi: the forest, the manor and the

³⁹ The adjective ‘topological’ might be a more precise term.

garden. As we will establish, these topoi designate clearly delineated sites of socio-cultural entities which, on their part, can be reduced to the domain of the estate and the domain of the village, respectively—the world of the landowning nobility and the world of the peasants. The garden functions as a bridge between the two worlds, as a mediator between their main representatives – Krasavin and Tania. The events that occur in the garden coincide with the midpoint of the play which is why this locus is not only central from the compositional point of view. More importantly, the dramatist splits the garden in two separate sections and spreads out the episodes that take place there over two consecutive acts as if probing two possible scenarios: Krasavin-Tania's blossoming romance as a social experiment with some traces of the expressive quality of Karamzin's *Poor Lisa* and then, in a typical melodramatic fashion, a stock situation as is the "intrigue of a vicious character", namely Glafira's fateful intervention. But before we delve into the estate's and garden's narratives let us return to the forest and the connotations it suggests.

The play's spatial configuration is a crucial poetical device which reflects disparate internal and external loci. And yet these sites: the forest, the manor, and the garden, allude to encasement and protection. Forest is that space that in reality and on allegorical level suggests additional, one might say oxymoronic connotations. The folklore tradition provides us with multitude of narratives which represent forest as the realm of wild animals, dangerous creatures and supernatural powers. The forest usually symbolizes the unknown and, similarly to the katabatic journey, entrance into such a space is charged with peril and unpredictability. The forest in *On a Forgotten Estate* comprises both major attributes of the topos — it demarcates the characters that are

treated as marginal in Krasavino and on the estate, and simultaneously it is a space of protection. The forest is Kasian's home. His physique intimidates peasants due to their ignorance and superstitions: Kasian is a hunchbacked, crippled forester who once was the estate's most skilled blacksmith. Now he is known as Crook or the "wood demon" and these nicknames are not evoked simply by the folk's meanness. Kasian is different and his otherness is in his independent spirit, fearlessness and, most of all, in his open-mindedness. Villagers do not remember that once he used to teach peasants' children to read and this is one of the reasons for his friendship with Golorubov, the village schoolmaster. What distinguishes Kasian is his autonomous existence. His status in the hierarchy of the estate and the village is ambiguous. In the past, as a house servant Kasian was admired for his dexterity and he is also respected for his fair judgment and wisdom. The peasants' envy and superstitions, however, endow him with mystical power: "Whatever he forges with his hammer, it is always a bad omen, it bodes nothing good". (p. 151). Thus the villagers interpret Kasian's bad premonition before the tragedy strikes Tania's parents as witchcraft and soon after the disaster they chase him away from the estate to the forest. "They hunted me down like a wild wolf", he tells Golorubov later. Kasian and Golorubov share passion not only for knowledge. They love children and they connect with them through reading and nature. It is the forest where we meet Golorubov for the first time when he brings his pupils for mushroom hunting and it will be the forest again where in the final act the teacher and the students will hectically search for Tania.

In the same way as Kasian fits neither in the village nor on the estate, Golorubov bears the marks of marginal existence. His overwhelming virtuousness and

militant straightforwardness will later echo in Chekhov's characters like Khrushchov (*The Wood Demon*) and Astrov (*Uncle Vania*) or Sumbatov-Iuzhin's Grubel'nikov (*Listia shelestiat* [*The Rustle of Leaves*]), to name only a handful of heroes. Golorubov could be a member of the lesser, landless nobility, but most probably he belongs to the class of *raznochitsy* (people of various ranks)⁴⁰. Plausible evidence of Golorubov's identity is his last name. In *On Forgotten Estate* Shpazhinskii takes full advantage of a long-standing Russian theatrical tradition of using 'speaking names.'⁴¹ Thus, for instance, the schoolmaster's last name reveals his financial and social status, Tania's proper name resounds of Pushkin's Tatiana and the virtues of her heroine; the prince's character, in accordance with his last name, Krasavin, points to the importance of his aestheticized gestures. There are two more "speaking names" which, as prompted by Stepanov, deserve our attention. With regard to ethical subtext "Kasian" is less evocative (albeit stylistically a peasant) name. But such 'neutralization' is compensated by his nicknames ("Crook" and "wood demon".) Glafira, as is the case with Kasian, is an ordinary peasant female name but compared to Tania's name it becomes clear that Shpazhinskii from the outset aimed at drawing a distinction between the heroines since,

⁴⁰For more on the category of *raznochintsy*, see, for example, Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1997), chapter 3 "Middle Groups".

⁴¹ Andrei Stepanov emphasizes the value of the names in stage melodrama of the period. He contends that name's semantics forms a "system" which falls into two main categories of "*svoi*" (insider) and "*chuzhoi*" (outsider, stranger) which, further, can be distributed under several rubrics in order to affiliate characters with particular national identity, social status, class belonging, moral standing, personal traits of character, etc. In other words, villainy and virtuousness might become apparent with the very announcement of a hero's/heroine's name or last name. "Each name [']s connotation] is finalized when contrasted with the name of the antagonist, who establishes the "thematic opposition" of a play", Stepanov elaborates, and among the examples he provides is the opposition Golorubov-Krasavin. More on this topic, see Andrei Dm. Stepanov, *Dramaturgiia A.P. Chekhova 1880 godov i poetika melodramy*. Avtoreferat. Diss. Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvenny universitet, 1996; pp. 7-8

to quote Mirsky, “the calm self-command and resignation of Tatiana give her that unquestionable halo of moral greatness which is for ever associated with her name.”⁴²

The use of “speaking” names is one of the earliest and easily recognizable devices of melodrama to categorize its *dramatis personae*. Another fundamental technique, which evolves from the “underlying manichaeism” of melodrama⁴³, and is frequently deployed by the playwrights of the period, is grouping the characters into two major camps. Stepanov refers to this type of polarization as to “the victim’s support group” and “the villain’s support group.”⁴⁴ Such groups are obligatory in the characters’ system since melodrama rests on intentionally simplified polarization (be it social, economic, moral, gendered, or else). In addition, the centrality of pathos in melodrama⁴⁵ intensifies the binarity of its disposition and struggles. In compliance with these requirements, Shpazhinskii introduces an additional dimension to the “support groups”. In a way this dimension could be associated with what Stepanov calls “spatial-ethical hierarchy”. He finds that the characters’ loci of origin, inhabitation, or main sphere of activity are significant touchstones of their moral position. Thus spatial oppositions like city/village, city/estate, capital/ province, abroad (overseas) /Russia, among many others, facilitate the process of a character’s identification. The first component of the oppositions is always associated with the figures of the villain, the intruder, or the stranger. The second component, correspondingly, identifies the

⁴² D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian literature. From Its Beginning to 1900*. Ed. Fr. J. Whitfield. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1999), p.92.

⁴³ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995) p. 4.

⁴⁴ The scholar insists that none of the *dramatis personae* can stay neutral.

⁴⁵ Ben Singer, one of the major contributors in the field of theory of melodrama after Brooks, places pathos at the head of his “cluster concept of melodrama” which consists of “five key constitutive elements”. Pathos is followed by “heightened emotionality, moral polarization, nonclassical narrative mechanics, and spectacular effects.” See the argumentation of his concept in Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity. Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2001) pp.6-10

victimized. Melodrama borrows numerous motifs from Romantic literary tradition, which in turn draws heavily on folklore and mythology. These three rich sources supply other paradigmatic sites that signify peril, evil forces, and destructive power. As we have already seen, such is the case with the subterranean dimension and claustral space. We are about to find out how Shpazhinskii deals with the enclosed space of the garden. But now let us finally see what we find fascinating in his approach to the forest.

In his analysis of symbolic space and the notion of boundary⁴⁶ Lotman includes forest in several spatial oppositions — inner/outer world, cosmos/chaos, normal space/anti-space, home/anti-home, and home/forest:

Among the universal themes of world folklore and important opposition is that of ‘home’ to ‘forest’ (‘home’ being the place which is one’s own, a place of safety, culture and divine protection, while ‘forest’ is somewhere alien, where the Devil dwells, a place of temporary death and to go there is equivalent to a journey to the afterlife). Archaic models of this opposition have persisted and been productive even in the modern period.

p. 185

On a Forgotten Estate’s forest, however, differs significantly from the afore-mentioned semiotic patterns. Notwithstanding the general features of a demarcation site, this locus shows signs of a space that protects rather than threatens. Moreover, the forest shields Kasian from the prejudice of the village and the manor. It is his dwelling place and it is Tania’s and Golorubov’ favorite spot for walks and contemplation. On the other hand, the forest is the place which leads back to Tania’s ‘exotic’, dark roots. It is exactly where Tania’s father, Piotr, kills her mother in a fit of jealousy. The man is sent to Siberia and the little girl is left an orphan. Kasian remembers Varvara, Tania’s mother, as a challenging, free-spirited woman. The villagers consider her striking beauty sinful.

⁴⁶ In this concrete instances boundary is “spatial in the literary sense”. Iurii Lotman, *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Introd. Umberto Eco. Trans. Ann Shukman. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000 ,pp. 140-42; 185-5)

Their envy increases her husband's suspicion and eventually unleashes his violence. The orphaned child becomes the princess' protégée: she receives a good education, learns foreign languages. But after her mistress's death Tania falls from favor and, first she is 'adopted' by Tolbukhin — the manor's manager and Glafira's father — and later she moves in with the family of the tailor. Now she is treated just as a house servant and she frequently takes abuse from the tailor's wife. Like Kasian and Golorubov, Tania is a misfit both in the world of her late benefactor and in her newly adopted family. But Tania accepts her new situation with dignity and humility. Her physical and inner beauty, her intelligence and spirituality evoke primitive suspicions of the malign community she is part of. The shadow of her parents never ceases to haunt her. Hence the play's female protagonist connects two major melodramatic concerns: the crisis of patriarchal society (through the intrafamilial disaster of Tania's parents) and the crisis of identity (through Tania's inconsistent status within the communal hierarchy). The centrality of the heroine in these narratives is an essential tool in the value system of the melodramatic world. As a rule, to quote Gabrielle Hyslop, "the image of women in melodrama is [...] clearly of excessive virtue."⁴⁷ In the popular drama of the 1880s this image is additionally charged with a strong social subtext. The dominance of the "superfluous man" and "necessary woman" discourses are still very tangible in literature, and melodrama absorbs many of their motifs. With Krasavin's arrival, it would be entirely normal to anticipate that the plot would unfold following a conventional pattern and that the playwright would recourse to the motif of the poor-

⁴⁷ Gabrielle Hyslop, "Deviant and Dangerous Behavior: Women in Melodrama", in *Journal of Popular Culture*, 19, no. 3 (1985), p 69. Although Hyslop's essay examines Pixierécourt's melodrama in particular, her analysis of the female characters and their function can be applied to Russian nineteenth-century popular drama since Pixierécourt's plots and techniques were one of the main sources of inspiration and emulation for the Russian stage at the time.

but-virtuous heroine seduced and abandoned by an aristocratic villain. And indeed, the entanglement of the plotline begins with the growing attraction between Tania and the prince. Shpazhinskii uses romance as a framework and love triangles as important propellers of the action, but in terms of the main collision they are less important factors. In the play the real destructive power is society whose hostility is split between personified evil, Glafira, and public prejudice⁴⁸.

Thus the forest functions as a site of delineation and a site of asylum. It brings together personages that share common values and it shields them from the societal antagonism. With the demise of her mother and her father's exile, in the person of Kasian Tania gains a father figure. Golorubov is in love with Tania and yet his attitude is rather platonic than sensual, more of admiration rather than of passion. For him the young woman is the embodiment of purity and his primary concern is to save her from harm. Tania's first on-stage encounter with Glafira and the reactions of the characters (that are present in the scene) outlines the "victim's support group" and presents two of the plot's love triangles: Golorubov loves Tania, Tania does not reciprocate, Glafira loves Golorubov. The jealous Glafira does not miss any opportunity to pester Tania and to make sure that the orphan would never forget about her vulnerable status. The Tolbukhins think of themselves as Tania's adoptive family and they expect her to be grateful and submissive. Golorubov expresses Tania's composure best: "She has reasons to respect herself... [Tania] does not accept your kind-hearted intentions with a

⁴⁸ Although with Glafira's personage the playwright indulges the audience's insatiable appetite for a clear-cut bifurcation of good and evil, Krasavin's character is not vilified. And, as we will see, the evilness is relocated through the emphasis on the detrimental potential of the society.

servant's fidelity, wagging her tail" (p. 146)⁴⁹, he confronts Glafira. His explanation of Glafira's resentment and incessant nagging at Tania is also a signal of the entanglement of the intrigue: "You have an enemy! This is outrageous... It's your fault: why are you better than Glafira Nikanorovna? Nobody forgives something like that." Tania's superiority over Glafira lies in her uncorrupted soul, genuine goodness and moral fiber. These are the qualities which Glafira does not possess and does not comprehend which is why she is even more and more aggressive with Tania. But Golorubov does appreciate these qualities and when Tania does not return his affection the teacher suppresses his disappointment since he sees Tania to be predestined for something much greater:

You have suffered a great deal but you do not betray a trace of resentment, a drop of bile. But I do. So it appears that we are not meant to be... No, no, do not try to console me, don't! You were not born to wheedle; you crave heroic deeds, you need range. You either have to deal with the same scope as yours, or to take up a cross: the heavier, the better!
p.148⁵⁰

In the way Golorubov sees Tania one can detect the tradition established by the great realists of the nineteenth century in portraying strong, spirited women as the main adherents of the hesitant, fragile and ineffective male characters. This tradition, as Mirsky specifies, goes back to Pushkin, but is the most prominent trademark of Turgenev:

The strong, pure, passionate, and virtuous woman, opposed to the weak, potentially generous, but ineffective and ultimately shallow man, was introduced by Pushkin [...] but nowhere more insistently than Turgenev's. His heroines are famous all the world over and have done much to spread a high reputation of Russia's womanhood. Moral force and courage are the keynote to Turgenev's heroine — the power to sacrifice all worldly considerations to passion [...], or all happiness to duty. But what goes home to the general reader in these women is not so much the height of their moral beauty as

⁴⁹ All citations are from Ippolit V. Shpazhinskii, *V zabytoi usad'be, Delo*, No. 12, 1880, pp. 141-202. Translations from the play are my own.

⁵⁰ The reference to the "scope" brings to mind the discussion of developing one's inner potential in *Platonov* and *On the High Road*. Shpazhinskii's emphasis here is on the inner spiritual and moral qualities which are equaled to intellectual abilities.

the extraordinary *poetical* beauty woven round them by delicate and perfect art of their
begetter. p. 202⁵¹

In order to show how Shpazhinskii approaches such a tradition we have to turn now to the main protagonist, Prince Krasavin, and to examine his place within the system of characters and then (and more importantly) to situate him within the two key plotlines: the love intrigue and the reflection of the standing of the early post-reform landholding nobility.

Krasavin retreats to his family estate entertaining the idea of reconnecting with his childhood roots. He is fed up with the fuss of the life in the capital, weary of *le grand monde*. His hope is to regain his inner tranquility through the enticement of the utopian bliss of his provincial estate. Krasavino is located in a remote part of the country. In Russian a secluded area is frequently referred to as a “bear corner” (*medvezhii ugol*), that is, a godforsaken place. “Bear” (*medved*’), respectively, becomes an epithet for people who live in such desolate places. Gradually, however, “*medvezhii ugol*” and “*medved*” obtain an additional, positive undertone. In Modest Chaikovsky’s *A Day in Petersburg* (1893), for example, such a label does not only describe a person who prefers the provincial estate to the big city and who looks and acts clumsy among high society. *Medved*’ becomes a sign of recognition of a lifestyle and values that appreciate Russian traditional culture and morals rather than those imported from the West. The prince’s nostalgia for serenity and authenticity that estate offers, a common gesture of the Russian aristocracy, is juxtaposed with the skepticism of Iurasov. Iurasov, a distant impoverished relative of Krasavin, is one of the ubiquitous figures of *nakhlebnik*, the hanger-on, who could be observed almost on every estate of the time

⁵¹ D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature from its Beginning to 1900*. Ed. Fr. J. Whitfield. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1996)

and would be present in various literary sources. Priscilla Roosevelt gives interesting spin to the role of the parasite on Russia estate:

The pages of Russian novels and memoirs are sprinkled with the figures of superannuated tutors and governesses who customarily lived out their lives with the family of their pupils. [...] Such elderly individuals joined with others in the household from a large indeterminate category of persons who were neither family members nor properly speaking, household staff. This plethora of unaccounted household members imparted a medieval quality to the aristocratic estate. Nobles down on their luck simply moved in with a wealthy neighbor. [...] This accurately describes the financial dependency of such individuals but not their actual status in a wealthy household, regardless of how they came into it.⁵²

One possible way to construe the “medieval quality” of the *nakhlebnik*’s presence is to read it along the lines of his/her ‘entertaining’ function. Among numerous instances we could provide from Chekhov’s dramatic oeuvre, for example, count Shabel’skii (*Ivanov*) and Charlotta Ivanovna (*The Cherry Orchard*) come to mind immediately as the quintessential hangers-on.

The character of Iurasov also belongs to the long line of “character doubles”⁵³ (*dvoyniki*). Iurasov shares the prince’s social background and, to some extent, his modus vivendi. But above all, he is the prince’s companion out of economic necessity. He does not comprehend Krasavin’s existential hesitations and labels them as “sour virtues” and “mawkish idealism”⁵⁴. Iurasov recognizes in Krasavin’s sensitiveness a

⁵² P. Roosevelt, *Life on the Russian Country Estate. A Social and Cultural History*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995, p. 110

⁵³ Leading back to mythological narratives, the literary tradition is peppered with doubles. Further on, Shakespeare is may be the most referred to writer who uses this trope. In nineteenth-century Russian literature that would be Dostoevsky and Chekhov. Among the scholars who have written on the technique of doubles, Lotman’s approach to “character doubling” seems most fitting here since he directly links the implementation of characters like these in modern literature with mythological patterns and we consider the “plot-text”, or to be more precise, the “plot-playtext” of the drama to combine both patterns. “Character doubling, which resulted from dividing up a cluster of mutually equivalent names, later turned into a plot-language which lent itself to many different interpretations in all sorts of art-ideologies: doubles could be material for an intrigue, or for pointing up contrasts between characters, or, as in the works of Dostoevsky, for the modeling of the internal complexity of the human personality.” Lotman, Op. cit., p.154.

⁵⁴ Yet Iurasov’s attitude is expressed from the point of view of an insider, from the perspective of the class and ideology both noblemen belong to.

fashionable pose: “Lassitude, spleen ... [The prince] is a kind, meek soul, very sensitive. People like him get tired very quickly and they become unhappy, poor thing... But I’ll cure him both of his spleen and of his conservative guts.”(p.159). The prince’s escapism Iurasov qualifies as “squeamishness of a replete aristocrat”. This particular point in Iurasov’s criticism strikes a chord with the notion of “idyllic myopia”⁵⁵, to borrow the idiom coined by Priscilla Roosevelt (which we will utilize with the opposite sign in mind). Although the primary focus of her study of the Russian country estate is on the pre-reform period, the scholar’s conceptualization of estate as a unique socio-economic and cultural institution can be almost fully applied to the post-reform era. Roosevelt uses the term of “idyllic myopia” when she discusses the creation of “European surroundings” in the Russian countryside, namely the concomitance of two disparate cultural phenomena, of two major tendencies of the Russian post-Petrine culture and, correspondingly, the utopian visions of the nobility they produced. In other words, Roosevelt refers to the unavoidable gap between traditional rural life and that of the Westernized outlook that co-existed on the provincial estate. “It was this sort of myopia [...] that allowed the Slavophile of the 1830s to feel at one with rural Russia and its inhabitants, while, in fact, observing them from a safe distance.” (p. 101). Roosevelt asserts that Pushkin’s generation felt more comfortable in “the isolated, often theatrical, and ultimately foreign English garden of the grandee than in Russian village”. In the time of Krasavins, the idea of the immersion in the elegiac rural Eden as a means of spiritual resurrection was as utopian as the quixotic “small deeds” of the populists.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p. 101

Krasavin and Iurasov represent not only different generations but different approaches to reality. Krasavin's withdrawal is an act of conscious choice; Iurasov follows the prince only because he financially is forced to. Krasavin is the quintessence of "superfluous" melancholy; Iurasov is full of energy and epicurean optimism. Krasavin intends to reconnect with his roots and to continue the educational undertakings of his mother. The latter he considers being his duty. In a conversation with Golorubov he discovers that the village has a school only for boys and he entertains the idea to open a school for girls. Iurasov's perception of enlightening activity is rather hedonistic and theatrical. Thus his intention to "enlighten" Krasavin, that is, to encourage Krasavin in aristocratic debauchery, or to use Roosevelt's wording, "to celebrate the estate as an aristocrat's playground, a luxurious area of delight and fantasy" (xii) provokes Golorubov's caustic irony:

GOLORUBOV: So you are enlightening the masses. Good for you, good... You renounced your principles, you don't give a damn about your past, you don't care about anything — what else you could be possibly doing but educating, enlightening. Lo and behold! Someone might give you a pat on the back... This probably gives you great sense of fulfillment. Even just this kind of pleasure is worth cursing one's own home. Since man is such a selfish swine. He would clown around only to hear: "What a fool, what a fool!"

p. 163

Obviously Golorubov's mockery alludes to quite dissimilar forms of 'educating' activities. In Iurasov the teacher ridicules the old man's status of a parasite, his cheap theatricality and his potential corrupting influence on Krasavin, whereas with the prince Golorubov makes fun of his chimerical enlightening ambitions.

Let us reiterate that previously we outlined three major dramatic topoi: a forest, a manor house and a garden. We showed that the forest introduces and brings together the marginal figures (but not peripheral characters in terms of their relation to the dramatic action) of the play that also happen to form the "victim's support group". The

manor house serves as a topos which presents Krasavin and Iurasov and some minor characters, such as Tolbukhin, Nikolashka, the tailor, and (off-stage) his wife, Maksimikha. The last three personages live in the closest proximity to Tania and they have immediate impact on the quality of her life. After the death of her patron, princess Krasavina, Tania becomes part of Tolbukhin's household. From various conversations it becomes apparent that the orphan is treated more as a house help than an adopted daughter. Tolbukhin and Glafira (who is also raised without a mother, a fact which later will serve as an excuse for Tolbukhin in his attempt to justify his daughter's wickedness) are Tania's antagonists. Glafira's resentment against Tania is stirred up by the latter's evident otherness: she is cultured, sophisticated, and gracious. Tolbukhin's attitude, on the other hand, holds up against Tania's 'shameful' descent — she is just a daughter of a "fallen woman" (*guliaiushchaia zhenshchina*) and a "convict" (*katorzhnik*). Thus when Krasavin discovers in indignation that Tania does not live in the manor house any longer, Tolbukhin dryly responds: "She's got a roof over her head; she has food, clothes... What more do you expect?"

Krasavin's arrival gives Glafira an additional serious reason for agitation. Her jealousy builds up after she notices that Krasavin displays lively interest in Tania. Now Glafira is intimidated not only by Tania's rivalry in love, but also by the latter's superiority over her as a human being, as an individual whom the prince treats as his equal. Tania is offered to share the master's table, an honor which is not granted to Glafira, although Glafira is the manager's daughter and her entire demeanor suggests privileged status. She is bossy and rude with the servants; she is inappropriately flirty with Krasavin. Glafira explains her explosiveness with her passion for thunderstorms

and severe weather. She is fascinated by the nature's unpredictability and might: "What a power! It takes my breath away. The same storm, the same tempest is ranging in my bosom" (p.161). It should be noted here that Shpazhinskii uses a device which, yet again, is characteristic for the folklore poetics — parallelism. In folklore and in folk songs in particular the symbolic image of the storm connotes a human condition or signifies a situation or an event. In the case of Glafira, the implementation of the storm image is aimed at projecting her turbulent character and (self) destructiveness, at anticipating her plotting against Tania, and, finally, the image is contrasted to another metaphor used by Iurasov to describe Tania. He compares her to "a morning in May, fresh and pure." Both heroines reveal different connection with nature and the essence of the connection is an important clue to the direction of the relationship they will establish with Krasavin. Whereas Tania achieves a complete harmony with nature and this is a key to her inner state of mind, Glafira's fascination with cloudbursts is an indication of her future damaging impact on the major characters. Her insinuations affect Golorubov so strongly that he physically falls physically ill. Her intrigues terminate the relationship between Tania and Krasavin. The greatest damage caused by Glafira, however, turns out to be not her attempts at destroying so many lives but the broken trust and the poisoned souls. Shpazhinskii dramatizes the loss of trust as the loss of innocence.

The concept of innocence in the play is not presented in the vein that countless melodramas (those modeled upon Western paradigm in particular) utilize: "a man desires her; a man dishonors her..."⁵⁶ The notion of innocence scales up to a higher

⁵⁶ I borrow this definition from a longer formula proposed by Léon Metayer when discussing the image of woman in melodrama in general. For more details, see Léon Metayer, "What the Heroine Taught,

dimension which seeks to portray purity of human nature as purity of nature itself. Thus, we consider the topos of garden which accommodates the third and the fourth acts to be central not only in terms of the composition but also with regard to the way Shpazhinskii uses this archetypal biblical trope as a framework and fills it with a new content. The first ‘entrance’ of the garden in Krasavin’s manor is off-stage in Act Two: Glafira, without delay, grasps Krasavin’s attention to Tania and volunteers to show him the estate’s garden. This act serves as a transition to the real, on-stage site of the garden that in Act Three functions as a ‘garden of Eden’ and in Act Four as a ‘Garden of Evil’. Let us remind that the two acts are in different parts of the garden, a stage remark which we find essential. Act Three is separated both spatially and temporally: it is set in a particular area of the garden and a month has passed since the beginning of the dramatic time. The playwright chooses the garden as a locus where develops the relationship between Tania and Krasavin. Garden is an integral cultural and aesthetic element of estate. In *On Forgotten Estate* the garden illustrates a confluence of two paradigmatic motifs: a quest for identity and a quest for union with nature. These quests can be considered as part of what Roosevelt defines as “forms” or “visions” of estate life:

[That] seemingly ordered the world of the Russian landowner. The first, [...] celebrated the estate as an aristocrat’s playground, a luxurious area of delight and fantasy. The second enshrined the estate as a patriarchal, self-contained world of ritualized tradition and festival. The third transformed the estate into the pastoral arcadia of poets and artists.⁵⁷

As we will see further, Krasavin himself considers his retreat as a cleansing experience, as an escape from the “train whistles” and from the societal hypocrisy and

1830-1870”, in *Melodrama. The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*. Ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996) pp. 235-45.

⁵⁷ Roosevelt, Op. cit., xii

emptiness. In Tania he finds all the necessary features he himself does not possess and she, plausibly, becomes the “necessary woman”. What we find fascinating is how the playwright subjugates the Arcadian longing and ‘superfluous’ impetus to the melodramatic conventions. The key stratagem he employs is the garden’s archetypal status and the connotation it suggests. The garden, as an estate in miniature, mirrors the estate’s fundamental functions. It is an entrance to immediate interaction with nature but in the same time garden’s enclosed space implies intimacy and separateness. It is a collaboration of the creations of the natural world and the artistry of the human activity. The most intimate thoughts Krasavin shares with Tania are uttered on this particular site. Tania epitomizes the authenticity and sincerity which the prince considers vanished in the city and the salons. Yet her sophistication and erudition are the qualities which for Krasavin are as vital as her genuineness. In the conversation we will quote below there is a key detail which might be overlooked were it not a stage direction that not only literally accompanies the dialogue but elaborates the discussion of authenticity.⁵⁸ Furthermore, a modified version of the remark and the lines referring to it spread out to the next act (Act Four).

KRASAVIN: The world you don’t know, Tania, is full of artificial flowers. They put real flowers only on people’s graves.

⁵⁸ Chekhov uses a similar technique in the scene with the dead seagull in *The Seagull*. In this case the stage direction anticipates a statement, not immediately, as it could be expected, but through space. Treplev’s movement is ahead of a line and as a result there is a case of dramaturgical “pleonasm”. If we conditionally label by “A” a gesture and by “B” a line, then they might remind us of a rhythmical chain of the following pattern: ABAB:

TREPLEV: [enters without a hat, carrying a gun and a <i>dead seagull</i>]:	A
Are you alone?	
NINA: Yes, alone.	
[Treplev <i>lays the seagull at her feet.</i>]	B
What does this mean?	
TREPLEV: I was a brute and <i>killed this seagull</i> today.	A
I <i>lay it at your feet.</i>	B

TANIA: You are always like this – as soon as something from your previous life comes to your mind, you become sad and gloomy... As if the winds of past make you shiver.

KRASAVIN: It is worst than cold. Everything good I had is now squeezed out of me or wasted in the most stupid and banal way. There exists one new word. The new people coined it. This word is “nervousness.” (*With bitter irony.*) A wonderful title for the novel of my life. [...] I am tired. If there is still something living in me – this is my capability to enjoy nature.... I feel good here, I feel good with you, my dear.

.....
TANIA: You should be looked after, you should be protected. Someone has to have compassion on you.

KRASAVIN: “Looked after!” Aren’t you going to get tired, Tania? [...] You are energetic, strong. And now imagine next to yourself a tired, bitter and on top of that a skeptical, paranoid man like me. [...] So what do you think will come out of this – everything but happiness.

TANIA: I don’t think so. (*Enthusiastically.*) I think, happiness means to light the soul of your beloved, to make him strong during hard times, to make him spirited in moments of weakness, to be as needed as the air and light.... p. 168-69

The dialogue takes place while the characters take strolls in the garden and Tania picks up flowers and makes a small wreath out of them. The gestural stage direction lays emphasis on the discussion of lost authenticity in the ‘garden of Eden’ which in Act Four transforms into the ‘garden of Evil’, and the discourse respectively changes into that of lost innocence. The symbolism of the garden is multidimensional. The first level sustains the love theme and the flowers are the transparent metaphor of Tania’s innocence and purity. The second level is the societal constraints from which Krasavin seeks refuge. The third level is built on the love theme which this time is presented and “pursued” as “an agency of salvation”, to use Gilman’s phrasing.⁵⁹ Krasavin and Tania articulate different ideas of love. For the prince love, like any significant life experience, is demanding and ultimately disappointing since he is trapped in his intellectual and ethical skepticism and he interprets any type of relationship he enters as analogous to his social role-play. Tania’s impetus is portrayed

⁵⁹ R. Gilman, *Chekhov’s Plays. An Opening into Eternity*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 115

somewhere in between the instinctive sensitivity of the Sentimental tradition heroines and the models found in the “necessary woman” discourse. By “supplementing” and “reconceptualizing” the superfluous-man theme the necessary woman also reveals traits of “superfluity”. Compared to Krasavin, as we have already seen, Tania displays much more palpable marginality and yet her character is considerably stronger as is her emotional stamina. Thus, when Glafira casts suspicion on Tania’s honesty in her relationship with Krasavin and their romance is put to a test, the prince does not rise to the challenge as Tania does. Krasavin’s insecurities are contrasted to Tania’s resilience because their vision of love is quite different. Tania pictures herself as a caretaker and soother of Krasavin and loving him means serving him, whereas Krasavin still sees in the young girl, as Golorubov successfully defines, the late princess’ “toy” (*pobriakushka kniagini*). In his romantic encounter with Tania Krasavin valorizes the aesthetics of the experience in the same vein he anticipates to receive aesthetic pleasure from his encounters with nature. Golorubov’s displeasure with Krasavin is incurred not only by their rivalry with regard to Tania, but also by his mistrust towards Krasavin’s intentions:

GOLORUBOV: I am very surprised that you tag after these gentlemen.⁶⁰ What could you possibly look for there?

TANIA: I am looking for nothing. I am neither capable of tagging after, nor looking for.

GOLORUBOV: Of course, you wouldn’t notice... Everything there is patched up and painted over. They will charm you and then insult you.

TANIA: Please, do not get upset with me. I appreciate your concern very much, but as far as I am concerned – I am going to follow my heart and my mind.

.....
 GOLORUBOV: But he [Krasavin] will poison your soul very skillfully. Yes, this is better. So there are the traces of that damn time when you were the princess’s toy, when they made everything possible in order to cultivate the decadence of their milieu. And now you are drawn to that direction again – where your demise is.

pp. 173-174

⁶⁰Here Golorubov refers to Krasavin and Iurasov.

Krasavin's rhetoric about his disgust with the "artificial flowers" of the society ironically echoes in Golorubov's metaphoricity ("patched up" [*zaloshcheno*], "painted over" [*zakrasheno*]). Krasavin's quest for authenticity is doomed. Despite Tania's efforts he is unable to overcome his own prejudice and anxieties. He falls victim to Glafira's plotting and Iurasov's collaboration. When Glafira casts suspicion on Tania's honor by insinuating that the latter is interested in Krasavin only because she expects to be provided with a dowry, Krasavin does not rise to the challenge. He instantly takes the rumor in good faith. For Krasavin the 'Garden of Eden' loses its appeal. He tramples the flower wreath just as hastily as he puts an end to his relationship with Tania. In her machinations, Glafira succeeds in making Iurasov to believe that with a possible union between Krasavin and Tania he might end up losing his comfortable position. This factor also builds up the prince's increasing paranoia. Finally, Golorubov, torn by his own drama, unconsciously contributes to the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust.

The intimate Edenic serenity and sublimity of Act Three gives way to the plotting and eavesdropping in Act Four which decelerate the main action. What is under immediate threat is not the loss of innocence but the failure to recognize virtue and from this moment on the plot line is directed towards rehabilitation of virtue. Once again, the locus of the garden is instrumental in foregrounding the ideological discussions through the prism of the melodramatic techniques. In Act Three at the center of the action is Tania, the 'lady' of the Garden who shares Krasavin's most intimate and sincere moments. In Act Four, set in a different part of the garden, there is a shift of the dominant mode of narration. Now Glafira reigns over the garden. Like the

biblical serpent, she intrudes into the Garden of Eden. Glafira epitomizes the evil force that poisons everything pure and genuine; she is the temptress who does not seduce by lust but by challenging trust. Although Glafira succeeds in ruining the relationship between Krasavin and Tania, she herself recognizes Krasavin's weakness and his susceptibility to suggestion:

“Had I wanted I would get out of His Highness all of this nonsense out of his system...But I love strength, such strength in which I could find everything to my heart's and mind's content. As to the prince...Had I had to deal with such a softy, I would think for him, I would do everything for him and thus would do anything I want to.
p. 190

An atmosphere of imminent disaster falls over the estate. Krasavin decides to leave the estate and gives Tania a packet announcing that “her future is secured”. Disgusted, insulted and not given the chance to explain herself Tania throws the money away and then runs into Glafira who in order to avoid further complication suddenly decides to avouch her machinations. But the prince does not admit her also to the house. Golorubov is desperate and Kasian reappears full of bad premonition. Act Five resolves the crisis back in the forest. Alarmed by Tania's disappearance the entire village rushes to the forest. The villagers find her kerchief by the swamp and decide that Tania threw herself into the water. Meanwhile, Tania and Kasian discuss their future. Kasian supports Tania's decision to leave the village and tells her that he will follow her and will be able to help her since he has been saving money to start a new life: “For the late Varvara's sake, for your sake, I have lived my whole life as a wood demon and scared the fools” (p.197). After the villagers find Tania and Kasian everyone gathers around them and a sequence of ‘litanies’ and penitent speeches finalize the dramatic events. In a typical melodramatic fashion the “workings of divine

vengeance ... through a grand scene of forgiveness” resolves the tension.⁶¹ Virtue is recognized and redeemed. Krasavin admits his mistakes and offers his life in exchange for forgiveness. Golorubov delivers a pompous speech about the moral strength of Tania which modifies into a panegyric of the greatness of Russian woman. He passionately dispels the common fear that Tania might have committed suicide, all the more that the site of the action happens to be the exact spot of Varvara’s tragic demise:

GOLORUBOV: Your panic is ungrounded... Nothing can crush Tatiana Petrovna’s spirit! Her love is a heroic deed, a sacred thing – do you hear me? This is that type of love which makes the Russian woman strong and heroic; this is the power that breathes life into everything and everyone around, and which, fate, paradoxically, brings together with weak-kneed people like you! p. 200

Shpazhinskii completely exhausts the melodramatic momentum of heightened emotionalism by incorporating one of the basic principles of classical melodrama — the providential and coincidental motifs. Having admitted her guilt and asking for forgiveness, Glafira finds a knife and kills herself. The moral order is restored: the villainess is punished and Tania’s tribulations come to an end — her virtuousness is recognized, her reputation is reestablished. Such a development is accompanied by another transformation regularly found in melodramatic structure. Balukhaty qualifies this type of change as a “change of phase for one and the same character” (from vicious to virtuous, for example) and places it under the principle of contrast.⁶² Such internal change undergoes the character of Glafira. The importance of this process is stressed by the site of its occurrence. Her public pronouncement of repentance is executed, once again, exactly on Varvara’s place of death. The spot projects a special meaning and this is the reason for it serving as a meeting point of the closing act. What seems to be predestined for Tania strikes Glafira.

⁶¹ Metayer, *Op. cit.*, p.239.

⁶² Balukhaty, “Poetika melodramy.”

The dramatic finale disentangles all the plot lines in the initial external stage space – the forest. Despite the pathos-laden discourse of the last act the dramatic action is brought back to the forest. The dynamics between the forest, the garden, the second external space, and the manor house, the interior spatial site reveals two foci. On compositional level, the garden accommodates the structural center of the play. The ideological discussions are also placed within the two acts that are situated in the garden. The garden, being a spatial reduction of the estate, reproduces all “four ideological worlds” to be found in the latter: “the world of fantasy and caprice”, “the world of medieval melancholy”, the world of political beliefs, and the world of poetic aspirations.⁶³ The locus of the forest, however, by shaping the envelope pattern of the play, appropriates the major ethical message of the drama. The finale of a conventional narrative of a victimized heroine alludes to an unconventional epilogue. Thus I part company with scholars like Time, for instance, who argues that Shpazhinskii’s play’s most interesting feature is the way the playwright work with the main protagonist, namely the psychological portraiture of the Hamletian nobleman of the time⁶⁴. I argue that in addition to the play’s structural originality *On a Forgotten Estate* pushes forward the conception of the melodramatic heroine. Krasavin fails to appreciate the genuineness of Tania’s wreath just as his superfluity is ‘upstaged’ by Tania’s marginality. The heroine’s conscious decision to leave the estate hints at a shift in the discourse of the “necessary woman” and its possible orientation towards the fin-de-

⁶³ The concept of the “four worlds” was suggested by Roosevelt in her analysis of the architectural design of Tsarskoe selo. Op. cit., p. 37-9

⁶⁴ G. A. Time. *U istokov novoi dramaturgii v Rossii. 1880-1890-e gody*. (Leningrad: Leningradskoe izdatel’stvo, 1991)

siècle fascination with the “new woman” and revision of the social meanings of womanhood.

The Quest for the “Positive Hero”: Piotr Boborykin’s⁶⁵ *Doctor Moshkov*

When Chekhov’s *Ivanov* was first staged the overall assessment of the merits of the play was more unenthusiastic than laudatory. Most of the critics read the title character as if the playwright claimed to have discovered the formula of the new positive hero and that was the common point of their disagreement and disappointment. However, one thing about the play was unquestionable — the novelty of the title character. Or, to paraphrase Chekhov himself, the most important quality of *Ivanov* was giving an accurate formulation of a problem rather than resolving it.⁶⁶ Popular drama has already witnessed such a tendency. Dramatists persisted in their quest for a new generation of bright, conscientious and sensitive people who would lead the nation out of *bezdorozh’e* and put an end to the “timeless” era. The directions of the quest were disparate but on the whole they can be summarized under two major tendencies: a continuous analysis of “superfluity” which now, as a concept, gradually modified into a discourse of “broken people”, and a “quest for a new “positive hero”. The latter search was conducted in different strata of society: in the village, in the provincial town, on the factory (especially with the fast pace of industrialization and modernization of the country), on the estate. The process of the revision of the status of

⁶⁵ Piotr Boborykin (1836-1921) was equally famous for his prose work and his plays. His was extremely respected by literati, he had close ties to *Moguchaiia kuchka* (The Mighty Five), especially to M Balakirev, he was familiar with the intellectual elite of Western Europe and was on friendly terms with many Western writers, such as A. Dumas *filis*, G. Lewis, G. Eliot, etc. He left a significant theoretical legacy on the theory of stage art and extensive memoirs. His novels *Del’tsy*, *Kitai-gorod*, and *Vasilii Terkin* were among his bestsellers.

⁶⁶ In this particular case the important question was the emergence of a new literary type, not a new positive hero.

women was also already in progress since the 1880s marked a special interest to the so called “women’s question” (*zhenskii vopros*). This segment of the current chapter examines a play which represents a search for a different dramatic hero.

Doctor Moshkov’s (1884) plot spins around the title character, a doctor who practices medicine in a provincial town whose inhabitants seem to appreciate his professional dedication and charitable work — three times a week he treats the poor free of charge. But with all his nobleness and dignity Pavel Moshkov hides ‘dark’ secrets. On the one hand, two mysterious women stay with him and stir the curiosity of the local gossipers. On the other hand, rumors begin to circle around and to cast dark shadow on his relationship with a dying patient’s wife. Elena Osudina is a respected lady in the town’s society. Her husband is terminally ill and for a long time Moshkov does his best to prolong his life. But Osudin’s health takes a turn for the worst and witnesses are called to Osudins’ residence to sign his will. The town’s suspicions proves justifiable as a scene between Moshkov and Osudina reveal that they have feelings for each other and they regret the fact that they have to hide them.

But there are much more serious hurdles ahead of them and they appear in the face of Litovtsev and Temliakova. Litovtsev is Osudin’s closest friend and executor of his will. He likes Osudina and intuitively dislikes Moshkov. Temliakova is one of Moshkov’s ‘grateful’ patients who does everything possible to show up at the places he attends because... she is in love with him. Besides being a thankful patient she is also a jealous woman since the doctor does not reciprocate her feelings and she also, like Litovtsev regarding Moshkov, instinctively discerns in Osudina competition. Moreover, she is intrigued by his anonymous female visitors and is determined to solve

the riddle. The mysterious guests turn out to be Moshkov's illegitimate daughter, Mania and her mother-Anisia. During the difficult years in medical school Moshkov owes his survival to Anisia — a simple seamstress with a golden heart who is so devoted to her beloved that she decides to sacrifice herself and their daughter in order not to hamper his future career. She believes that he has already done his share of sacrifices by giving up the opportunity to continue his education abroad in order to take care of his common law wife and daughter. Despite Moshkov's insistence over the years to officially recognize Mania, Anisia turns down his suggestions. She stays in Moscow with their daughter and Moshkov starts his career in a provincial town. For society Mania is his adopted daughter and she herself finds out about Moshkov's paternity not before she confronts her mother during their visit. A touching scene between the father and the daughter follows Anisia's revelation. But their joy does not last long. Osudin dies and Litovtsev decides to take full advantage of the situation: under the pretext that he wants to "save her honor" Litovtsev almost blackmails Osudina to marry him. But in reality he and Temliakova are responsible for the rumors about Moshkov's involvement in Osudin's death. Osudina, on her part, wishing to protect Moshkov, suggests that they end their romance. Moshkov insists on keeping the relationship: a public scandal or graver consequences do not scare him. But Osudina is intimidated too much by Litovtsev, all the more that she thinks that the doctor has to reunite with Anisia and Mania who, meanwhile, have left town. The final curtain falls leaving Moshkov devastated and lamenting his existential solitude.

In constructing the play Boborykin chooses to build the dramatic narrative on anagnorisis. The moment of recognition is an essential component of dramatic

structure. The playwright utilizes recognition by bringing in the figure of an illegitimate child — a successful melodramatic formula. Moshkov's newly revealed paternity functions as a stratagem that contrary to the expected effect elevates rather than compromises his moral status. Within the external plot there are two narratives that develop simultaneously. The first one fleshes out the familiar motif of female martyrdom (the line of Anisia). The second line follows the conflict between doctor Moshkov and the hostile, scheming society personified by Litovtsev and Temliakova. Both lines 'compete' in revealing the focal point of victimization. The result of such 'competition' is uncommon — the dénouement scene portrays Moshkov as a marginal individual, abandoned and misunderstood by the people he loves and rejected by a society whose hypocrisy he is incapable to tolerate and with whose rules he refuses to comply.

The drama examines the social value and personal price of decency and integrity in individuals like Moshkov. The doctor's story chronicles that of the numerous representatives of nobility of the late seventies and the eighties who (consciously or not) embrace the ideology of the "small deeds" and do their best to live a meaningful life. Moshkov shares lineage with the title characters of *Platonov* and *Ivanov* in terms of the idealism of their youthful aspirations which clashes with the actuality of adulthood. During his university years Platonov saves fallen women, later settles in a marriage to an unpretentious girl, becomes a father, and starts working as a village schoolmaster. Ivanov invests all his energy into provincial self-administration (*zemstvo*), agriculture, peasant education, and many other worthy activities. In his romantic life he decides to follow his heart and marries a Jewish woman which

alienates him from his milieu. Antropov's Kholmin, to a certain degree, may also be added to the afore-mentioned line of personages: his marriage to Liolia and his first years in journalism attest to the protagonist's determination to break up with a futile lifestyle and to channel his talents into something meaningful. Although Moshkov bears certain resemblance to the characters of Platonov, Ivanov, and Kholmin, nonetheless he belongs to a different category. Unlike the aforesaid characters Moshkov lacks their exaggerated "Hamletism", nervousness, "excitability", and ever-present fatigue. The character does not indulge in self-dramatization, nor does he suffer from social apathy or emotional inertia. On the contrary, instead of continuously coquetting with the concepts of boredom and alienation he lives a modest and accomplished life. In other words, in Moshkov almost all major components of superfluity are missing and a crucial one in particular—"the tragic discrepancy between potentialities and performance"⁶⁷. Yet the protagonist can be classified as a misfit in terms of his disconnection from society which, interestingly enough, becomes palpable only when analyzed parallel with and through the characters of Anisia and Mania.

Within the play's plot Anisia and Mania function as 'guest artists'. In the dramatic construction, however, they occupy an important place. We trace a spatial dimension to the nature of their dramatic presence. The relationship of the heroines with Moshkov reflects the protagonist's ambiguous situation – both in regard to his private life and in terms of his position within the public domain. The mother-daughter duo illustrates two extremes in the way melodrama perceives female characters. Anisia

⁶⁷ Frank Seeley, *From the Heyday of the Superfluous Man to Chekhov. Essays on the 19th-century Russian Literature*. (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1994), p. 17.

is the epitome of what Léon Metayer defines as “fidelity and submission to the male”⁶⁸. In constructing her character Boborykin amalgamates two established patterns. The first one follows a recognizable scenario based on a relationship which is doomed due to social inequality. Thus the playwright adheres to what is, according to Balukhaty, one of the major, according to Balukhaty, technical principles of melodrama — the principle of contrast (in this particular case a social one). What Boborykin does next, shows that he departs from the pattern and channels the conflict into a different direction. Anisia is not abandoned by Moshkov, neither does he refuse to take responsibility for her and for their daughter after the birth of the child. The protagonist does not come into conflict with his prejudice or with the prejudice of society but with the prejudice of Anisia. The conflict becomes internal and the discourse of victimization transforms into a discourse of voluntary martyrdom which, in turn, lead to a paradoxical outcome: martyrdom, self-inflicted or not, still belongs to the domain of victimization. Whereas Anisia’s character is rather one-dimensional, her function is not. Hence Moshkov’s character should not be quickly labeled as well.

At first sight Moshkov’s and Anisia’s bond evokes some of the components that constitute the connection of the “superfluous man” and the “necessary woman”. Without giving a specific name to female characters in such discourses, Ellen Chances defines their meaning as follows: “Often [...] weak misfit man was juxtaposed to a strong woman who did fit into society, who could act, and who could become involved in the life around her.”⁶⁹ Needless to say, such a distribution of functions refers to

⁶⁸ Metayer, Op. cit., p.241

⁶⁹ Ellen Chances, “The Superfluous Man in Russian Literature”, in *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, Ed. Neil Cornwell (Routledge: London and New York, 2001), p. 112

narratives in which a hero's superfluity is determined by his ineffectiveness, uselessness, and inactivity. Moshkov does not qualify as such: he does not show signs of neuroses, lack of perseverance or purpose. Anisia's line is brought into the dramatic plot in order to highlight different aspect of "superfluity" which is actually more appropriate to qualify as dysfunctionality of the main hero. Where Moshkov resembles the literary type in question is in being dysfunctional on the level of personal relations. The nature of his incapacity is dissimilar. His predicament is not rooted in an inability to commit to a relationship, but is instigated by a society which does not sanction his relationship with Anisia, Mania, and, ultimately, with Osudina. In all of the cases in which he strives to establish a domestic relationship, society sabotages them. By "society" here we do not imply a direct interference but the pressure of the unwritten rules of public morals. These are the rules that make Anisia to convince first herself and then Moshkov that their union is doomed; these are the rules of decorum which intimidate Osudina to openly admit her love for the doctor.

Mania's character is representative of another type of heroine who starts to emerge on the stage as a response to the new vision of women's societal status. Bright and independent, she inherits Moshkov's love for knowledge. Following in her father's steps she studies medicine at Petersburg. Unlike her mother, Mania is uncomfortable with their position in Moshkov's life. Although Anisia insists on their discrete presence in the doctor's household, Mania feels that such a status is humiliating. Anisia and Mania come for a visit while the latter is on a break from her studies and even during their short stay Mania feels that they have been hidden from the society. Their seclusion in Moshkov's apartment she compares to a life "under lock and key as if

[they are] leprous [...] so that no one would know about [their] existence.” Her mother’s position she sees even in a more undignified light: “Don’t I see that you completely have disappeared. You don’t exist! You are like an object!” (p. 34)⁷⁰. Confronting her father and appealing to his convictions of a “new, progressive man”, Mania eventually equates Anisia’s anonymous presence with “contraband”. And indeed, a telling detail in a later episode echoes the image of “contraband” which Mania creates in her indignation. The visit which Mania pays to Osudina in order to reveal her and her mother’s true identity and to ask her to break up with Moshkov, is followed by Anisia’s call while trying to smooth out her daughter’s hostile behavior. Anisia uses the back door when she enters the house and again while leaving Osudin’s residence as if she ‘smuggles’ herself into that house. Anisia’s awareness of herself as *being out of place* in Osudin’s house is reiterated and eventually verbalized in her statement that she *knows her place*. The latter is her response to Mania’s attempts to persuade her mother to *claim the place* she deserves.⁷¹ Anisia’s conviction is that both Moshkov and she once had made the right decision by going their separate ways. Her instinct prompted that they belong to different worlds and had she stayed with Moshkov, sooner or later, he would have regretted such a choice. She knew that although the doctor had swallowed his pride, nonetheless she would not have been able to live up to his expectations. Besides, she is confident that he has done his share of sacrifice and to ask for more would be too much. The perception of both characters by the people who surround them is highly idealized. Mania describes her mother as a “saint”. Temliakova refers to the doctor as “angel in flesh”. Such ‘canonization’

⁷⁰ All citations from the play are from Piotr Boborykin; *Doctor Moshkov*, (Moscow: Litografiia Moskovskoi Teatral’noi biblioteki, 1884). Translation is mine.

⁷¹ Emphasis mine.

intensifies the inner struggle in Moshkov and Anisia's frustration. Appreciating each other's merits they also respect their dignity. Anisia strives not to burden Moshkov by imposing a sense of guilt and Moshkov treats Anisia as his equal. But with all the mutual respect and understanding the characters find themselves in a quandary which they cannot resolve. Mania's insistence on their reunion is complicated by Moshkov's feelings for Osudina. Now his 'holiness' is challenged by the harsh criticism of his daughter. Pressured by her chastisement, Moshkov yet has to deal with Osudina's growing hesitations.

Mania's disappointment with her father grows into a generational conflict. But instead of the traditional "father-son" conflict, this one takes place between a father and a daughter. What makes the confrontation all the more intriguing is that both dramatic personae are recognized as individuals of advanced views. In her crusade for her mother Mania appeals to Moshkov's "new, progressive convictions". Anisia excuses Mania's uncompromising attitudes, by referring to her "modern free spirit". However both sides, Moshkov and Mania, clash exactly over the different way they see the expression of the "new" times and the "new" attitudes. For Mania, women's position in society and in family should not any longer be associated with submissiveness and ultimate sacrifices, whereas Moshkov insists on a man's right to pursue personal happiness despite societal decorum. The paradox with Mania lies in the fact that while referring to "progressive views" she resorts to traditional argumentation. Or, to put it differently, she enters the stage space as representing an intellectual individual, but exits as a melodramatic heroine.

Thus the play demonstrates several types of reversals: ideological, gender, and spatial. The last one can be detected in the structural significance of the peripheral off-stage space whose structural significance is presented both on- and off-stage. While a student in Moscow Moshkov, inhabits a basement. This is not only a consequence of his financial circumstances but an illustration of the protagonist's secretive, 'underground' common-law wife and illegitimate child. Anisia and Mania come for a visit to Moshkov's provincial town — the periphery, from the capitals — the cultural center (Anisia lives in Moscow, Mania studies in Petersburg). Their episodic and off-stage presence in the protagonist's life develops into one of the central plot lines of the playtext. Ultimately, by exiting the stage and leaving Moshkov they display signs of, albeit taciturn and still indistinct, shift in agency.

The Advent of the “New People”: Aleksandr Sumbatov-Iuzhin's
The Arkazanovs

In the history of the Russian theatre, the last two decades of the nineteenth century are often referred to as the era of the actors. The period gave the audience a constellation of stars whose originality and accomplishments have been an indispensable part of the legacy of Russian dramatic art. M. Ermolova, P. Strepetova, M. Savina, A. Lenskii, V. Davydov, among many others, have achieved iconic status and courses on their artistry have been part of the basic core of academic curricula of the drama schools. Actors achieved such a distinguished position not only because of their talent but also because of the specificity of the hierarchy the entire theatrical enterprise. The restrictions of the censorship were still very powerful and the

prerogatives of the playwright to have their say during the staging period of their plays were very limited. The function of directors can be interpreted in the same vein. Konstantin Stanislavsky changed this practice. Thus the actors' interpretation became a compensatory mechanism for such limitations.

Prior to achieving fame as playwright, director of the Maly theater and as a professor of dramatic art, Aleksandr Sumbatov-Iuzhin (1857-1927) established reputation of a leading actor. His style is associated with the "Romantic school" of the Russian tradition. This label referred to actors and actresses whose stage characters belonged predominantly to Romantic drama and that is why their entire method of acting was perceived as "romantic" implying monumental gestures, exaggerated histrionics, and, most importantly, heightened interest in the psychology of the characters. Unsurprisingly, the playwright's plays were influenced by his acting style. *The Arkazanovs* (1886) does not belong to his most "theatrical" plays. However the underlying melodramatism of the drama and the author's approach towards the antagonist (Navarygin), the embodiment of the "new people" on the Russian scene — the newly emerging class of *parvenus* "money-grubbers" — makes this works stand out in Sumbatov-Iuzhin's dramatic oeuvre.

Moreover, Navarygin's character we read as an example of a "marginal situation." This notion has been elaborated by H. B. Dickie-Clark as a development of the "marginality theory" whose theoretical fundament was laid by Robert E. Park and Everett V Stonequist.⁷² Dickie-Clark expands the sociological framework of the

⁷² See Robert E. Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," *American Journals of Sociology*, 33 (May 1928), pp 881-93; Everett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man. A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937). Their concept of marginality was further

Park/Stonequist theory by calling attention to the “psychological elements in the theory”⁷³. Although he recognizes the necessity of such attention, nonetheless, he insists on separating the “biological” “psychological”, and “cultural “elements” within the social concept of marginal situation and places at the center “the structural elements of hierarchy and ranking.” And yet, among the numerous types of marginal situation (which he basically defines as “[a] result of any departure from complete consistency or congruence among the rankings of an individual or stratum in the various matters regulated by the hierarchy”⁷⁴, the scholar recognizes the situation of the *parvenu*. “Even less structured marginal situations, such as those of the adolescent, the *parvenu*, and the career woman, involve evaluation and ranking and are, therefore, susceptible to hierarchical arrangement (p. 366). The dramatic conflict in *The Arkazanovs* presents an interesting case of interweaving of social, psychological and melodramatic hierarchies.

The play’s knot entangles around a familiar motif — a ruination of a “gentlefolk’s nest”. The Arkazanovs: Dmitrii, a landowner, his wife Varvara, and their children, Olga (19) and Boria (16), are facing bankruptcy and loss of their estate. The underlying reasons for the approaching financial crisis Arkazanova sees in the zealous public activism (*podvizhnichestvo*) in which Dmitrii has been engaged as far back as the early 1860s: involvement in post-reform agricultural enterprises and campaign committees, establishing Sunday schools, sponsoring cheap literary editions. In other words, the protagonist’s social passion, as described by Varvara, portrays a typical *narodnik* figure. She considers Arkazanov’s public endeavors “honorable” but his

developed and refined by scholars like Alan C. Kerckhoff, Thomas C. McCormick, Aaron Antonovsky, etc.

⁷³ H. F. Dickie-Clark, “The marginal Situation: A Contribution to Marginality Theory,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (March 1966), p. 363-370.

⁷⁴ Dickie-Clark, *Ibid.*, p. 367.

financial ventures impractical and “reckless”. Varvara discusses the family’s predicament with Timiriazev, Arkazanov’s old friend from the university and Arkazanova’s secret devotee for twenty years. Both Arkazanova and Timiriazev think that Arkazanov’s only option is to sell everything and to move the family abroad. Arkazanov hopes that there is one person that might help him avoid public scandal and prison — Navarygin. Navarygin is an affluent industrialist and entrepreneur. Arkazanov asks Navarygin to vouch for him. Navarygin declines to do so and yet he theatrically tears a bill of debt. Timiriazev feels humiliated for Arkazanov and almost challenges Navarygin to a duel but the latter succeeds in persuading idealistic Arkazanov of his genuine concern and good intentions.

Navarygin is married to Virineia, a prosperous merchant’s daughter, through whom he gains his wealth and power. Under the pretext that she is mentally challenged, Navarygin keeps Virineia confined. The truth is that he is disgusted by her because she is a constant reminder of the humiliating compromise he made in his youth. By marrying an older, rich woman Navarygin ‘sells his soul’ and acquires the means to save his mother and sister from poverty and sickness. Nonetheless they both ultimately die of consumption and he blames Virineia for his ultimate sacrifice. Though he keeps a mistress, who is in charge of his household, he falls in love with Olga who, as the time progresses, also develops signs of affection for him: Navarygin is a handsome man and he exudes confidence and empathy. But he is aware that Olga would never agree to become his lover, nor can he even contemplate a divorce, because that would mean that he would lose his millions. The ‘chance’ appears in the person of a penniless distant relative of Virineia, Fufin, whom Navarygin allows to stay in the

estate under the condition that the latter will serve him unconditionally. Fufin combines attractive appearance and corrupt conscience and he looks like the ideal ‘tool’ for executing the plan, hinted by Navarygin’s mistress, Veronika. Under the pretense of being a wealthy manufacturer, Fufin is supposed to court Olga and, hopefully, she would accept his proposal. On their wedding day Fufin has to disappear and in that way Olga, dishonored and without any alternative, would eventually become ‘available’ to Navarygin, who would act as her savior.

Two months pass and Arkazanov’s affairs have worsened. Arkazanov is facing an imminent threat of imprisonment for his debts. Navarygin, still pretending to be his “caring, loving brother”, promises to delay the due date. Fufin asks Olga to marry him but she turns down the proposal. Navarygin decides to play his last card and tells her that it is her duty to save her father and her family. Meanwhile Timiriazev again suggests selling the rest of the assets, invites the Arkazanovs to his estate and offers a position to Dmitrii. Confused and desperate, Olga confides in her mother her feelings for Navarygin. Still believing in Navarygin’s goodness, on the eve of the last auction she visits him to bid farewell but he admits his real intentions. He tells her about his unhappy marriage and confesses his feelings for Olga. Olga leaves in repulsion. Back on the Arkazanovs’ estate preparations for departure are under way. Arkazanov has been offered a position at some doctor’s estate and the family is hopeful about the future. But their enjoyment is interrupted by an arrival of the police who come with a warrant for Arkazanov’s arrest. Parallel to these events an auction is also in progress. Navarygin arrives finally offering to vouch for Arkazanov but the Varvara rejects his ‘charity’ with dignity and a pompous speech. Curtain.

By charting two life paths through the characters of Arkazanov and Navarygin, Sumbatov-Iuzhin problematizes the clash between two ideological and philosophical positions. The problem of the rapid industrialization and modernization of the country and the socio-economic transformations these processes unleash become one of the topical themes discussed by the dramaturgy of the period. The newly emerged class of nouveaux riches was examined through a range of characters that embodied the new business elite, such as: *burzhua-millionshchik* (bourgeois-millionaire), *kulak* (petty rural capitalist), *kupechestvo* (rich merchantry), etc. The growing significance of the new power and privilege within the socio-economic landscape brought also changes onto the theatrical stage, all the more as the relationships they established in and outside of their environment supplied intriguing dramatic material. With all the supremacy and arrogance they were entitled to, the new “masters of the situation” brought also a great deal of personal hesitation and anxiety. Characters who “broke out from their milieu” (“*gerói, vylamyvaiushchiesia iz svoei sredy*”), as they often were referred to, offered new aspects to the psychological insights of the melodramatic form. The inner struggles that accompanied their entry onto the Russian scene complicated the otherwise one-dimensional melodramatic paradigm.⁷⁵

Structurally, the progression of the dramatic conflict in *The Arkazanovs* is traced through the alternation of the action between the two estates and, respectively, between the five acts. Within the formal units (acts) which encompass the two ‘camps’ of *dramatis personae*, however, there are knots of additional psychological tension which need to be highlighted since they contribute to the play’s overall configuration

⁷⁵ Needless to say, characters like these served as ancestors of the famous Lopakhin from Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*.

of conflicts. In Dmitrii Arkazanov's character, easily recognizable is the clash between an individual's efforts and results in his public and private lives. Arkazanov is not torn in a painful self-analysis. His frustration does not stem from regrets about his social inertia. In contrast, his past endeavors attest to passionate commitment to public causes which consume all of his energy and attention. The outcome, however, is predictable: the family's business affairs are in disarray.

The playwright delays the moment of main confrontation between the protagonist (Arkazanov) and antagonist (Navarygin) by probing it first within the level of "victim's supporting group", to use the term which we introduced earlier in this chapter. The relationship of the two friends — Arkazanov and Timiriazev — somewhat resembles that of Oblomov and Stolz from Goncharov's novel. Arkazanov's impracticality and meekness is juxtaposed with Timiriazev's determination and efficiency. Almost twenty years after *Oblomov* had been published the dynamics these two characters represented was still very relevant because, as Prince Mirsky, who otherwise was quite critical of Goncharov's artistic objectivity and stylistic talent, put it:

"Oblomov is more than a character; he is a symbol. The fact that he is drawn with the aid of none but purely and modestly realistic methods only enhances the symbolism. He obviously was, and was immediately recognized to be, the embodiment of a whole side of the Russian soul, or rather of a side of the soul of the Russian gentry—its sloth and ineffectiveness. He has a high sense of values. He is open to generous aspirations but incapable of effort or discipline."⁷⁶

With Timiriazev's response to Arkazanov's predicament Sumbatov-Iuzhin articulates one of the major contradictions of the gentry's ethos: between ideas and actions, intentions and results. Arkazanov's naïveté and unconscious stubbornness in his unwillingness to recognize the seriousness of his situation is a consequence of what G.

⁷⁶ Mirsky, *Op*, cit., p. 191.

S. Morson calls a “lack of prosaic habits” and “prosaic vision”.⁷⁷ Timiriazev, in contrast, is an individual who seems to possess “everyday virtues”. In his behavior, however, we do not discern the aggressiveness and criticism which characterize famous Chekhov “doubles” like Astrov, Lvov, Voinitsev, etc. Timiriazev appreciates his friend’s sense of social responsibility and does not allow Arkazanov, though very sympathetic to her situation, to question Arkazanov’s past activities: “No, [...] this is not rubbish, not recklessness. These are the tiny drops which fill the great cup of the progress. All the things he did were because that was his duty” (p.10).⁷⁸ On the other hand, Timiriazev expresses indignation at Arkazanov’s inflexibility which puts him in a state of dependence on Navarygin’s ‘mercy’. He challenges Dmitrii’s voluntary martyrdom and passivity with the prospect of Olga taking up a job in order to contribute to the family finances:

TIMIRIAZEV: You are a tiger, you are not a father. You are a crocodile devouring his own hatchlings ... I will not let this happen!
 ARKAZANOV: What should I do?
 TIMIRIAZEV: Sell all of these *feudal castles*⁷⁹ and lands, pay your debts, leave this damn place. Go abroad and start a careful, German life.
 ARKAZANOV: I am paying a high price for my profligacy and my delusions. Every time a take a look at Olia or Boria my heart sinks. I would prefer the jail cell than Varia’s silent reproach. Oh, God!

p. 21

Timiriazev does not question Arkazanov’s principles and beliefs. What he is critical about is the latter’s indulgence in excessive commitment to “sublime” ideas and public projects and hence his negligence about “everyday virtues”. Two capacious metaphors — that of “feudal castles” and that of a predatory animal gulping down his little ones — emerge from the dialogue as some of the crucial questions of the time. “The feudal castles” signify a social system whose practical value has proved to be dysfunctional

⁷⁷ Morson, Op. cit., p.226.

⁷⁸ All quotations are from Al. I. Sumbatov-Iuzhin, “Arkazanovy”, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. III, (Moscow, 1901). Translation is mine.

⁷⁹ Emphasis mine.

and obsolete. The “castles” now present only an economic burden which is not only an obstacle for their owners but also an obstacle for their successors. In the play the ever-present generational conflict modifies into the question of one’s responsibility before the next generations. Interestingly, Timiriazev, who is not a parent himself, demonstrates stronger parental instincts than Arkazanov.

On the other hand, Arkazanov’s children are portrayed to be in a complete unison with their parents. They share their views and support their decisions unconditionally. It is exactly what makes Olga and Boria to stand out among the long line of “children” who question and rebel against their “fathers”. Olga’s filial devotion is unshakable even when she is confronted with the dilemma to marry Fufin in order to save her father’s honor. Prior to the proposal her conversation with her mother reveals the latter’s philosophy of a woman’s purpose in the life of her loved ones. She perceives it as a discipleship and *podvizhnichestvo*:

ARKAZANOVA: We owe to give up our own lives and to live only through their [the ones we love] lives. When their battles drain the strength of them we are obliged to give them everything we have in our poor souls in order to lift their high spirits, to boost up their energy. This is our sacred calling. p. 77

Nonetheless, Olga’s readiness to marry Fufin in order to protect the family from destitution and disgrace terrifies Arkazanova since exactly her own sense of honor is in conflict with such ultimate sacrifice. The playwright utilizes the motif of “sale-trade” as a main device through which he demonstrates how the protagonist (Arkazanov) and the antagonist (Navarygin) behave in identical situations. Two types of “sale-trade” are negotiated and contested in the play. On the one hand, the sale of Arkazanov’s estate and Navarygin’s acquiring his wealth document factual economic procedures. On the other hand, the corollaries which accompany the processes, their moral cost, are the

key point of divergence between them. The development of the characters is constructed by the juxtaposition of the processes of Navarygin's rise to power and wealth and of, conversely, Arkazanov's downfall. In both cases a female character plays a substantial role: Navarygin's passage from rags to riches lies through his marriage to Virineia; Arkazanov's ruin climaxes not in the actual moment of the auction and of the arrest but coincides with his daughter's critical moment of making a difficult choice as a direct consequence of his actions.

“What we most retain from any consideration of melodramatic structures”, states Brooks “is the sense of fundamental bipolar contrast or clash. He further elaborates:

[...] Melodramatic dilemmas and choices are constructed on the either/or in its extreme form as the all-or-nothing. [...] Polarization is both horizontal and vertical: characters represent extremes, and they undergo extremes, passing from heights to depths, or the reverse, almost instantaneously. The middle ground and the middle condition are excluded. [...] Polarizations not only a dramatic principle but the very mean by which integral ethical conditions are identified and shaped, made clear and operative.⁸⁰

Although the moral rhetoric invested in Arkazanov and Navarygin might seem mapped out clearly, a more complex melodramatic configuration emerges when the heroes are analyzed within the context of their “groups of supporters”. The intricacy lies in the alternation of the ascending/descending ‘movements’ in their development. These fluctuations nuance their portrayal, especially in the case of Navarygin. On the surface, Navarygin's villainy is unquestionable. The predatory instincts and unscrupulousness with which he goes after Arkazanov are generically reminiscent of the figure of the “villain revenger” — the main protagonist of revenge drama. Naturally, in this context we are referring to a “revenge element”, not to the entire poetics of the genre of the

⁸⁰ Brooks, *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

revenge tragedy, whose bloody sensationalism here is modified into the cold and perfidious machinations of Navarygin. Navarygin's actions are driven by his desire for money and power. The fierceness with which he goes after Arkazanov, however, has much deeper roots.

The "sale-trade" theme re-emerges in Navarygin's confession about the undignified choice he has to make by marrying into the family of a wealthy merchant. Having lost his freedom, discredited his integrity and, most importantly, his self-respect Navarygin vents his anger on Virineia whom he perceives as a constant reminder of his moral degradation. Virineia is Navarygin's dark secret, his shame, and his verdict. A peripheral character otherwise, she is the key to Navarygin's core. Their relationship follows several types of reversals: social, psychological and spatial. The poor, starving university student transforms into a powerful industrialist. Virineia is locked in her/their manor ("*khonomy*") leading almost an animal existence since the only thing she is allowed to enjoy is food. Navarygin is abusive towards his wife both verbally and physically and she is terrified by him. The characters are also contrasted in terms of their appearance. Navarygin is attractive and enigmatic; Virineia is a much older, obese woman who evokes in him nothing but revulsion and contempt. Embittered and cynical, Navarygin feels entitled to treat Virineia in this way, but her cloistered existence, in reality, is a mirror-image of the hero's own entrapment of which he becomes fully aware only when he meets Olga and falls in love with her.

Olga is not only the object of Navarygin's desire; she epitomizes his unconscious psychological motivation: his fascination with power and money is driven by his constant need for validation. He strives to prove to himself and to the world that

his social status and prestige justify all of his choices and actions. Olga's purity is contrasted with Navarygin's own loss of innocence:

NAVARYGIN: She [Olga] is my misery and my punishment — this is what this girl means for me [...] Hungry childhood, beggarly adolescence, a marriage to a gold mine, a whole life dedicated to speculation and, let's be honest, a life with a one and only goal — profit at the price of ruining others—hoping that all of this would suppress all noble ideas. And what? It took this girl, this child, only one glance, one appearance and *she turned everything upside down*.⁸¹ p. 46

Olga's character shifts the initial, external conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist to Navarygin's inner conflict. He interprets Olga's rejection not only as his failure to break Arkazanov's will, but as a moral fiasco. The ideological clash between Arkazanov and Navarygin, as Arkazanov defines it, between the "yesterday's lackeys" who become "money-lenders" and "the salt of the earth", the people who "always put the common welfare above their private interests", ends with a catastrophe for Arkazanov.

NAVARYGIN: We have struggled against each other all our lives. We represent two antagonistic forces. I climbed up the ladder the way you despised and at each step you did not miss to treat me with contempt. It was the force of the era, not me, that took avenged me on you.

ARKAZANOVA: There is nothing horrible about that: even with all our hardship and homelessness we are stronger and happier than you. [...] Yes, there had been a struggle between us, but not the type you spoke about. Deep down you know that because there are still some remnants of conscience in you. There was a struggle because we didn't know how to succeed by foul means. There was a struggle between an honest man and a money-lender. Go home, go to your ... palace. He [Arkazanov] will go to Siberia and we will follow him. But the trial, the exile, the ruin — all of them are less shameful than your handshake. p. 114-115

The ethical clash, however, resolves with a moral victory for the latter. On the other hand, the finale concludes in a typical melodramatic fashion: villainy is punished, virtue is recognized, and innocence is saved. Paradoxically, victimization is celebrated as victory. Last but not least, Arkazanov's moral superiority is validated by his children: Boria thanks his mother for not accepting Navarygin's final offer for help;

⁸¹ Emphasis mine.

Olga rejects Navarygin because her sense of dignity and honor is much stronger than her feelings for him. Thus the ubiquitous generational conflict is modified and elevated to a generational continuity.

The vitality of a convention is in its joyous capacity for being inflicted or subverted”, writes J.L. Styan.⁸² The focus of this chapter was four plays which demonstrated different stylistic approaches within one and the same dramatic mode. Although still faithful to the poetic conventions of previous theatrical tradition, turn-of-the-century popular dramatists demonstrate a shift in the balance between “formula” and “form” in their dramatic production. They show artistry and originality in their work within the melodramatic framework, new trends in the examination of the nature of the conflict. Of special interest is their innovativeness when working with spatial-ethical dimensions within the melodramatic hierarchy. The ideological fluctuations of the time are reflected in the poetic structure of the plays. Familial drama was very sensitive to shifts in the ideological discussions which were a direct result from the uncertainties in the social and domestic realms. The malfunctions of the former were portrayed through the dysfunctionality of the latter. By accommodating and reconceptualizing a major discourse of the previous epochs – the discourse of “superfluity” — into discourses of marginality, the popular dramatists made towards modern dramatic writing a further step, albeit a shy one.

⁸² J.L. Styan, *Drama, Stage, and Audience*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1975), p. 12.

CHAPTER II

Paradigms of Marginality in Chekhov's Early Drama

In his latest complete edition of Chekhov's dramaturgical heritage in English Laurence Senelick places *Platonov* and *On the High Road* under the rubric "Early Experiments." Indeed, the experimental quality of both plays is first to be found in the simple fact that they were the playwright's earliest attempts at dramatic form. However, even in these early plays there emerges a distinctive dramaturgical technique already of significant artistic value. These two dramatic pieces, albeit quite different in social setting and stylistic quality, reveal common features with regard to modes of narration and the organization of dramatic space as a poetic stratagem. The dramatist exploits misplacement, one of the major motifs in his later plays, as a reflection of the spiritual anxieties of fin-de-siècle Russia. On the thematic level, misplacement highlights the "modern uncertainty" and "incompleteness" of early 1880s society, while as a poetic device it both organizes the dramatic space and propels the dramatic action.

Already in the mid-nineteen-fifties, analyzing the sources of "ontological solitude" in Chekhovian drama, Robert W. Corrigan pointed out that the playwright preferred situating the dramatic narrative in "restricted areas." "The interiors are

always closely confined rooms; the exteriors are usually attached to the house or are nearby.”⁸³ At the center of *Platonov* and *On the High Road* Chekhov places two disparate, and yet emblematic, entities of the Russian scene: a provincial estate and a wayside tavern. The nature of the dramatic space and its appropriation in the plays are constructed through different poetic resources. Nonetheless, the encapsulation of the Voynitsev estate, on the one hand, and the tight, cramped space of the inn, on the other, are instrumental in revealing dramatic conflicts and furthering the plot. A closer analysis of this constituent of the plays’ dramatic structure shows how encasement and misplacement serve as mechanisms for creating modes of marginality.

Between ‘Holy Foolishness’ and ‘Jestership’: *Platonov*

Platonov occupies a special position within the dramaturgical legacy of Anton Chekhov. The very fact of its paradoxically late and incidental discovery as a manuscript of a play in four acts without a title raises simultaneously several groups of issues with respect to its dramatic poetics, which later, in the playwright’s mature plays, will develop into the renowned Chekhovian canon. *Platonov* is only “the beginning of all beginnings”. In spite of the obvious deficiencies of the play (the unusual length, the multitude of dramatis personae, the melodramatic excess), which probably were the main reasons the author never returned to the manuscript and rewrote it, let alone pursued its staging, *Platonov* demonstrates striking novelty as regards the dramatic conflict, construction of characters, the work with rhythm and

⁸³ Robert W. Corrigan, “The Drama of Anton Chekhov,” in *Modern Drama. Essays in Criticism*, ed. Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 82

with space and, last but not least, the synthesis of the tragic and the comic, the dramatic and the lyric, high and low.

Chekhov writes *Platonov* when he is not even twenty. Yet the work demonstrates amazing maturity in observing a society in which social shifts bring huge disruption into the entire pattern of attitudes displayed on the Russian country estate in the 1880s. Voynitsevka and Platonovka, the two major topoi of the drama, reflect the confusion within the hierarchy of values of the provincial gentry. The boundaries of the previously established framework of individual and societal behavior are softened and dissolved, producing a bizarre pattern of relationships within an encapsulated group of people. They suffocate because of the triviality of their existence, because of their inability to work, act, love, or even to make efforts to face the challenges in their changing lives. In spite of their complicated relations, fictitious and obvious antagonism, rivalry and misunderstandings, they need each other desperately and, day after day, they are driven to meet, talk, communicate, argue, hate, and love. This need is manifested through the characters' attempts to invent and re-invent themselves in the course of the dramatic action, sometimes being unaware of the very process and sometimes intentionally.

Platonov is overcrowded with characters. The overpopulation, however, has a special function. This swarm of individuals inhabits a micro-universe, which constantly hesitates between the center and the periphery. Voynitsev's estate strives to overcome the limits of the usual model of conduct, its inhabitants dream about a change in their *modus vivendi*. The attempts, though, fruitless and vain, are ultimately channeled into ambiguous actions. They do not provide the desired change, neither in the private

sphere, nor on the larger scale of social representation. On the contrary, they generate further confusion and disturbance within the encapsulated community and cause irreversible turmoil. The direction of the efforts and deeds of the major characters can be considered in terms of two major tendencies – one of them is aimed at the structural center of the play, the title character. The second one vacillates on the verge of mockery, ridicule, eccentricity and the absurd. Thus, crucial discussions of life, personal choices, work, finance, friendship and love are modified into a bizarre amalgamation of poetic techniques from a drawing –room comedy, melodrama, buffoonery and tragifarce.

Questions about the position, status, and responsibilities of an individual within a society, and the consequences of private decisions, are interwoven with the exploration of the everyday praxis and cultural patterns of the provincial estate. *Platonov* can be regarded as a drama of a lost identity, which through theatricalisation and self-dramatisation strives to restore the troubled inner balance. The more the title character attempts to depart from recognizable patterns of relationship and social conduct through the big sweeping amplitudes of “*shutnichestvo*”, “*iurodstvo*”, self-parody and mockery of the others, the wider the gap between the fictional and the real.

⁸⁴ As a result, on the one hand, the purest and the most fragile people are hurt (Platonov’s son and wife) and on the other hand, Platonov pays with his own life. Beyond this, other numerous events accompany the main plot line and contribute to the tragic and yet heterogeneous overtone of the play’s dénouement.

⁸⁴ This type of dramatic technique Igor’ Sukhikh defines as ‘pulling apart’ (*raskhozhdenie*) of the informational and emotional meaning of the dialogue. More on the system of dialogue in *Platonov*, see Igor’ Sukhikh, *Problemy poetiki A.P. Chekhova*, (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1987) 10-33; Gilman, *Op. cit.*, pp. 47-48

The problem of marginal and centrifugal energies regulating Voynitsev's estate can be traced as early as in the very opening scene of the play. Bored, trying to kill some time over a game of chess, Anna Voynitsev and Nikolai Triletsky are engaged in one of those endless conversations about daily routines, hot weather, the upcoming lunch, and, finally, Triletsky's courting of Maria Grekov. Once having headed in a certain direction, the conversation never arrives at its intended destination as a topic. It lingers and constantly crumbles into an insignificant exchange of remarks, which rhythmically, "in between", generates the main dramatic narrative. With regard to this, Triletsky's passing comment on his relationship with Maria is quite revealing.⁸⁵

TRILETSKY: Actually, I see her every second day, sometimes every day even. We go for walks in leafy country lanes. I talk about things that interest me, she talks to me about things that interest her, holding me by this button and removing some fluff from my collar. I'm always covered in fluff, you know. p.19

Meetings and talks at the Voynitsev estate are desired and waited for. Members of its circle need to see and communicate with each other on a daily basis. Like doctor Triletsky and Maria Grekov, though, they do not pay serious attention to what they hear or observe. What they really aspire to is determined by the inner urge to live in and be part of an environment, which, although incapable of giving answers or resolving dilemmas, at least, can provide a certain setting for bringing up problems. While waiting for lunch or another meal, the residents of Voynitsevka discuss the most vital and delicate issues with the same amount of energy and enthusiasm as they do local rumors and petty issues. The intrinsic idea of intimacy is constantly broken. Every character is driven by the demand to share and confess, to contemplate and ponder. A person from outside is needed to confirm choices and concepts, perceptions

⁸⁵ All citations from the play are from Anton Chekhov, *Platonov: A Play in Four Acts and Five Scenes*, Trans. David Magarshack, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965). Transliteration of the characters' names is also consistent with this edition.

and feelings. The social and the private fuse and produce an ambiguous mode of behavior. This mode is adopted to facilitate the conventionally enacted patterns of social and cultural behavior, which turn out to be already inadequate.

Voynitsev's estate represents a diverse body, which at the same time stands out as an encapsulated society. Voynitsevka's seclusion is determined not only by being located on a remote estate in a southern province but also and mainly by the essence of the attitudes of its members, by the monotony of its rituals, by the quality of established relationships. These types of manifestation are indicated in different ways. Anna Voynitsev introduces Pavel Shcherbuk – a landowner and neighbor of the Voynitsevs as their “friend, neighbor, guest and creditor.” In a similar fashion, Glagolyev Sr. and Petrin can be portrayed. Close friends to Voynitseva's late husband, they are not only guests at the estate but also full members of the manor's life. At first glance, the estate reveals complex interconnected financial relationships, which primarily spin around the imminent threat of bankruptcy, losing the estate, and the futile efforts to avoid the inevitable. On the other hand, economic forces are revealed and examined through characters, whose awareness of the very essence of the bonds is unveiled:

TRILETSKY [to Sophia]: Didn't you know I was getting board and lodgings from her ladyship [Anna] for being her jester? And pocket money, too. When they tire of me, they'll kick me out of here in disgrace. It's true what I'm saying, isn't it. However, I'm not the only one who says it. You said it too at dinner at Glagolyev, didn't you?

p. 100

The significance which Chekhov attaches to the economic interdependence in Voynitsevka, can be detected in minute details as well as in expressive artistic summations. Triletsky's petty parasitism is demonstrated also in his repetitive borrowing of small amounts of cash from different “benefactors,” as Anna defines the

latter once, followed by the immediate irrational “giveaways” of the same money. The beneficiaries, on their part, accept the “gesture” instinctively without any comment or even slight puzzlement. An illustration of the playwright’s artistry with tropes is articulated through a witty pun on an abbreviation, which is elevated to a capacious metaphor:

TRILETSKY: (...) Incidentally, what does that monogram ‘S.V.’ mean? Sophia Voynitsev, or Sergey Voynitsev? To whom did our philologist wish to pay his respects by these letters: his wife or himself?

PLATONOV: It seems to me that these letters must mean ‘Salute to Vengerovich’. It’s his money we are making merry on. p. 87

Thus, the dimensions of the impending economic catastrophe range from explicit statements to emblematic articulation. Voynitsevka’s inhabitants and guests are entangled in intricate relations whose suffocating nature is reinforced by the stifling summer heat, which functions as a background to the dramatic action throughout the play. Almost every *dramatis persona* entering the stage for the first time refers to the “devilishly hot” weather. The weather conditions are considered rather inappropriate for “discussing serious matters.” The southern leisurely setting serves as an excuse or justification for the lack of characters’ motivation to be active and responsive. Similar remarks are present as continuous accompaniment to the discourse of boredom and melancholy. Moreover, even a courtship sometimes can be lined up in the same order of daily routines as mealtime. Triletsky interprets his wooing of Maria Grekov as killing time together rather than as a love or passion:

TRILETSKY: I’m afraid I can’t say what I find so attractive about her. (Boredom, love, or something else? I don’t know.) After dinner I’m terribly bored with her I’ve found out—by the sheerest accident, mind you—that she’s bored with me too.

p. 19

In concordance with the way in which Voynitsevka comments on and reacts to the social fabric of the relationships involved, the psychological and intellectual

aspects of the estate's encapsulation are displayed. Day after day, the same faces, and no promise of diversity, challenge or change:

GLAGOLYEV SR.: I'm bored. These people say things I've heard years ago. They think what I thought as a child. It's all old stuff, nothing new...I'm cursing myself for being unwanted here.

ANNA: Because you're not like us? People learn to live with cockroaches, why don't you learn to live with our sort of people? p.93

The same sense of encapsulation and predictability can be detected even in the "visiting card" of the village's horse-thief's, Osip, as composed by Platonov: "Born in Voynitsevka, committed all his robberies and murders in Voynitsevka, and always to be found in and around Voynitsevka."

The habitual daily rhythm of Voynitsevka is shaped by meals and small talk, low-key discussions, arrivals and departures, which create a misleading impression of dynamism. The organizational principle of the estate's existence is presented as an alternation of these components, which is reminiscent of the pattern of the seasons' natural cycle. The formal entanglement of the dramatic plot begins with the arrival of the Voynitsev family from the city. This major impulse, though, pushes along the plot development not only in Voynitsevka, but also in Platonovka. The ostensible energy of Voynitsevka is juxtaposed to languid Platonovka. Whereas Voynitsevka's mealtimes and visits regulate the manor's dynamics, the express and goods trains passing by measure Platonovka's life. It is also naturally determined by the academic schedule in light of Platonov being a schoolmaster.

An additional model of interaction between both topoi will be established throughout the play. In it another illustration of marginality can be recognized. Recurring shifts of the dramatic progression are launched between Platonovka and Voynitsev manor. They reflect the striving of the former entity to overcome its own

isolation, emotional hibernation and despondency only to discover a level of identical apathy in the latter. In terms of phases within the dramatic development, analogous fluctuations are tangible. On the surface, most of the events occur in Voynitsevka. The real center of dramatic tension though, the rising action and part of the climatic point in particular, is situated in Platonovka. Consequently, the concentration of dramatic activity correlates with the main protagonist's shifts between the two entities. The center and periphery in *Platonov* – both in terms of qualitative components of the drama and in relation to the development of the main protagonist of the play, demonstrate discernible instability, which will be discussed below.

Mikhail Platonov himself, serves as the focal point of the action and functions as a “hub” of communication, in a similar way to the Voynitsevka estate. Equally hated and admired, he is that enigmatic figure who serves as “the man in the mirror” for the others. Playing, teasing, mocking, arrogant, aggressive, the provincial schoolmaster is the most interesting interlocutor and the most attractive gentleman for the ladies. He is the epitome of modern indeterminacy and incompleteness. Glagolyev Sr. says about him:

GLAGOLYEV SR.: (...) He [Platonov] is the hero of the best, though, unfortunately, still unwritten, modern novel. By uncertainty I mean the present condition of our society: the Russian novelist feels this uncertainty. He finds himself in a quandary, he is at a loss, doesn't know what to concentrate on. He doesn't understand (...) these people. His novels are abominably bad, everything in them is forced and cheap, and, well, no wonder! Everything is so uncertain, so unintelligible... Everything is so terribly confused. Everything is in such a hopeless muddle. And our highly intelligent Platonov, in my opinion, expresses this uncertainty admirably. p. 26

The vagueness and incompleteness Glagolyev Sr. refers to can be recognized even in Anna's salon furniture, which is a mixture of “modern and antique” units. Tradition meets modernity and their interaction produces an ambiguous result.

If we try to enumerate the “epithets” and qualifications Platonov’s acquaintances and friends give him, we will have a long list of “labels” which portray a complex individual. He stands out, on the one hand, as an emblematic representative of Voynitsevka and, on the other hand, as an unattached constituent of its micro-cosmos. Anna Voynitseva is the first one who asks the question of his “status”. “(...) What kind of person do you think he is? Is he a hero or not a hero?” (p.26) she asks Triletsky and Glagolyev Sr. For only a “hero” like Platonov is capable of stirring the lethargic atmosphere of the estate, of provoking and demanding reactions and of searching for responses. This ability, though, is revived in him only when Platonov deeply immerses himself in the setting of “high ceilings” and “parquet”. Platonov’s trips to Voynitsev estate function as a means of awakening from his “hibernation”. There is an armchair in the home of Voynitseva, considered his own one, waiting for him whenever Platonov wishes to appear. Domesticity is not appealing to him. He needs an audience to “preach” and ridicule, and Anna’s drawing room serves as a perfect stage. “The smell of human flesh”, as Platonov himself defines, electrifies his hunting nature. “He pursues me from morning till night, keeps staring at me, doesn’t give me a moment’s peace with those understanding eyes of his”, complains Sophia (p.75). Triletsky, in his turn, compares Platonov’s indulgence in harsh mockery and his zeal for “sermonizing” with predatory instincts: “There he sits, our great sage and philosopher. Always on the look out. Waiting impatiently for his prey: whom to regale with a lecture before bedtime.” (p.89).

Platonov attracts with his typicality and unpredictability. His companions can watch in him a reflected image of themselves. These reflections are quite often

distorted and ugly, banal and devastating. Yet Mikhail Platonov sends real challenges because among the frequenters of Voynitseva's drawing-room he is the only "hero". By "hero", as we have already noted, is meant his capability to render best their common indeterminateness. With regard to this, Cyril Glagolyev's comment is very articulate:

GLAGOLYEV JR.: What a rabble! What *specimens*! The airs they give themselves! Such ugly faces, such crooked noses! And the women?... Good Lord! In such company I invariably prefer the refreshment bar to dancing... How stale the air in Russia! So damp, so close. I can't bear Russia. The ignorance, the stench – horrible! It's quite different abroad. p. 88

"Specimens" ("*tipy*" in the original text) here evoke the concept of frozen empty masks. Within the model of their routine behavior, Voynitsevka's inhabitants are comfortable behind them. They do not trouble to try to overcome the habitual pattern. Platonov is the one who constantly attempts to cross the framework of the status quo. In most cases, the effect of "troubled water" he creates is cleansing. Whether he plays with his own transformations or enjoys the role of the *raisonneur*, sardonically merciless or surprisingly considerate and understanding, he always triggers a reaction.

Platonov's character permanently hesitates between two major cultural agenda: that of the "court jester" and of the "holy fool". To produce an effect of behavioral and cultural marginality the dramatist elaborately amalgamates these two patterns. In the first place, this has to do with Chekhov's efforts to track down the nature of the "jester" who is entitled to tell the truth without decorations and euphemisms. In addition, the "jester's" mission is also to provide, even for a while, an emotional asylum in a traditional societal unit.

In considering the "holy foolishness" ("*iurodstvo*"), the ideological and cultural value of the concept in Russian mentality and history is crucial, since the behavioral

equivalent of the phenomenon is demonstrated in the cultural space of *Platonov*. We will trace its manifestations in the person of the title character of the play as well as in Osip (to whom we will pay special attention later on) since there are, as we see it, two major reasons for its use. The first one has to do with the very nature of the social representation and public reputation of both individuals. The second rationale for placing Platonov and Osip within the discourse of “holy fool” figures stems from their link to the notion of marginality. We need to establish the aspects of their behavior as markers of the phenomenon in question because representations of *iurodstvo* in *Platonov*, reasonably, are not demonstrated in the literal sense of the term. They rather emerge as deep-seated patterns within the cultural memory of Voynitsevka’s society.

Needless to say, as a social phenomenon, *iurodstvo* represents marginality par excellence. In terms of public status, involvement in social order and relationship with authorities, the institution of the church in particular, holy fools unquestionably occupy the margins of society. Vladimir Dal’ gives the following definition of *iurodivy*⁸⁶: “[...] people consider holy fools to be God’s people, often discerning in [their] unconscious acts deep meaning, even intuition or premonition; [...] the ecclesiastical connotation at times implies [someone] foolish, unreasonable, irrational”. Under the same entry, we find the following specification: “[...] *iurodstvo* (to adopt/embrace *iurodstvo*), *iurodit’sia*, *iurodstvovat’*, [means] to play the fool the way jesters in olden times did.”⁸⁷ The last segment suggests that the phenomenon in question can be classified under two main categories – the first one referring to people with a physical disability or mental disorder towards which the society cultivates an attitude of both total

⁸⁶ Vladimir Dal’, *Tolkovy slovar’ zhivogo velikoruskogo iazyka*, (Tokyo: Tachibana Shotem, 1934).

⁸⁷ Translations from all cited Russian sources are my own, unless stated otherwise.

rejection and marginalization or that of sympathy and mercy. The second group includes individuals who adopt the holy fool figure as a conscious manifestation of criticism of or confrontation with the societal norms and outlook.

Tracing the roots of *iurodstvo* back to the times of Medieval Rus', A. Panchenko identifies these two major types as "natural" and "voluntary" and differentiates within them another two subcategories – "passive" and "active".⁸⁸ In our case, as we have already mentioned, we are interested exclusively in those indications which are representative of the phenomenon as an essential component of Russian cultural, spiritual, and last but not least literary heritage. "Intelligent *iurodstvo* – this is neither an oxymoron, nor a paradox. Indeed, it was a form of intellectual criticism [...]", specifies Panchenko.⁸⁹ The prevailing aspect of *iurodstvo* in Platonov is displayed through intellectual resistance, severe ridicule of decorum, hypocrisy and total uselessness of Voynitsevka. In Osip, the phenomenon is demonstrated through a psychological confrontation with the villagers.

The public status of the holy fool figure in Russian culture is unstable. On the one hand *iurodivye* are treated as outcasts of society and depending on their physical condition and public behavior, they are either approached with compassion or regarded as dangerous deviations. The latter attitude has to do also with the fact that there were many cases of behavior, which imitated *iurodstvo*. Russian cultural history evidences numerous examples of imitators of holy fools (*lzheiuodtsy*). As a result an individual who showed any symptoms of *iurodivost'* was approached with caution.

⁸⁸ For more details, see A. M. Panchenko, *O russkoi istorii i kul'ture*, (St. Peterburg: Azbuka, 2000), section "Iurodivye na Rusi", pp. 337-355

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

The second main role of the holy fools relates to their performative attributes. In this function, they share certain features with the figure of jesters. In spite of some differences in Western and Eastern cultures towards them, both traditions endow jesters with special privileges. In the “entertaining” quality of jesters and holy fools, society finds a balance between rejection and tolerance, and an opportunity to justify a mechanism for protecting marginal people. The jesters’ practice of public mockery of human weaknesses and societal vices correlates with the holy fool’s protest and criticism. Furthermore, both figures are granted the “license” to speak their minds freely since their “performance” is not considered to pose a threat towards the established order. In rare cases, a jester would pay with his life for his arrogance, while church authorities would ostracize holy fools, depending on the particular case. Namely, their access to the church would be limited or totally denied.⁹⁰

As an institution both the figure of the jester and that of the holy fool, assume incongruous position within society. On the one hand, they belong to the periphery. They are loners and rarely form any type of common societal grouping. On the other hand, the essence of their pursuit needs an audience and, as a result, they become a center of public attention. Their activity is for the crowd and it is executed in the street, on the town square, or in the royal court.⁹¹ The country estate inherits some properties

⁹⁰ More on this subject, see M.P. Pyliaev, *Staroe zhyt'e: Ocherki i rasskazy o byvshikh v otshedshee vremia obriadakh, obychaiakh, i poriadkakh v ustroistve domashnei zhizni*, (Sankt-Peterburg: zhurnal “Neva”; “Letnii sad”, 2000), section “Starodavnie starchiki, pustosviaty i iurodtsy”, 321-425.

⁹¹ On fools and jesters in Russian court see Ivan Zabelin, *Domashnii byt ruskikh tsarei v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh*, (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2000): 257-275.

and “rituals” from court life, which, in its turn, in certain aspects are witnessed later in the praxis of the *dacha*.⁹²

In terms of theatricality of the Russian country estate and its cultural routines, Voynitsev estate does not make an exception. It finds its “jester” figure in the person of Mikhail Platonov. He identifies Anna’s salon with a pulpit from which to “preach”, with a stage on which to “perform”, and in Voynitsevka’s frequenters the spectators he needs: “What is so remarkable is the revolting fact that you never quarrel with my father when you’re alone with him. You choose a drawing room for your diversions, for there the fools can see you in all your glory. Oh, you theatrical fellow!” (p. 61). A certain “hierarchy” within the capacity to entertain is established. Triletsky endeavors to try on the role of Platonov to see if it fits him. However, his attempts immediately get discouraged. Anna is the first character to bring up the question of eligibility for being a jester. She denies Triletsky the privilege: I do believe you’re about to deliver yourself of some witticism. Don’t, my dear fellow, I’m sick of your jokes. Besides, the role of jester doesn’t suit you. Have you noticed that I never laugh at your jokes? You ought to have noticed it ages ago, I should have thought.” (p. 18) Sophia elaborates the notion by downgrading Triletsky’s to a “buffoon” and a “clown”, most probably because the quality of his “jestership” is rather one-dimensional.

In contrast, Platonov’s *iurodstvo* and buffoonery are manifested as a means to face his own “demons”, to suppress his bitter sense of self-dissatisfaction and deep intellectual and spiritual anxiety. Platonov’s personal charisma, sharp wit and cynicism, though, exasperate his audience. His challenging faculty for what in our time

⁹² On the paradigm of country retreat and the relationship between *dacha* and country estate, see Stephen Lovell, “Between Arcadia and Suburbia: Dachas in Late Imperial Russia.”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 61, No. 1. Spring, (2002): 66-87.

would be labeled as “showmanship” is, in fact, a manifestation of self-inflicted bad publicity. What prompts this is the fact that in his role of a “court jester” Platonov violates an important rule, which regulates the relationship between a court and a jester. A jester’s performance implies a temporary suspension of the established hierarchy. Eventually the exchange of places is expected to be reversed and the order – restored. Platonov does not seem to believe in that. In addition, mocking Voynitsevka’s “royalty” and, therefore demarcating himself from them, he at the same time is an indispensable part of this “royalty”. Hence, Platonov’s status is somewhat paradoxical and incongruous.

His main critic and antagonist--Isaak Vengerovich Jr., discern this aspect of Platonov’s theatricality. These two characters have several serious encounters. They reflect the hostility between Platonov and the rich Jewish businessman Abram Vengerovich, Isaak’s father, based on the firm certainty of the latter about Platonov’s total uselessness, financial incompetence, irresponsibility, and repulsive arrogance. The conflict between Vengerovich Jr. and Platonov is also rooted in their ongoing dispute about the most vital philosophical and ideological issues of the time.⁹³ In the context of the quality and connotations of the play’s theatricality, it is Isaak Vengerovich who grasps the dark tonality and not the innocent side of Platonov’s buffoonery.

VENGEROVICH JR.: Don’t think that I’m angry with you because you don’t let my father alone. Not in the least. I’m merely interested in finding out what people are really like. I’m not angry at all. By making study of you, I’m trying to find out what our modern Chatskys are like. I understand you only too well. If you had been happy, if you hadn’t been so bored with doing nothing, it would never have occurred to you to

⁹³ I. Sukhikh believes that the “literary projection” of Vengerovich Jr. is Dr. L’vov from *Ivanov*. Moreover, the scholar sees in this character reflection of the “Fathers and Children” rhetoric. Mikhail Gromov in his analysis of the play also underlines the significance of the “critical tradition of the sixties”. For more on that topic, see Mikhail Gromov, *Chekhov*, (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1993), chapter “Bezotsovshchina”.

worry my father. You, Mr. Chatsky, are not looking for justice, you're merely amusing yourselves, enjoying yourselves. Now that you have no longer any menials (*dvornia*) you have to abuse someone. So you abuse everybody who happens to cross your path.
p. 61

This statement alludes to the legacy of Russian estate attitudes from pre-reform times and their, at times, grim practices of leisure and entertainment. Platonov's behavior Vengerovich Jr. sees as a refined transformation of physical brutality into verbal abuse.

Despite the fact that the main protagonist is the center of theatricalisation of the everyday existence, he does not stand as an exception in this respect. Self-dramatisation or quite the reverse – intentional conduct on the verge of the farcical – tempts other characters. In this connection, the extraordinary literariness and referentiality of the whole play should be emphasized. Vladimir Kataev considers this as a factor, which creates “an intensified literary background” for the play.⁹⁴ Igor' Sukhikh attaches a special aesthetic significance to the “literary layer” of *Platonov*. “This is a reality, completely saturated with literature, in which the roles are blended, where the boundaries between play (*igra*) and real life are almost indistinguishable, where for a genuine sensation it is extremely difficult to squeeze through theatrical clichés. [...] Almost all of the dramatis personae of Chekhov's play are characters from novels and dramas already written, often from several works simultaneously, which is highlighted through literary parallels and reminiscences.”⁹⁵ M. Gromov's interpretation of the presence and meaning of multiple literary allusions in the drama is the most adequate in terms of theatricality. He discerns in *Platonov's* excessive referentiality “the emergence of one of the most distinguished techniques within the playwright's

⁹⁴ Vladimir Kataev. *Literaturnye sviazi Chekhova*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1989) 115.

⁹⁵ Igor' Sukhikh, Op. cit., 22.

poetics: “in the new context the high” literary or novel (*romanicheskii*) discourse was reduced to a parody, [and thus] was dethroned and given a new meaning”.⁹⁶

It is precisely the intense presence of the above-mentioned discourse and the dramaturgical vocabulary in particular, that is central to our understanding of the play’s use of marginality and theatricality. In the characters’ imagination reality is pushed to the periphery and they live and act with the idea of other, different dimensions – that of art and literature. This proximity, however, gradually diminishes when the play approaches its climax. The artificiality of “performance” and identification with literary heroes is recognized and rejected. The impending catastrophe serves as the alarming signal that brings to an end the buffoonery, which is literally indicated in characters’ lexis. Here are several illustrations:

SASHA: “Let me go. I’m done for. You’re *joking*⁹⁷ while I’m suffering [...] Don’t you realize that it’s no *joke*?” p. 160

PLATONOV: Is this the *epilogue* or is the *comedy* still continuing? p. 160

GLAGOLYEV SR.: Let’s go and look for happiness somewhere else. Enough! It’s high time I stopped *performing a comedy* for my own benefit, going on fooling myself with ideals! There’s no more faith, no more love! There are no more human beings! p. 163

TRILETSKY JR.: This is terrible...The *tragedy* is almost at an end, *tragedian*! p. 183

PLATONOV: [...] Must kill myself [...] (He picks up a revolver.) Hamlet was afraid of dreams. I’m afraid of--life. What’s going to happen to me if I go on living? I shall be ashamed to face people. (He puts revolver to his temple.) *Finita la comedia*. p. 190

COL. TRILETSKY: The Lord has forsaken us. For our sins. For my sins. Why did you sin, you old *clown*. p. 195

Platonov’s hesitation between high and low projections of public behavior and theatricalisation of everyday life is additionally elaborated by the vacillation of the play’s stylistics between light comic playfulness, gloomy grotesque and genuine

⁹⁶ Mikhail Gromov, Op. cit., 96-97.

⁹⁷ Emphasis mine.

tragedy. Within the afore-mentioned stylistics, along with the interpretation of literary patterns of “high” discourse, equally important is the representation of the traditional icon of the “holy fool”. This image creates an unanticipated counterpart – Osip. Osip’s character is one of the major creations and accomplishments of Chekhov with regard to the system of characters and in relation to the dramatic conflict of the play. Osip is a horse-thief and a bandit. Platonov and Osip belong to completely different worlds. What unites them is their similar lingering on the border of right and wrong, moral and immoral, high and low. Both of them follow and believe in eccentric ethics, yet one that operates within the framework of the fundamental principles of Christian paradigm. Platonov greets Osip on his first appearance in Act One:

PLATONOV: Who do I see? The devil’s bosom friend. The terror of the countryside. The most fearsome of the mortals...It is you who in the darkness of the night and the light of the day fill the hearts of men with terror? It’s a long time since I clapped eyes on you, murderer, No. 666! [...] I have the honor, ladies and gentlemen, to present a most interesting specimen to you. One of the most interesting bloodthirsty animals of our modern zoological museum [...] Horsethief, parasite, murderer, and burglar. p. 50

In a comparable way, an accumulation of various qualifications of Platonov can be traced throughout the drama. They reveal an identical status. Platonov is the local “celebrity” whose charisma preoccupies the minds of Voynitsevka. “Dear windbag”, “our great sage and philosopher”, “half-baked sage...empty and hollow”, “interesting, original fellow”, “splutterer” – to mention but a few of Platonov’s characteristics scattered along the entire body of the dramatic text. Osip’s character serves as the second focal point within the play’s network of dramatis personae. The presence and the development of his part elaborate the poetic unconventionality of *Platonov* and contribute to the progression of the idea of social and psychological marginality and its ethical dimensions.

Osip is a peasant but he does not feel himself a member of his community. The village ostracizes him not only because of his criminal record. Osip does not fit into the peasant's life because of his exotic arrogance and bizarre "proud loneliness." What repels the peasants catches the attention of bored Voynitsevka. Osip does not fully fit into the folkloric, Romantic paradigm of the "noble outlaw", nor does Platonov completely correspond to the model established by the rich literary tradition of "superfluous man." Both of them follow the strange, meandering path of ups and downs, revelations and *iurodstvo*. That is why they are attracted to each other. They watch each other from the side and this observation is one of their ways of self-knowledge. Osip's attitude of superiority towards "common people" echoes Platonov's unmitigated contempt for the people of his circle. It is the same arrogance and the same sense of extraordinariness:

OSIP: You see, sir, the common people have no guts today. They're stupid...Afraid of proving anything against me. They could have sent me to Siberia, but they don't know the law. They're terrified of everything. Yes, sir, the common people is an ass, sir. They're always trying to do things behind your back, in a crowd. They're an ignorant, beggarly, scurvy lot, sir. It serves them right if they get hurt. p. 52

Chekhov uses Osip's character as a dramaturgical tool to nuance and enrich Platonov's personality. Moreover, the playwright endows Osip with compositional value. His first appearance coincides with the accumulating tension between Vengerovich Sr. and Platonov. The clash between the two of them will take place later, however the encounter at that point is postponed by Osip's intrusion and the focus is diverged. This intentional retardation alters the rhythm and inaugurates Osip's paradoxical task to be a "peacemaker" and, at the same time, to serve as Platonov's "executioner". Vengerovich Sr. pays Osip to "cripple" Platonov in order to punish him for his abuse and disdain. However, Osip will not be able to do it. The financial award

is tempting but what is crucial for his decision to tear up Vengerovich's twenty-five rouble note is the inner conviction that money should not be the motivation behind the punishment. Platonov should be penalized for being a "bad man". Osip, however, is aware of his own sins. When the scene reaches its climax, Sasha enters the house and saves Platonov's life just as previously Osip prevents her first attempt to commit a suicide.

Osip reminds Platonov of what he himself could have been and what he never had become. It is exactly Osip who brings up the bitter realization that youth and good intentions have been wasted.

PLATONOV: [...] What a smile! And his face! [...] There's a ton of brass in that face. You wouldn't break it on a stone easily. [...] Look at yourself, monster! See? Aren't you surprised?

OSIP: A most ordinary man, sir. Less, even...

PLATONOV: Oh? Are you sure you're not one of the mythical Russian giants? Not an Ilya Murometz [...] Oh, gallant, victorious Russian, what are we compared to thee? Little men, rushing to and fro, parasites, ignorant of our proper places. Why, you and I should be fighting giants with heads as big as mountains, whistling as we perform deeds of derring-do. You would have made short work of legendary Solovey the Brigand, wouldn't you?

p. 51

Platonov's fascination with the village's horse-thief is due not only to Osip's impressive physique. It is Osip's social autonomy and psychological self-sufficiency that he admires most. The rhetorical questions he asks Osip are rather an expression of sincere respect: "You don't belong to this world, do you? You're beyond space and time. You're beyond customs and above the law, aren't you?" (p. 52). Both characters feel the pressure of not being capable to integrate fully in their communities. This awareness of marginalization merges into another vital theme of the play – that of unrealized productive energy. The persistent leitmotif of undeveloped potential can be detected not only in Platonov and Osip but also in several minor characters. Whereas in his youth Platonov sees himself as "as a future Cabinet Minister" and Sophia, looks on

him as a “second Byron”, Colonel Triletsky envision his son, doctor Triletsky, as “future Pirogov”. As to his own military career, Triletsky Sr. is not less “modest”:

COL. TRILETSKY: Another five years in the army, and I'd be a general. You don't think so? [...] A man like me – and not to be a general? With my education? You don't understand a damn thing if you think that. You don't understand a damn thing.
p. 69

The discrepancy between ambition and illusion is another manifestation of the author's exploration of the incongruities between Voynitsevka's representations and its true nature. We can observe numerous examples revealing a character's sensitivity towards other's person false pretenses and illusions, and, naturally, the inability to identify such symptoms in oneself. Platonov-Osip juxtaposition is built on this principle of mirroring of the characters. There are, of course, numerous other illustrations of this construct. We have already seen how Sophia proves false Triletsky's efforts to play the second jester in Voynitsevka's “court”. In his turn, Triletsky reveals Sophia's superficiality. Triletsky portrays her pompous verbiage, caricaturing her obsession with the “common idea” and “going to the people”. He discerns Sophia's false pretenses and shallowness prior to Platonov himself: “

TRILETSKY: [...] The other day I was examining the portraits of our ‘contemporary public figures’ [...] and reading their biographies. And what do you think my dear chap? You and I are not among them. No, sir. I couldn't find either you or myself, however much I tried. [...] and - can you imagine it? – I'm perfectly happy. Now, Sophia is different. She is not happy.
PLATONOV: What has Sophia has to do with it?”
TRILETSKY: She feels hurt not to be among ‘our contemporary public figures’. She imagines she has only to move her little finger and the whole world will gape in astonishment at her and the mankind will fling up its cap for sheer joy. She imagines - well – I'm afraid you won't find so much fatuous nonsense in any of our clever modern novels as you'll find in her...A clever doll...Looks on me with contempt, thinks I'm just blot on the landscape. But in what way her darling Sergey better than me? Is it because he drinks no vodka, thinks elevated thoughts, and unblushingly describes himself as the man of the future?
p.86

Ironically, Colonel Triletsky's great plans for the medical career of his son echo a similar discrepancy. The more a character exposes his/her emptiness and

inarticulateness, the higher s/he positions him/herself in the hierarchy of values. The toxic search for “perfection” crumbles into preposterous pretensions.

Osip and Platonov share not only a similar approach towards reality, but also common female objects of admiration. Osip adores Anna Voynitseva as a goddess. Her sophistication and inaccessibility make her an enigmatic person for him. Thus the idea of the “pilgrimage” to Kiev and New Jerusalem, hinted at by Anna, is Osip’s most cherished experience. Regardless of its failure, Osip considers the very idea to attempt to take the trip as a sacred mission. The concept of repentance brings in some relief. It is significant that Osip shares the story of his “pilgrimage” with Sasha Platonova. His attitude towards her is another aspect of his personality, which is interrelated, with that of Platonov. Osip’s compassion to Sasha is rather unexpected and touching, and it is he who prevents her first attempt to commit a suicide.

The symbolism of the railway track on which Sasha throws herself is crucial. Its connotation does not only imply the archetypal metaphor of disrupting modernity. Osip never accomplishes the voyage to Kiev. However, saving Sasha is his own way of showing genuine repentance for his sins. This scene is reminiscent of Platonov’s later fit of anger pushing Nickolay Triletsky to visit a dying patient. The very fact that the doctor considers seeing the sick shopkeeper worthless and that he prefers to go to sleep – this outrageous indifference unleashes in the title character the long-awaited devastating realization: “What kind of creature are you?” he asks Triletsky in terror.

PLATONOV: [...] What do you live for? Why don't you study? Why don't you keep up with medical studies? Why aren't you doing anything about it you animal? [...] What God are you worshipping, you strange creature? What kind of man are you/ No, *we*⁹⁸ shall never be of any use. Never!.. Nothing will come of *us*, the lichens of the earth. We're done for, we're utterly worthless...There's not a single man on whom I

⁹⁸ Emphasis mine.

could look and be comforted. How vulgar, filthy, shabby, everything is! Go away,
Nickolas! Go! p. 127

It is impossible for Platonov to live in self-deception anymore. His habitual role of Chatsky is “appropriated” by Cyril Glagolyev. Chekhov uses Chatsky’s image, as well as numerous other literary references, which are abundant in the play, to shift and lower the familiar literary cliché. The image splits between Glagolyev and Platonov in order to show the inability of both characters to perform the function of the famous literary hero. Glagolyev possesses only one formal criterion- that of an outsider. However, his arrival does not generate any disruption in Voynitsevka’s routines. Platonov continuously disturbs the estate’s realm but he is neither an intruder, nor a stranger. He belongs to Voynitsevka. In spite of his intellectual and emotional resistance, Platonov is one of them. That is why the Romantic Byronic pose, which he sometimes strives to try on, becomes a self-parody.

The hesitation between high and low projections of the main protagonist of *Platonov*, his unremitting shifts from the center towards periphery and back, can be also observed on the level of love affairs. The dramatic plot is peppered with multiple romances, which are portrayed as a melodramatic caricature of the prevailing turn-of-the-century literary formulae. Platonov’s preposterous provincial “Don Juanism” is forestalled by Shcherbuk’s story about his “malicious” wife and her “red-haired Don Juan”. The farcical essence of this story is elaborated in the romantic puzzle in which Platonov ultimately finds himself to be entrapped. Four ladies vie for his affection: Sasha – his wife, Anna-- his “soul mate”, Sophia--Platonov’s first love, and, finally-- Maria Grekov – a neighbor and an enigma. Paradoxically, for a long time Sasha, Anna, Maria, and Sophia are not aware of this hidden rivalry.

Sasha is the epitome of unconditional love. Dressed in Russian national clothing, deeply religious, all forgiving, she is rather more a mother figure for Platonov than a wife. Having a family of his own is probably the only feeling of accomplishment, which Platonov has to his credit. The concept of *pater familias* gives him certain stability, and Sasha and his little son fill in some part of the huge gap within him. Pure and naïve, Sasha is very devoted to her husband. She loves him enormously in spite of his numerous shortcomings. She shuts her eyes to his obvious flirtation with the young widow, Anna, taking the fact as not dangerous. Only when Sasha discovers Platonov's romance with Sophia through Osip is her moral code shattered. Sophia is a married woman and this means that another family would be destroyed. The pain and humiliation are so excruciating that she twice attempts suicide.

Anna's arrogance and cynicism fascinate Platonov. Fully aware of her feminine appeal, educated and sophisticated, spoilt and manipulative, Anna is his perfect match for the drawing-room discussions. Her carefully constructed image of a fin-de-siècle, emancipated woman combined with the eccentricity of a young widow who smokes, drinks, whistles like a peasant, and enjoys hunting, creates a mysterious persona. "Divine Diana" and "Alexander the Great" are among of her nicknames.

COL. TRILETSKY: [...] I like high-spirited women like you, damme! Can't stand timid creatures! [...] Smell her lovely shoulder and you get a whiff of gunpowder. She reeks of Hannibals and Hamilcars! A field-marshal, a regular field-marshal! Give her a pair of epaulettes and she'll conquer the world. p. 33

In the person of Mikhail Platonov, this "fiery", "European lady" meets her only equal partner who is capable of mocking the meaningless existence of Voynitsevka and of laughing at his own flaws. Anna and Platonov are "partners in crime" in terms of their mutual interest in any idea or experience, which could be possibly qualified as "spicy"

(chto-nibud' kislenn'koe). Platonov is the only person to be able to decipher Anna. He can recognize the despair even in those moments when she apparently enjoys a good time. He is able to discern in her desire to camouflage inner anxiety identical to his own.

PLATONOV: [To Triletsky] Don't believe her laughter. It's impossible to believe the laughter of an intelligent woman who never cries. She laughs when she wants to cry. And our Anna doesn't want to cry, she wants to shoot herself. You can see it in her eyes.
p.87

What lies beneath the mask of a society lady is an abyss of loneliness and vulnerability. Anna shares with Platonov another important feature--extreme self-destructiveness: "If you drink you die and if you don't drink you die, so why not drink and die? I'm a drunkard, Platonov." (p. 151) Anna Voynitsev is the most eligible spinster in the district and her estate serves as a place of common attraction for the local gentlemen. However, there is another important reason which draws the local businesspersons and landowners. The Voynitsev family is in debt and Anna is overwhelmed by the estate's financial crisis. Sergey, her stepson, is useless. The only hope is in Glagolyev Sr., who behaves as if he would be willing to buy the estate and to allow the family to stay there indefinitely. Rejected by Anna, he, however, does not show up at the auction and goes abroad. When discussing with Platonov the moral and emotional price of saving Voynitsevka, Anna is straightforward. When making her decision she has to choose between two parameters of nobility ideology: "honor or estate".

ANNA: [...] But, the trouble is, you see, that the honor you were so eloquent about for my benefit today is applicable only in theory and not in practice. I have no right to drive them [Glagolyev and Petrin] out. [...] For you see, they are our benefactors, our creditors. I've only to look askance at them and the very next day we shall be evicted. As you see, it's either honor or the estate. I choose the estate.
p. 60

Anna's ethical credo is inconsistent. There is a moment when she assures Platonov that if he had been not married, she would have married him "without giving it a second thought". "I'd sacrifice my title for you", she adds. (p. 91). However, she is neither able, nor willing to give up for him any privilege. On the contrary, she proposes to "sacrifice" herself, provided that Platonov would run away with her. The impending threat to lose her estate does not appear to be devastating for her. A real misfortune would be to lose Platonov. Platonov's resistance to becoming her lover perplexes Anna. Under Platonov's pretext of respect for the marital contract and his preference not to ruin their friendship, she recognizes something else:

PLATONOV: [...] I love you as a woman, as a human being. Must every kind of love be misrepresented as only a certain kind of love? My love is a thousand times more precious to me than the one you've so suddenly got into your hair [...]

ANNA: "Doesn't he realize what he is saying. Misinterpreting every kind of love as a certain love!...What nonsense! Like the love of a novelist for a lady novelist. [...] If I can't take you fairly, I shall take you by force..." pp. 92-93

Anna mocks Platonov's statement as melodramatic discourse. She herself, though, is not aware that her comment and especially her "threat" belong exactly to the same paradigm. Being raised and educated on literary models, people like Platonov and Anna often confuse fiction with reality. The irony here lies in the fact that we detect another example of fluctuations of high and low discourses. It is obvious that Anna refers to yellowback-type literature, which dominated the literary scene at that time.⁹⁹

Platonov does become Anna's lover but she cannot persuade him to run away with her to Moscow. This happens since each of them has a different motivation for the journey. Anna considers the trip not only as an opportunity to have some fun, but primarily in terms of "propriety". Whereas the concept of adultery does not clash with

⁹⁹ This type of writing becomes very prominent as a result of a number of socio-economic developments, such as distribution improvements, rising literacy, etc.

her ethics, she considers staying at Voynitsevka with all the rumors being inappropriate. Chekhov mocks Anna's twisted concept of decorum, juxtaposing it with another situation in which she demonstrates her idea of "etiquette". "Ladies are not supposed to sleep in the open" is equalized to not hiding in the big city after a public scandal. As to Platonov, he does not share Anna's enthusiasm about Moscow, because Voynitsevka's "high ceilings" do not appeal to him anymore. Moreover, their rank is lowered: he notices that these very ceilings are "whitewashed by [Anna's] village women". Ultimately, Anna's aggressiveness and domination repel Platonov, and he has to choose whether to run away with her or with Sophia. Mikhail prefers Sophia.

Sophia's arrival at Voynitsevka brings in sweet memories for Platonov about his first innocent love. He sees in Sophia his last chance to return to his young years, full of idealism, ambitions and good intentions. She is the main initiator of the discourse of work, "martyrdom" and *truzhenichestvo* and this is exactly what misleads Platonov and tempts him to have a relationship with her. His quest for "new faces" and "new life" seems to be almost fulfilled when she enters his life. Sophia's reappearance is mistakenly interpreted by Platonov as his last chance to change his life and priorities. However, Sophia proves to be just another illusion since she is actually an old face. All she says and does is in concurrence with a rhetoric, which she can only recite, but she is incapable of accomplishing even one real "small deed". Platonov realizes that Sophia does not love him. What she really loves is the idea of loving him, and more important -- "saving" him. Platonov feels the chimerical nature of their romance and plans and instead of a "hot lover", he turns into a slovenly drunkard. Even Sophia herself is disgusted by his appearance. It takes her great efforts to make him get off the couch.

And the difference is drastic between the estate's Don Juan, the "model gentleman" and the man on the couch with the tightly closed shutters of the schoolhouse is drastic.

The school building, which is supposed to be a busy spot, is depicted as a silent, lifeless place. In the second part of Act Two and most of Act Three the action takes place at or in front of Platonov's window. The reader/viewer is not admitted inside. In a similar way, Platonov lives on the borderline of past endeavors and plans about future. The present, however, is not cherished and the only way to cope with the disappointment at not being capable to live up to the ideals of his youth for Platonov is to continue to indulge in mockery and self-destruction.

Platonov's intellect rarely misleads him though. That is why his eccentric "maximalism" is "de omnibus aut nihil, aut veritas". The short period of his second infatuation with Sophia does not obscure Platonov's perception of himself. The "new life" promised by Sophia, actually, presents nothing more than opportunity for "new faces" and "new decorations." The ideas of a play, continuous reincarnations, turn out to be much more important than real deeds. However, even this plan fails the way Sergey Voynitsev's idea to stage *Hamlet* does. It never happens since the "selection" of the cast of the intended performance is wrong. Thus, the imbalance between theatrical expectations and futile efforts in real life produce blurred borders, which contribute to the tragic dénouement.

Maria Grekov is the most marginal female character in the play. It is due not to her limited participation in the action. Rather her dramatic presence is of a different quality. Her passion is chemistry and she prefers experiments in her home laboratory to Voynitsevka's social gatherings and worldly pleasures. Maria feels uncomfortable in

Anna's salon, she is embarrassed when a gentleman kisses her hand. The question of women's emancipation, which is such a hot, widely discussed topic in the last third of the century and especially at the turn of the century, finds in *Platonov* a multi-layered approach. Chekhov incorporates this discourse by bestowing a different aspect on each of the four heroines. Sasha represents the traditional paradigm of humility and martyrdom in representing women in the literary tradition. Anna discusses the issue of women's economical dependence. Sophia's character interprets Turgenev's heroine in a farcical fashion. Finally, Maria, in her turn, prefigures the future intellectual career woman.

But in terms of the dramatic value of the characters, Maria is the only one who openly confronts Platonov and the only person who evokes sincere respect in him for that. She makes him realize the core of his own anxiety and contradictions, the fact that Platonov's archenemy is neither the petty melodramatic intrigues on the estate, nor the predictable entrapments of the clash between ideals of youth and disappointments of maturity, but the loss of one's self-respect.

MARY: What's wrong with you?

PLATONOV: Platonov is wrong with me. [...] Now I understand why Oedipus tore out his eyes! How base I am, and how deeply conscious I am of my own baseness!

p. 192

Maria wins Platonov's respect also because of the manner she decides to deal with his treatment of people. She presses charges for assault and summons him to court. Platonov interprets this act as a condign punishment. The only thing, which bothers him, is making sure that Maria finds out about his apology. Moreover, he insists that the court beadle tell everyone that he apologized to "Miss Grekov, but that she would not accept [his] apology." (p.144)

In regard to the qualitative elements of the play, in the character of Maria, we detect a parallel with Osip. Maria does not find Platonov's *iurodstvo* innocent and entertaining. Osip justifies his "business agreement" with Vengerovich Sr. to "cripple" with his own motivation:

OSIP: I used to respect you, Mr. Platonov. I used to think you were a big man. But now... You're too harmful to live... Which of the three of them [women] is the woman you really care for? [...] You didn't ought to have touched what does not belong to you. p. 155

Neither Maria nor Osip manages to punish Platonov. Hysterical Sophia will accidentally shoot him. Osip is lynched by the peasants off-stage most probably because of his unremitting robberies. He ultimately is penalized for the same reason – taking something that "doesn't belong" to him. In that respect, both characters--Maria and Osip-- who are at first glance very peripheral to the *Platonov* plot, become central for the dramatic conflict.

In the beginning of the drama, Petrin tells Platonov a short parable:

PETRIN: What is life? I'll tell you what it is. When a man is born he can choose one of three roads. There are no others. If he takes the road to the right, the wolves will eat him up. If he takes the road to the left, he will eat up the wolves. And if he takes the road straight ahead of him, he'll eat himself up. p. 47

Platonov, in his habitual manner mocks the storyteller, not realizing that this parable tells his life story. It brilliantly summarizes the intellectual and spiritual anxiety of Russian society at the turn of the nineteenth century and existential marginality as a recurring trope. *Platonov* exemplifies both numerous and various manifestations of such hybrid status. On the level of character network, the play brings to light individuals who no longer fit into the dominant paradigm of the social and cultural patterns of the milieu they initially belong to. Moreover, this type of condition

encompasses not only the principal characters (Platonov, Anna, Triletsky Jr.) but also highlights the problem through minor personages (Osip, Maria).

On the other hand, within the context of the long-established tradition of “superfluous men” in nineteenth-century Russian literature and in the novel in particular class membership and ideology cease to be the dominant features of the phenomenon in question. The category of marginals and being marginalized expands considerably. This group reflects not only the changes within the nobility ethos, but the radical transformation in post-reform Russian society as a whole. This study has strived to establish the general parameters of marginality in *Platonov*. They have been examined through the correlation between the focal topoi of the play, the “holy fool” and “jester” figures and their cultural and psychological dimensions, and through their significance for the concept of theatricality of everyday life on the Russian estate in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Katabasis and Misplacement as Poetic Stratagems: *On the High Road*

Whereas the meaning and the dynamics of the relationships on the Voynitsev estate create the suffocating quality of the dramatic space, the claustrophobic nature of the inn in *On the High Road* is a more literal congestion, an important point of overlap between the dramatic and the stage space. The opening stage direction clearly establishes this feature: “[...] The stage represents Tikhon’s tavern...The floor and benches along the wall are completely packed with pilgrims and vagrants. Many of

them are sleeping sitting up, for want of room.”¹⁰⁰ (224) The topos of enclosed space had a prominent function within the literary forms dominated by the melodramatic mode. The modern roots of this convention lead back to Gothic and Romantic aesthetics, which, to a large extent, influenced the ‘iconography’ of the nineteenth-century melodrama. A garden, a forest, a cave, a dungeon, a tower, a castle, to name only a few, represent the archetypal ‘claustal’ space, which, as Peter Brooks puts it, “[seeks] an epistemology of the depths.”¹⁰¹ Classical melodrama uses this type of spatiality as a standard stratagem to develop and resolve its central Manichean collision(s): between virtue and vice, innocence and villainy. Such kinds of topoi challenge innocence, entrap the victimized, hide the truth. Entrance into the *claustrum* brings into being the literal (physical) endeavor to rescue innocence from captivity and the symbolic mission to search for and, eventually, restore the truth.

Entrance into the space of clausturation has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal ‘plane’ stretches between the ethical extremes of melodrama – that is the principal clash between good and evil. In addition, a visit to an enclosed space may take the form of “a descent into subterranean depths”¹⁰² (Brooks, p. 50). Brooks finds the motif of descent to be a pervasive pattern in melodrama. On the other hand, Michael Finke emphasizes the centrality of katabatic journey in Chekhov’s works.¹⁰³ In the writer’s persistent use of this motif, the scholar discerns a

¹⁰⁰ All citations from the play are from Anton Chekhov, *The Complete Plays*, Trans., ed. and annotated Laurence Senelick, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006). Transliteration of the characters’ names is also consistent with this edition.

¹⁰¹ Brooks, Op. cit., p.19.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 50

¹⁰³ Finke discusses in details the katabatic subtext in his article “The Hero’s Descent to the Underworld in Chekhov” in *Russian Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1. (Jan., 1994), pp.67-80 and, later, in his book *Seeing Chekhov. Life and Art*, chapter “Seeing Hell, Transforming the Self: Land Diving in Chekhov” (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 155-227.

“mythopoetic principle”: “[...] Katabasis is [...] a leitmotif in the author’s life, a deeply personal paradigm driving Chekhov’s love of travel and penchant for observation, and investing these inclinations with meaning.¹⁰⁴ Understandably, in *Sakhalin Island* Finke finds the ultimate illustration of the katabatic journey which unites the trip to a “far-off” (and also marginal) land with all the “hellish” connotation of the island – both in terms of its social conditions and the narrator’s/author’s “search for spiritual and creative re-birth”¹⁰⁵.

Although *On the High Road* does not explicitly display the motif of descent, the play can be added to the corpus of texts, which Finke¹⁰⁶ considers as a paradigm for katabatic subtext. Most of the cluster of elements, which the scholar singles out as characteristic of the “masterplot” in question, is present in the play and we will try to navigate through the framework they construct and to evaluate the meanings they generate. “A number of descent models from disparate arenas of discourse were available to Chekhov, and Chekhov was catholic in his borrowing. His descents echo those of Russian folklore, the myths of the Ancients, canonical and apocryphal Orthodox Christianity, and contemporary popular culture”, summarizes Finke¹⁰⁷. *On the High Road* presents a comparable variety of sources of major motifs and aesthetic levels whose simplicity and transparency might mislead and give the impression of a work in which cliché and tradition are the only references invoked. Such is the case with Vera Gotlieb who sees in this dramatic text no more than the obvious layer of melodrama. She contends that the playwright uses here standard melodramatic

¹⁰⁴ Finke, *Seeing Chekhov. Life and Art*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 155.

¹⁰⁵ Finke, “The Hero’s Descent...”, p.76

¹⁰⁶ Among these texts are *The Wood Demon, Peasants, Ariadne, Sinner from Toledo, A Doctor’s Visit, etc.*

¹⁰⁷ Finke, “The Hero’s Descent...”, p. 68

techniques “without subverting them”.¹⁰⁸ In my reading of the play, I argue, in contrast, that very early in his career Chekhov demonstrates a poetic quality that has been consistently indicated by the scholarship later on – his artistry of subversion of traditional themes and tools. He employs one of the most conservative dramatic structures – the melodramatic form – and, simultaneously, subverts and rearranges its constituents in such a way that the readily identifiable “moral teleology” is frustrated. By using spatial and structural ‘misplacement’ as a key pattern in characters’ functions, the dramatist reverses the primary melodramatic conflict. Before we analyze the character of this reversals let us return to the function of the descent motif, which is one of the means through which Chekhov, complicates the nature of the play’s dramatic clash.

It is a well-known fact that *On the High Road* surfaced on both the literary and theatre scene almost three decades after it was initially written (1883-86). The reason for that lies in the censor’s rejection: by representing a member of nobility as a déclassé drunkard, the playwright violated a strict stage rule. The play is one of the two Chekhov’s dramatic work whose locale is not the provincial estate¹⁰⁹ and “it is his only ‘lower depth’ play, in which the characters are tramps, beggars, criminals and the dispossessed.”¹¹⁰ However, the uniqueness of the play does not stem from the uncommonness of the setting. Rather, it is the “dramatic geography” of the play, the communication between the on-stage and off-stage domains, and, finally the fusion of the two worlds they represent which had already emerged in *Platonov*, where Osip’s

¹⁰⁸ Vera Gotlieb. “Chekhov’s one-act plays and the full-length plays.” in *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*. Ed. Vera Gotlieb and Paul Allain. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000), p.58

¹⁰⁹ The other exception is *Three Sisters* in which the action takes place in a country town.

¹¹⁰ Gotlieb, Op. cit., p. 58

plot line mirrors and supplements that of the title character but its function structurally does not supersede the primacy of Platonov, nor does the dramatic space of Voynitsevka (the village) displace that of the manor.

In *On the High Road*, the katabatic journey is an important element of the interaction between the realms of on- and off-stage spaces. On the one hand, the inn – the on-stage locus – represents a juxtaposition of sacred and profane. The pilgrims-tramps co-existence is a projection of two archetypal paradigms of journey exploited in literature and art – the spiritual and existential one. These two patterns of quest are interwoven, first, within the dynamics between the pilgrims and Merik, the tramp, and, secondly, in the relationship of Merik and Bortsov, the impoverished landowner and frequenter of the tavern. The off-stage loci – 1) Bortsovka, introduced by Kuzma, a former servant of Bortsov and 2) the nearby anonymous town where Bortsov's unfaithful wife lives and which serves as a symbolic site of his 'pilgrimage', suggest the starting point and the final destination of Bortsov's downfall. Originally, the play was conceived as a tale of a nobleman who loses his manor, wealth, and dignity because of betrayal and abandonment by his new bride. Eventually, Bortsov ends up as a desperate drunkard in Tikhon's tavern and the plot pivots on his ultimate humiliation while begging the tavern's owner for a drink. However, the dramatic quality of this protagonist serves primarily as a framework for the story line. Were it not for Merik's character, the play would have represented just another cliché-ridden melodrama with which the theatre repertoire was brimming. Merik's entry into the dramatic space and his function in the conflict elevates Bortsov's own coming to the inn. The nobleman's own 'descent' to the 'lower depth' of the inn has predominantly a social dimension.

Merik's dramatic presence mirrors and complicates such a katabasis, bringing into it an additional, existential dimension. His arrival turns into a 'descent' to his personal, inner 'hell' and the inn itself allegorizes the Russian scene of the time presenting a reduced model of society.

We started our discussion of the play by asserting that in *On the High Road* Chekhov resorts to melodramatic form and techniques, but does not stop there. He shows that, albeit somewhat conservative and rigid, melodrama yet offers certain unforeseen versatility. In the drama in question, it is the playwright's "skillful manipulation of stock formulas", to use Daniel Gerould¹¹¹ words, which "invest[s] them with new connotations and value". Chekhov's utilization of katabatic motif in its three hypostases – the pilgrims, Bortsov and, last but not least Merik – is what enables this play to go beyond the structure of melodrama and to develop into a parable-like dramatic form. In order to illustrate precisely how the motif operate, first, we will have to determine the elements which constitute the descent pattern in *On the High Road*, and, subsequently, to show how Chekhov works with it within the melodramatic mode. The latter is better discernible if examined within the context of the "vertical method" of dramatic analysis and, in particular, through scrutiny of the configuration of the "segmental [scene] units."¹¹²

Following Bernard Beckerman, we will apply an element of the vertical method, which, for its part, explores the dramatic effect of the entirety of a play's

¹¹¹ Daniel Gerould, "Russian Formalist Theories of Melodrama" in *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring, 1978, p. 153

¹¹² Bernard Beckerman, "Dramatic Analysis and Literary Interpretation: The Cherry Orchard as Exemplum in *New Literary History*, Vol.2, No. 3, Performances in Drama, the arts, and Society. (Spring, 1971), p.391-406, esp. pp. 404-406

components (such as system of characters, plot, language, etc.) by focusing on the structure of the segmental units.

These, specifies Beckerman, are not composed of character and story but of interactions among agents who embody active and reactive thrusts of energy”¹¹³. [...]The impact of drama depends upon the sequential unfolding of the segments. [...] Theatrical response is total. It is not purely emotional, not intellectual, but a complex affective-cognitive reaction that is not very well understood. The crucial factor in response is the dynamic element in the play to which the individual attends. This is embodied in the structure of the segment as well as in the structure of relationship between segments. Therefore, the appreciation of the structure of a segment is the key to a potential dramatic response.”¹¹⁴

In other words, the scholar differentiates two levels within the analysis of scene units. The first level of sequence (which we will define as the micro-or interior level) incorporates the relationship between the elements within a segmental unit. These elements are usually perceived more as a temporal aspect (Beckerman refers to them as to “temporal strands”). Our focus here is mainly on the spatial configuration of such elements. On the other hand, the parameters of a scene unit may range from a small segment within the actual dramatic scene to a whole act. They can even stretch beyond the margins of a certain act division, which leads us to the second level of sequence – the macro- or external level.

On the High Road reveals a distinct correlation between the micro- and macro levels of the segmental units. Although the play is divided into five scenes, their actual number could be reduced to four because Scene IV is in fact extremely short and, except for the announcing of the arrival of the coachman (a minor character), it cannot be categorized as a qualitative element¹¹⁵; rather it is simply a quantitative element – an

¹¹³ Beckerman, Op. cit., p. 404. We believe agents of disruption and recognition scenes to be instances of such “interactions” which will be discussed further on.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.405

¹¹⁵ This key dichotomy between qualitative (also labeled as formative) and quantitative elements of drama were introduced by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (chapters 6 and 12). For more details, see

element which purely navigates the chronology of a dramatic work. The analysis of Scene I and II will show that the interaction between the first two dramatic segments operates on the macro-level; at that, the unfolding of the dramatic knot is carried by the descent subtext, whereas Scene III, (IV) and V resolve the conflict by following a melodramatic scenario but with a marked gendered shift.

The opening scene introduces the tavern as an arena of interaction between its occupants and the elements. Prior to Merik's appearance, the sound of thunder and the lightning flashes seem to be the only source of turbulence in the otherwise rather static and lethargic environment. The paradigm of misplacement here is created by the amalgamation of the spatial positions of the characters, their literal homelessness and sense of existential anxiety. The inn gives shelter to individuals who are in a state of in-between-destinations. The pilgrims Savva, Nazarovna and Yefimovna are on their way to the next holy site. Savva, an old and very sick penitent, is dying but he is not afraid of the looming end. For him the possibility of facing the end far from home is much more dreadful than death itself. Consequently, the very concept of 'home' here stands as quite problematic. Rather than being overtly defined, it emerges only through opposition to its antonymic counterpart – 'homelessness' which runs through the social geography of the majority of the dramatis personae. Fedya, a factory worker, vacillates between the category of peasant migrant as casual laborer and townsman. His 'authoritative' contemplation on life in the city in his capacity of "shining shoes at the Grand Otel" is an ironic hint at his ambiguous identity.

Theatre/Theory/Theatre. The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel. Ed and introduced by Daniel Gerould. (New York, NY: Applause Theater & Cinema Books, 2000), pp. 49-55

In the first place, the inn stands for a site of constant transition: the repetitive arrivals and departures of various itinerants – both random visitors and regulars – stir the temporary stillness and give impetus to the action. Two main vehicles maintain the dramatic tension – the agents of disruption and the recognition scenes (*anagnorises*)¹¹⁶. In *Platonov*, a single *anagnorisis* reunites the title character and his long-lost lover Sophia, whereas in *On the High Road* Chekhov implements several scenes of recognition, which stimulate the progression of the play and dramatize the motif of misplacement. Misplacement here functions on literal and allegoric levels of appearance. The pilgrims' presence in a barroom is justified by reasons purely pragmatic – they need a place to spend the night. And yet, their attitude, that of Nazarovna's and Yefimovna in particular, betray unambiguous uneasiness. They regard the inn as a suspicious, sacrilegious place and his inhabitants as sinners. Their universe consists of a clear dichotomy between sin and virtue, and the latter is considered exclusively a saints' privilege. There is nothing in between and Bortsov's misfortune does not arouse their compassion.

Semyon Bortsov brings the first act of disturbance into the ostensibly peaceful co-existence of the tavern's lodgers. At first, it is his incessant begging for vodka, which annoys the travelers and exasperates the owner, Tikhon. The tavern resounds with Savva's feeble moan and Bortsov's cry and yet again, the nature of their weeping is significantly different. Savva is desperate to be able to live to see his native Vologda,

¹¹⁶ When discussing the function of the scenes of recognition in melodrama, Brooks is cautious: "In a novel by Dickens or a play by Ibsen we may be tempted to talk about "identity," the movement of the plot towards discovery of identity, and the moral anagnorisis that accompanies it, such terminology appears inappropriate in a theater where persons are so typological, and where structure is so highly conventional. Anagnorisis in melodrama thus has little to do with the achievement of psychological identity and is much more a matter of recognition the liberation of misprision, of a pure signifier, the token for an assigned identity." (Op. cit., 53) Yet, Chekhov already in his earliest works starts moving towards a more sophisticated model of implementation.

while Bortsov is tormented by his “disease”. Penniless and frantic, stripped of all of his possessions, Bortsov is able to offer only the last two belongings he can trade for – his overcoat and his hat. The hat is “full of holes like a sieve”, but, more significantly, it stands as the first indicator hinting at Bortsov’s previous social status. Fedya recognizes in it a “gentleman’s cap”, an occurrence that spurs him to ridicule this *barin* and sheds some additional light on Bortsov’s earlier fit of rage at Tikhon:

BORTSOV: [...] Understand, *you ignoramus*¹¹⁷, if there is an ounce of brains in *your thick peasant’s skull*, I’m not begging you, it’s to use *your own vulgar way of speaking*, my guts begging! [...] *I’m stooping to your level!* My God, *the way I’m stooping!*
p. (227-228)

The last line of the foregoing quotation is of vital importance because Bortsov compares his humiliation with a movement downward, a figurative descent, and as we will see further, on, this change in his spatial position will be literally repeated twice by Merik.

Now Bortsov’s dramatic significance becomes more tangible. The anonymous drunk, whose presence so far has been indicated mainly through the statements of other characters, starts claiming his own position in Tikhon’s tavern. For the first time his lines betray a certain social markedness. Bortsov establishes a clear boundary between himself and the inn:

SAVVA: Who’s crying?
YEFIMOVNA: The gent.
SAVVA: Ask the gent to shed a tear for me so’s I’ll get to die in Vologda. Tearful prayers work wonders.
BORTSOV: I’m not praying, granddad! These are not tears! They’re my life’s blood! They’ve squeezed my heart and the lifeblood’s run out...But how can you grasp that! Your primitive mind, granddad, can’t grasp that. You people live in the *dark*¹¹⁸ ages!
SAVVA: And where’s them with the *light*?
BORTSOV: *Enlightened* people do exist, granddad... They would understand!
SAVVA: They do, they do, my son...The saints was *enlightened*...
FEDYA: So you seen saints?

¹¹⁷ Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁸ Emphasis added.

SAVVA: It comes to pass, young fella... There's all kinds of folks in this world. There be *sinners*, and there be *servants o' God*.
p. 229-230

Thus, the discourse of Scene I explores two basic, synonymous oppositions – the “dark” and the “light/enlightened” people and the “sinners” and the “servants of God.” The pilgrims’ interpretation is strictly religious and literal, whereas Bortsov’s approach is ethical. Further, he tries to persuade Tikhon to give him a drink in exchange for his coat. There is nothing under the coat but Bortsov’s naked body and Tikhon does not dare to “take a *sin* on [his] soul.” This segment concludes the scene, but more importantly, it echoes the opening exchanges of the next scene between the pilgrims, who construe the storm as “God’s own thunder” and the rumble as a natural punishment since “a *sinner* don’t deserve to be left in peace.” Consequently, the “hell metaphors”¹¹⁹ in the on-stage locus and the off-stage locus surface from the very beginning of the play and they persistently re-emerge throughout the text. The “sin” element functions also as a compositional indicator. It serves as a framework of Scene I and opens Scene II.

The connotations of Bortsov’s self-delineation from the tavern’s occupants on the one hand, and the reversal of spatial positions, on the other hand, are further developed through the entrance of the character of Yegor Merik. Similar to Osip’s function in *Platonov* in regard to the title character, he is the protagonist who serves as the key commentary on Bortsov. Merik’s overpowering physicality and the threatening axe in his belt (which at the climactic point functions as a tool of the obligatory scene, the *scène-à-faire*, transforms the balance of the tavern. While the first scene equally distributes the energy between the *dramatis personae*, Merik’s arrival disturbs this

¹¹⁹ Finke, “The Hero’s Descent...”, p. 68

stability. Two acts of empowerment signal the shift within the tavern's hierarchy. The first one occurs as Merik introduces an essential sublevel of the inn's spatiality by rearranging the established order. Inn benches signify a privileged place to sleep and Merik makes Fedya give up his spot and lie down on the floor instead. Before we analyze the significance of the protagonist in spatial reversals, we need to return to his centrality to the "subterranean masterplot." From the outset, Merik's declares his 'otherness': "Some folks feel the cold, but the bear and the man with no family ties is always hot. I'm sweating like a pig!" (p._230). The images of the nocturnal raging thunderstorm intensify the hellish subtext:

MERIK: It's dark, like somebody smeared the sky with tar. Can't see yer nose before yer face. And the rain whips ya in the kisser, like one of yer snowstorms...
FEDYA: Fine times for our pal the robber: even beast of prey take cover, but it's Christmas for you jokers. p.231

Finally, Tikhon identifies Merik as a "bad man" and a "robber" who "comes off the highway". Now Chekhov switches to a conventional topos that belongs to the melodramatic stage, namely – the "paradox of the sympathetic villain", which Brooks traces back to the "outlaw hero and the repentant sinner of earlier melodrama". (Op. cit., 87)¹²⁰

Merik's claim for authority is attributable to his sense of exclusivity. The unchallenged supremacy of his axe is only an external indication, which grants its owner respect and fear. In Merik's exterior the pilgrims discern a sign of demarcation.

¹²⁰ In the 1820s and early 1840s, the French and the British stage in particular were fascinated with the "noble outlaw" "[...] Their aspect was romantic – even baroque... In any even, the public enemy as represented on the stage began to undergo another transformation. He shed his neuroses and his primitive fierceness [...] The picaresque rogue, in short, came to eclipse the humbug philosopher and social martyr. More on this topic, see Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama*, (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania UP, 1967), chapter XVIII "Highwaymen and Housebreakers", pp. 146-151. Chekhov, in his turn, was very well read in French melodrama, which might be one of the sources of inspiration for characters like Osip and Merik. On the other hand, of course, those were only elements of the "melodramatic skeletons", to quote Daniel Gerould, by "covering over [which] [Chekhov] began to evolve a new, "higher" genre. Op. cit., p. 163.

His eyes evoke the image of a “wild beast” but what principally arouses their suspicion is Merik’s overall impression, which they associate with his “hellish pride”. At one moment, they compare him to a viper, and at another – to “Satan at morning mass” and “spawn of Cain.” Similar to Osip’s mediating function in connecting the Voynitsev manor, Platonovka and the village (with the latter present in *Platonov* only as an off-stage locus), Merik lingers between the world of the ‘lower depths’ and the world beyond the tavern’s dimensions. He is the carrier of a similar socio-psychological complexity expressed through the characters of Platonov and Osip. Equally misplaced in the two realms, Merik still paradoxically provides the correlation between them.

To a certain extent, Merik shares Bortsov’s contempt for the “huddled masses” of the inn. He considers them petty, ignorant and one-dimensional. In the beginning, he displays such an attitude in the form of benign ridicule of their superstitious antagonism. Yet, he demonstrates faculties difficult to predict – warmth and genuine compassion. The vagrants themselves evoke Merik’s sympathy:

MERIK: Greetings, good Christians! [...] Why don’t you say something?
YEFIMOVNA: Turn away these eyes! And turn away from your hellish pride!
MERIK: Shut up you old bag! It wasn’t hellish pride but affection and a kind word I wanted to bestow on your bitter fate! [...] I felt sorry for ya, I wanted to speak a kind word, ease your misery, and you turn your snouts away!.. p. 232

Initially, the psychological tension between the pilgrims and Merik derives from the opposition between the “Good Christians” and the “heathen”. When Merik chases Fedya to the floor, the latter calls him a “devil” to which Merik objects and opens a completely new dimension in the narrative’s imagery. The stage ‘fills up’ with numerous creatures from Russian folklore and, now, parallel with the ‘underworld’ of the pilgrims and that of the tavern, there emerges an ‘other world’, that of wood goblins and ghosts, forests and the animal kingdom. Yet, Merik’s ‘underworld’ is

considerably less threatening than the hellish imagery of the tavern and much more ethereal and poetic. Most importantly, he sees the devil, the evil, the sin – inside people, not outside them. It is an inner phenomenon and, the way we deal with them, is our personal responsibility.

The inn perceives Merik as foreign due to his double identity. His character is split between Yegor Merik, the robber, who, like Osip, is “beyond customs” and “above the law”, and Andrey Polikarpov, a former *meshchanin*, who, for mysterious reasons, left home and parents and wanders the world under an assumed name.¹²¹ Merik’s awareness of superiority stems from his independence, inner potential and a genuine decency, which echoes Osip’s own idiosyncratic ethics. The hostility between Merik and the tavern accumulates as Merik witnesses the way the travelers treat Bortsov’s predicament. Tikhon and the pilgrims see in the ruined “gent” (*bearing*) just a habitual drunkard, Fedya refers to him as a “joker” and a “scarecrow”. Their worthless sermonizing and indifference unleashes Merik’s anger:

MERIK: How about it, godly sisters, why don’t you preach to him? And you, Tikhon, how come you don’t throw him out? He ain’t paid for his night’s lodging, after all. Throw ’im away out, right on his ear! Ech, folks is cruel nowadays. Aint’ got no soft hearts and kindness in ’em...Folks is mean! A man’s is drowning, and they shout at him: “Drown faster, we ain’t got time to watch, it’s a workday!” And as for throwing him a rope, don’t make me laugh... A rope costs money.

p. 235-236

As a result, Merik performs a rather bizarre and yet symbolic act. He makes Tikhon take off his boots as a punishing act and compensatory mechanism which functions as a reversal of Bortsov’s previous “stooping” to the innkeeper’s “level”: “I want you, you mule-skinner, to pull off my boots, the boots of a beggar tramp!” (236) The moral dimensions of this act operate at exactly the same sublevel of spatiality, which Merik

¹²¹ Merik’s previous identity is yet again brought to light through a recognition scene between Tikhon and Merik.

already introduces in the beginning of Scene Two. Such spatial shifts invert the hierarchy within the tavern and serve as the key point of ethical conflict.

The second half of *On the High Road* presents a sweeping transition from a “gloomy, sordid” dramatic sketch of the “underworld” to, as Senelick¹²² puts it, a “raw” melodrama. Chekhov blends the motif of the fated gentry with the melodramatic motif of the cuckolded husband by romanticizing Bortsov’s plot line and sentimentalizing Merik’s role in it. The playwright rehearses the ultimate figurative switch between the protagonists through their last literal spatial exchange of positions. The entrance of Kuzma, Bortsov’s former servant, confirms the dubious standing of his master. Whereas Kuzma, when chronicling Bortsov’s ruination, emphasizes his financial irresponsibility, business incompetence and lack of character, the tavern is enraptured by the tragic love story of the nobleman left at his wedding feast by his unfaithful wife. Bortsov’s more-than-two hundred-*verst* regular trip to the town “just to get an eyeful of” Maria Bortsova is elevated to a sacred mission and expressed through a dramatic change in the attitude of the transients. Now they address him by “sir”, “lord” and “your lordship”,¹²³ but more prominent is Merik’s emblematic gesture. He gives up his place on the bench as a token of newly acquired respect. This act articulates Merik’s self-identification with the nobleman’s “tale of woe” since what makes Merik homeless and problematizes his identity is an analogous story of unrequited love.

¹²² Laurence Senelick. Op. cit., 223

¹²³ In the original text, it is also a logical transition from second person singular to second person plural. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the same morphological modification signals a semantic shift in the dynamics between Petya Trofimov and Lopakhin. For more on this, see Beckerman, *Ibid.*, 391-393

This new revelation justifies the *dénouement*, which generates a dramatic clash between Merik and Maria Bortsova, a character whose presence in the last scene is effected by the melodramatic rule of “random forces of happenstance”.¹²⁴ Maria, as a matter of fact, is already introduced twice to the audience earlier in the play. First, she enters the dramatic space while Kuzma tells the travelers how his former master ended up on the high road and in the tavern, and, secondly, when Bortsov, amidst his alcoholic convulsions, offers Tikhon a golden locket. The latter accepts it and finds out a portrait of a beautiful “she-devil”, a “real lady” – Bortsov’s wife. This discovery reshuffles the configuration of the plot line and prepares the ultimate reversal in the characters’ pre-assigned roles. Maria emerges now as the archetypal melodramatic ‘villainess’. She is endowed with the key attributes of villainy: Maria invades the ‘space of innocence’ (Bortsov’s manor) as a temptress, (at that, her social status is doubtful – we only know that she is “from the city” – a paradigm of modernity and corruption); her betrayal reenacts the “topos of the interrupted fête”¹²⁵ (she runs away from her wedding banquet with her lover, “the shyster lawyer” in the city) , and, finally, her arrival to the tavern is once again on her way back to the city. The final recognition scene between Maria and Bortsov and her immediate decision to leave the inn for her incapability to face her husband, unleashes a mismatched confrontation with Merik. Overwhelmed by Bortsov numbness and by his own emotional flashback, Merik begs Maria:

MERIK: [...] Just let me speak my piece to you...so’s you understand...Take it easy...No, God ain’t give me the brains! I can’t come up with the right words!
MARIA YEGOROVNA: Go away, you! You’re all drunk...

¹²⁴ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity. Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 52

¹²⁵ Brooks points to this topos as a regular element of melodrama.

MERIK (*stands in her way*): Hey, you should at least take a look at him! You should at least treat him to one kind word. For Christ's sake!
MARIA YEGOROVNA: Get this... halfwit away from me. p. 248

Crushed and enraged Merik is pushed to his limits and he tries to deliver his last act of “punishment” on Bortsov’s behalf – to use his axe and kill Maria. His attempt is thwarted by the lodgers, and Merik, staggering and sobbing, falls on the ground. Thus, the last act of misplacement transforms into an act of replacement. Just as Platonov dies by pure coincidence killed by the hysterical Sophia because he reaches for something “that does not belong to [him], Osip pays with his life for stealing from the peasants, and Merik fails to ‘administer’ justice because, according to his own interpretation, “fate didn’t want [him] to die over a *stolen* axe.”

Although his first dramatic works are peppered with melodramatic rhetoric and gestures, Chekhov invests them with a whole variety of innovative poetic techniques which culminate in his last play. In this regard, it is interesting how Igor Sukhikh evaluates the finale of *The Cherry Orchard*:

At the outset of the twentieth century Chekhov envisions a new formula of human existence: parting with the ghosts of the past, loss of the home, destruction of the orchard, and exit onto the high road, where lie in wait a frightening future and life “in chaos.” Abandoned home, abandoned paradise.

В самом начале XX века Чехов угадывает новую формулу человеческого существования: расставание с тенями прошлого, потеря дома, гибель сада, выход на большую дорогу, где ожидает пугающее будущее и жизнь «враздробь». Покинутый дом – покинутый рай». ¹²⁶

Platonov shows the loss of a manor, *On the High Road* witnesses the ‘crossroads’ of the high road. In *Platonov* Chekhov channels the rhetoric of “timelessness” (*bezvremenie*) into a drama of lost identity, which through theatricalisation and self-dramatisation strives to restore a troubled inner balance. *On the High Road* reiterates

¹²⁶ Igor Sukhikh, *Knigi XX veka: russkii kanon*. (Moscow: Nezavisimaia gazeta, 2001) p. 40

and elaborates the correlation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ projections of hierarchy and misplacement.

Drawing on *Platonov*’s discussion of “modern uncertainty” within the enclosed space of Voynitsev estate, *On the High Road*’s claustal tavern adds a new level of fluidity of cultural identity generated by the social mobility and spiritual anxieties of the early 1880s. The play’s “subterranean masterplot” organizes the spatial dimensions and serves as a compelling source of dramatic effect. The interaction between its component realms—the on- and off-stage loci sets up tensions which further complicate the nature of the dramatic conflict. Chekhov explores katabasis in three hypostases—the pilgrims, penitently wandering the country, Bortsov, the impoverished landlord, and Merik, the tramp. Through the archetypal paradigms of descent and journey the play’s spatiality compounds sacred and profane, high and low and thus overcomes the structural restrictions of melodrama.

The fluctuations of identities and the spatial shifts they generate reflect the ideological catastrophes of the provincial gentry and the spiritual crises of the turn-of-the-century Russian society. They expand the estate and tavern’s encapsulated topoi and anticipate the dimensions of the playwright’s mature plays.

CHAPTER III

The Dialectics of Internal and External Space in Chekhov's Prose

The parameters of marginality are broad and various in contemporary scholarship, which exploits this porous category according to the specific needs of a particular discipline. The notions of center and periphery serve as principal metaphors in analyses of geopolitics, modes of production, power relationships between majority and minority groups, social constructs and mechanisms. The tension between inclusion and exclusion, or sometimes, more importantly, the ambiguous status of social and cultural entities regarding their participation in the public space, reflect the sensitivity of these discourses to the problems of difference, privilege, and disadvantage. Marginal conditions possess numerous dimensions but what all of them share is that they result from the difficulty or failure of individuals or social groups to fully integrate into socio-economic or cultural structures. Marginality, the condition of being excluded from mainstream processes and institutions, may be conceived of as voluntary or imposed. Yet the complexity and multi-layeredness of social hierarchies entail that the opposition between center and periphery is unstable and can reverse itself as one shifts between societal systems of values. Thus an outcast from a socio-economic standpoint can claim centrality in the cultural sphere. The ambiguous status of social and cultural

entities with regard to participation in the public space reveals both the pervasiveness and fluidity of otherness.

The notion of marginality and marginalization may also be traced back to archetypal mythological and biblical characters and situations which continue to persist as “wandering” motifs in literature and the arts: the outcast; the outsider, the holy fool, the jester, the outlaw, the wanderer, the sick, the insane, the handicapped—all of them share a certain degree of difference and alienation, be it physical, social, political, cultural, etc. Needless to say, the very noun ‘margin’ traces its etymology directly to typography and literally is a spatial notion. To fit into a certain hierarchy of values or not, to be a part of a social organization or to be excluded from it—all of these states mean to be inside or outside of a physical or social entity.

Chekhov inherits from the Russian Realist tradition two emblematic ideologemes of marginality: the “superfluous man” and the “little man”. Whereas Chekhov’s predecessors conceive of these phenomena mainly in terms of social difference, Chekhov appropriates these master-tropes but emphasizes the psychological aspect. In his prose work and increasingly in his drama the writer recasts the marginalization of the nobility and intelligentsia in a broader existential context and reflects the profound intellectual and spiritual ineffectiveness of Russian turn-of-the-century society as a whole.

This chapter will discuss several aspects of Chekhov’s appropriation of the discourses of marginality which will show that they were as important in his prose as in his dramas. In particular I will focus on the problem of space as a mode of marginality. My research was inspired by my close study of Chekhov’s dramaturgical poetics and

informed by Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia and heterotopic sites, which emerged in his essay "Of Other Spaces"¹. Space was the central object of study and tool of analysis in Foucault's discussion of knowledge and power. As one of Foucault's commentators, Elden Stuart, pointed out "Such studies historicize space and spatialize history."² Foucault contended that "the great obsession of the 19th century was history with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of ever-accumulating past... The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."³ Writing on the border of two centuries, Chekhov internalizes and reflects this complexity of both dominants of space and time. Much ink has been spilled on the concept of temporality in his work. Of those writing about Chekhov's space, most noteworthy is Zingerman's analysis of certain aspects of space in Chekhov's dramatic texts. The scholar conceives of Chekhov's space through history, arguing that "the place of action in Chekhov's drama is the space doomed to extinction."

Chekhov created a multitude of spaces: physical and metaphysical, enclosed and open, on- and off-stage, katabatic and anabatic, literal and ironic. If we scan the titles of his prose works we will see that a great deal of them refer to particular topoi: *At Home*, *The House with Mezzanine*, *In Exile*, *In the Ravine*, *The Island of Sakhalin*, *On the Nail*, *On the Cart*, *On the Road*, *At Sea*, *In the Shed*, to mention a few. Chekhov's interior and exterior spaces signify not only literal geographical or physical

¹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", *Diacritics* 16, (Spring, 1986): pp. 22-27

² Elden Stuart, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Project of a Spatial History*, (London: Continuum): p. 3

³ Op., cit., p. 22

loci, but also existential places. In the texts I discuss in this chapter spatiality functions as a central trope of marginality. And, while examining them I will draw on Foucault's concept of heterotopia since many manifestations of marginality in the texts in question exhibit a heterotopic nature. Although the scholar never literally associates heterotopic sites with marginal spaces, it becomes clear that both topoi are closely linked:

There are in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society — which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. p. 24

Further Foucault categorizes different types of heterotopia according to six distinctive principles. For the purposes of this study it suffices to concentrate on two Foucaultian main categories of heterotopic spaces. Both categories can be found in every historical period and society: the crisis heterotopias (such states as pregnancy or sites as boarding school, barracks, etc.) and the heterotopias of deviation (prisons, psychiatric hospitals). Foucault places cemeteries under a separate, independent type (calling them “strange”) since they adjust their location and certain attributes to the specific historical time and geographical location.

First, I will analyze a selected body of prose texts written over a period from 1887 to 1889 and which demonstrate spatial strategies that were to intensify in Chekhov's later plays. The period in question is the beginning of what has been labeled as Chekhov's “middle period,” a time of transition both in his literary work and his biography as a private and public persona. I start my discussion by taking a closer look at two short stories in which the main narrative locus, the graveyard, and the ‘dramatis personae’ are marginal: *Bad Business* (“Nedobroe delo”) and *In the Shed/In the Coach*

House (“V sarae”). The spaces of *Bad Business* and *In the Shed* can be definitely categorized as heterotopic sites. In *Bad Business* the graveyard stands out as an external heterotopic space, whereas *In the Shed* presents a correlation of external and internal spaces – the graveyard and the shed whose interaction I will discuss later on. The plot of *Bad Business* brings together two individuals – a graveyard watchman and an anonymous passerby whose relationship with the locus of action presents a semantic juxtaposition. Here one cannot help but think of what Shklovskii described as the counterposition of detail: “Chekhov does not need contrived fabula, such as intrigue...Some of his short stories are based on the simplest opposition that provides a strictly delineated situation and proceeds to unfold through a number of collisions, peculiar to this situation.”⁴ As an example the scholar uses anagnorisis – the main narrative vehicle of Chekhov’s *The Fat and the Thin*. “Old friends run into each other. Their social status has changed. The collision lies in the degree of recognition.”⁵

The confrontation in *Bad Business* is built on a similar gradual process of anagnorisis, albeit with a typical, Chekhovian twist — a sudden transition from high to low occurring, first, within the old watchman’s perception of the passerby, and second—in the reader’s expectations dictated by the logic of the plot. Both receptions are guided by a shift in the narrative code that resolves in an anecdotal dénouement. As a matter of fact, a closer look reveals an immanent anecdotal structure of the story as a whole. Bitsilli described such narrative construct as a breakdown in communication:

The traditional *syuzhet* base of the anecdote is *quid pro quo* misunderstanding - error: the theme of misspent energy, and as a result, the “zero” resolution. [...] The discrepancy between expectation and realization creates a comic effect, as long as the result is not terrible or sad. Such an effect is most readily achieved by bringing the intrigue—the weaving of the storyline—to a “zero” resolution. pp. 107-108

⁴Viktor Shklovskii. *Povesti o proze*. Vol. 2. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966) p.345

⁵ Ibid., p.345

Now let us see what serves as a “misunderstanding” in *Bad Business*, and more importantly, how the reader arrives at its recognition. The effect which is usually sought by anecdotal technique is hinted here by verbal and extralinguistic clues scattered throughout the story. The opening line, “Who’s there?” serves not only as a rhetorical point of departure but also raises the key question which is going to be pursued until the end of the story—to establish the identity of the stranger who dares to invade and possibly threaten the space of the graveyard. On his regular tour, the watchman runs into a man who introduces himself as a passer-by and claims to be lost en route to a completely different destination. The night scene is wrapped in dark fog which precludes the watchman from seeing the stranger properly. The stranger seems to be disoriented and the watchman volunteers to lead him across the graveyard to the gate. The action of the entire story is based on their walk towards the gate and their exchanges. Intuitively, the old man is persistent in his attempt to discover what lies beneath the stranger’s appearance, whose bizarre giggling is dissonant from the image the latter strives to maintain — that of an old, helpless, crippled, and frightened creature. The irony is that while attempting to sustain this persona, the passerby undergoes a variety of metamorphoses. First he states that he is just a passerby, then he becomes a stranger, later he claims to be a pilgrim, and, finally, just before revealing his true identity, the man, mocking the watchman’s naïveté declares to be a ghost of a local man who committed a suicide. The shift in stylistic register is prepared by the stranger’s awkward giggling and his incessant effort to find out whether the watchman is alone or if there are more guards, all the while discussing the “high” matters of life

and death, sin and redemption. At the same time, the watchman's uneasiness with the stranger's presence is betrayed by his repetitive attempts to verify his story:

The watchman and the traveler start walking together. They walk shoulder to shoulder in silence... 'There is one thing that passes my understanding,' says the watchman after a prolonged silence – 'how you got here. The gate's locked. Did you climb over the wall? If you did climb over the wall, that's the last thing you would expect of an old man.' 'I don't know, friend, I don't know. I can't say myself how I got here. It's a visitation. A chastisement of the Lord. Truly a visitation, the evil one confounded me. So you are a watchman here friend? Alone in the entire graveyard?' p. 159-160

The gate is finally reached and... the watchman's protean companion ultimately reveals himself as an ordinary thief whose fellows rob the graveyard's church while he distracts the watchman. Thus the story concludes with what is typical for this type of anecdotal structure—a reversal, but in this case on two different levels of representation. The first level is that of role behavior.⁶ Role behavior may be defined as a cluster of conventional socio-psychological features (speech, manner, gestures) that trigger a certain set of expectations which are frustrated in Chekhov's story. Within the heterotopic space of the graveyard, the second level, the stranger assumes multiple, conflicting and false identities. When he reaches the gate, the threshold to "normal" space, his identity is likewise normalized: he becomes the thief that he is.

The narrative space of *In the Shed* (1887) consists of two loci. A shed for carriages with a wide open door leading to an inner yard of a town mansion is the main place of action, which in the theater would correspond to an on-stage space. The second locus is the graveyard, which is a recounted or off-stage space. It emerges in the story told by one of the secondary characters and denotes a heterotopic site. Several servants – a coachman, his little grandson, a groundskeeper, and an old man are

⁶ Role behavior (*rolevaia ustanovka, rolevoe povedenie*) was discussed in detail by scholars like Paperny, Sukhikh, Kroichik, to name just a few.

playing cards in the shed while a tragic event is taking place in the mansion. The master of the house commits a suicide and after a day in agony dies. The shed occupants observe the unfolding drama from the side. They are peripheral to the central event, yet are central to the plot. It is obvious that the servants will not participate in the impending funeral arrangements. Yet, the master's death causes them psychological and spiritual anxiety. The servants hesitate between feelings of compassion and contempt, since from a Christian point of view, a suicide is a mortal sin. Their uneasiness culminates in the old man's recollection of another suicide. The tale serves as a "text within text" and also introduces the heterotopic site of the graveyard: a general's son commits suicide and his mother has to bribe the policeman and the doctor so that she can bury her son inside, not outside the graveyard, however the watchmen complain that the deceased howls during the night and the mother is forced to agree to exhume the body and to rebury him beyond the limits of the graveyard.

The act of marginalization in this tale occurs twice—socially and spatially. First, it is the alienation of the family of the departed and, secondly, it is the literal spatial displacement of the body — outside the town's graveyard. The tale resembles a parable and as whole can be interpreted as an allegory. If we read it as such, then we have to look for at least two meanings – a primary and a secondary one. The surface meaning reveals the difficulty with which the adult characters reconcile genuine human empathy with the horror and derision evoked by the sin of suicide. An additional, alternative meaning emerges when the narrative switches to the point of view of Aleshka, the eight-year old grandson of the coachman. This child not only encounters the problem of mortality for the first time in his life, but also and more importantly —

he has to process the fact that there are circumstances under which a dead man cannot be accepted by the earth. Discursively, however, it is exactly through this change in narrative perspective that these irreconcilables are reconciled in the dénouement: “When Aleshka saw the dead master in his dream, and jumped up weeping for fear of his eyes, it was already morning. His grandfather was snoring, and the shed no longer seemed full of terror. (p. 204)

Now I would like briefly to touch upon two novellas which were written over two consecutive (1888) and (1889) years after *In the Shed* and *Bad Business*. Most of the studies dedicated to them usually read them along the lines of Chekhov’s fascination with Tolstoy, but I would like to call attention to Chekhov’s increasing use of spatial position. I believe that the function of hidden spatial metaphors in these texts is to organize narration and at the same time to comment on the existential and ethical problems addressed. Furthermore, these metaphors contain an allusion to spatiality: the adverbs of manner *vdrebezgi*, *vdryzg* and *vrazdrob’* refer to solid textures and shatterability. In other words, they imply acts of destruction and damage and are attached to the existential states of the characters, whose spatial position, as a consequence, is also violated and changed. ‘*Vdryzg*’ and *vdrebezgi* are synonymous and are usually used in vernacular phrases such as ‘*pian vdryzg*’ or ‘*vdrebezgi*’ or ‘*porugat’sia vdrebezgi*’ or ‘*vdryzg*’. “*Vdryzg*” also has additional connotations of “completely, entirely”. The attached meaning of “*vrazdrob’*” is “separately, individually”. In the cases I am going to discuss below, Chekhov places these adverbs in unusual contexts and in that way he coins neologisms.

In *The Name Day Party* (“*Imeniny*”, 1888) the trope in question is “*vdrebezgi*” and it alludes to the way the main heroine, Olga Mikhailovna, sees her life as ruined after a climactic quarrel with her husband:

She collapsed on the bed, and the room echoed to curt, hysterical sobs that choked her and cramped her arms and legs ... She felt that all was lost, and that the lie she had told to wound her husband had shattered her life into fragments⁷. p. 25

Ей казалось, что все уже пропало, что неправда, которую она сказала для того, чтобы оскорбить мужа, разбила *вдребезги*⁸ ее жизнь. p.166

Throughout the story the positions of the liar and the one “who is being lied to” alternate. Both spouses suffer because of the mutual secrets and lies. Petr Dmitrievich suffers because of dissatisfaction with his work and the inevitable inferiority complex provoked by his position in an unequal marriage — all of which he conceals under a fake and exaggerated conservatism and cheap flirtations: “As an intelligent man he could not help feeling that he had overstepped the mark in expressing dissent, and what a lot of dissemblance had been necessary to hide this feeling from himself and others! ...He was ashamed to confess his distress to his wife, and that riled her.” (p. 6) As for Olga Mikhailovna — we follow her from the very first page of the story as she attends to the needs of her numerous and demanding guests. In her last trimester, irritable and vulnerable, Olga cannot wait for the exhausting day to come to an end. She is annoyed by her husband’s inattentiveness and while seeking some privacy and rest in the garden, she accidentally witnesses one of the young female guests flirting with Petr Dmitrievich. In light of her condition, the scene in the garden causes her enormous distress and she comes to the decision finally to confront her husband about his “lies”: “She decided to find her husband and to have it with him...What harm has she done

⁷ In this case and in a few more examples, I give the Russian text for obvious reasons.

⁸ Emphasis mine.

him? What has she done wrong? And, finally she was sick and tired of his subterfuges. He was always posturing, flirting, saying things he didn't mean, trying to seem other than what he was and should be. Why all the dissimulations?" (p.10)

The origination of the "lies" is obviously quite dissimilar for the wife and for the husband. While Petr Dmitrievich ostensibly finds a certain *modus vivendi* which helps him cope with his frustrations, Olga Dmitrievna's pregnancy distances her from her husband and their guests. As we noted earlier, Foucault considers pregnancy a universal form of heterotopia belonging to one of the two main heterotopic categories – "crisis" sites. These sites—whether "privileged" or "sacred", or "forbidden" are a designated space for people "who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc." Thus Olga's Dmitrievna's advanced pregnancy is a crucial attribute of the heroine's physical and, what is more important— psychological marginality. First, she tries to remove herself from the chaotic activities of the party by withdrawing to the enclosed space of the garden, then to the hut in the garden, and finally "by the back entrance to her bedroom."

Prior to the central scene of the argument there is another episode which incorporates spatiality as a major trope – the boat trip to the "The Isle of Good Hope." Chekhov names the small peninsula ironically as a warning sign for the impending tragic event—the heroine's miscarriage. Several images and segmental units that accompany the boat trip resonate later on in the scene of the miscarriage (sonata form!). The idea to have a picnic on the island belongs to Liubochka—the girl who previously enjoyed the host's courtship. Naturally, Olga Mikhailovna is less than

enthusiastic, all the more because rain is expected. Yet, as a hostess, the heroine joins the party and puts on her “festive smile.” The island can be reached by boat and by carriages and the party decides to go by boat. But there are several obstacles: first the keys for the boats are misplaced, then Petr Dmitrievich nearly falls into the water, and finally the rain comes and cuts short the picnic. En route home Olga chooses to take the carriage and takes off her “festive smile”. The motif of “interrupted fête” is presented twice—by the premature return from the island, and second, by the miscarriage. In other words, the aborted picnic foreshadows the interrupted pregnancy.

The miscarriage takes place in a rather contradictory intimate space. The bedroom door is closed shut, as are the windows, and the curtains are drawn. At the same time, the servants make sure that all the enclosures within the room, such as the chest of drawers and jewelry boxes, are open, as are the gates in front of the altar in the local church. After Olga miscarries, the curtains and windows are opened, signifying the emptiness of the womb, while the small enclosures are shut. Gaston Bachelard, cited by Foucault in his essay on heterotopia, was among the first who paid attention to the finer elements of interior space as signifiers of existential conditions and crises. Just as John R. Stillgoe discerns in Bachelard’s house a “metaphor of humaneness,” I detect the same semantics in Chekhov’s treatment of intimate space.

A Nervous Breakdown/Attack of Nerves (“*Pripadok*”, 1889) is a story in which a medical condition and an existential crisis are condensed into another unusual metaphor: “*vdryzg*” which as *The Name Day Party*’s “*vdrebezgi*” assumes a pivotal place in rendering the story’s central conflict. The main protagonist, a law student

named Vassilyev⁹ lets his friends talk him into a night out in an infamous neighborhood. Vassilyev's motivation to visit some Moscow brothels for the first time is manifold. On the one hand, the young man is driven by his natural sensual curiosity. On the other hand, Vassilyev's impressionable naïve idealism and strong social sense stir his imagination and picture the upcoming outing as a spatial navigation through mysterious, meandering hallways that would lead to a long-anticipated revelation.

Vassilyev envisages the brothel in a markedly melodramatic fashion. In the first place, he visualizes entering into its real space as steering through gloomy, Gothic-like claustal corridors that hide the sin and cry for salvation. Secondly, his expectations of the brothel's interior are described in black-and-white: both literally and symbolically—which is another signature mark of the melodramatic mode's Manichean thinking. The prostitutes are wrapped in darkness; they wear “white dressing-jackets” and when, lit by a candle light, they recoil in grave anxiety. Brothel frequenters are portrayed as archetypal villains, and, conversely, “fallen women” represent innocent, victimized female “martyrs.” The moral polarization is accompanied, consequently, by strong emotionalism and pathos. Moreover, the numerous brothels the main protagonist and his company stop at grow into a tangibly histrionic sensation.

Vassilyev's romantic presupposition of the brothel clashes with reality and his shock and disgust are depicted as a drastic change from the black-and-white morality to the multi-colored, kitschy, cheap interior of the actual brothels and the prostitutes' clothing and coiffures. His quixotic intentions (the rhetoric of the 1870s would prepare

⁹ I use the transliteration of the characters' names as they appear in the translation of Constance Garnett I use for this story.

the reader for Vassilyev's 'saving', meaning buying out or marrying, one of the women) are frustrated by the character's realization that his poetization of "fallen women" and the reasons behind their way of life are nothing more than an illusion created by his inexperienced, adolescent, and last but not least, self-marginalized, self. Vassilyev overcomes his initial reluctance to join his friends in their brothel tour and such a decision is above all propelled by his feeling of voluntary and yet artificial seclusion and alienation:

He looked with softened feelings at his friends, admired them and envied them. In these strong, healthy, cheerful people how wonderfully balanced everything is, how finished and smooth everything is in their minds and souls! They sing, and have a passion for the theatre, and draw, and talk a great deal, and drink, and they have headaches the day after; they are both poetical and debauched, both soft and hard; they can work, too, and be indignant, and laugh without reason, and talk nonsense; they are warm, honest, self-sacrificing, and as men are in no way inferior to himself, Vassilyev, who watched over every step he took and every word he uttered, who was fastidious and cautious, and ready to raise every trifle to the level of a problem. And he longed for one evening to live as his friends did, to open out, to let himself loose from his own control¹⁰...

p. 22

Vassilyev's encounters on "S. Street" (*Sobolev pereulok*), however, do not liberate his closed-off, structured existence. The distance between the protagonist and the real world is even further increased as a result of the associations in his mind with a theatrical experience. And whereas previously, his expectations about the exaggerated aesthetics of brothels contain a positive connotation, now the theatricality of the real brothels generates only frustration and further sense of estrangement. Allusions to stage space heighten Vassilyev's sense of inadequacy: "It seemed to him that he was seeing not fallen women, but some different world quite apart, alien to him and incomprehensible; if he had seen this world before on the stage, or read of it in a book, he would not have believed it..." (p. 31) The initial poetization of "ruined women" in

¹⁰ All quotations from this story are from Anton Chekhov. *The Schoolmistress and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnett. (New York: The Ecco Press, 1986).

Vassilyev's mind follows a transition from an aesthetic experience dictated by ethical imperatives into a physical disgust and mental crisis. Vassilyev slips into a nervous breakdown and his collapse echoes the disintegration of "human dignity" he witnesses in brothels. The essence of his breakdown is multi-dimensional because it not only exposes an ethical crisis, but it also betrays the loss of psychological control that the protagonist sought in the first place:

It was clear to him, too, that everything that is called human dignity, personal rights, The Divine image and semblance, were defiled to their very foundations—"to the very marrow," as drunkards say—and that not only the street and the stupid women were responsible for it. p. 38

Для его также ясно было, что все то, что называется человеческим достоинством, личностью, образом и подобием божьим, осквернено тут до основания, "вдрызг"¹¹, как говорят пьяницы, и что виноваты в этом не один только переулочек да тупые женщины. p.185

Chekhov inserts his central notion – "vdryzg" – at the very moment the character experiences his ironic epiphany. Moreover, the writer has earlier implied the centrality of "vdryzg" by preparing it at a crucial moment in the plot: when Vassilyev hears a woman crying in another room he rushes to what he believes will be her aid, only to find that she is drunk. Not only is this episode a microcosm of the story as a whole, but Chekhov has anticipated his description of the neologism "vdryzg", which he credits to drunks: "осквернить достоинство вдрызг".

"Vdryzg" in Chekhov is an attribute of space, and the brothel in *A Nervous Breakdown* incorporates two Foucaultian heterotopic sites. First, the very institution of brothel Foucault considers a perfect illustration of an important feature of heterotopias – a compensatory one in which illusion may function as a means of counterbalancing the acts of exclusion: "... [Heterotopias] have a function in relation to all the space that

¹¹ Emphasis mine.

remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived)...” (p. 27). In the second place, Vassilyev’s crisis is depicted as a stage in his adolescent experience which Foucault regards as a crisis heterotopia *per se*, since “the first manifestation of sexual virility were in fact supposed to take place “elsewhere” than home.” Vassilyev’s journey away from sexual naïveté, from the quality that makes him feel marginalized among other young men his age, must take place outside of “normal” space. However Chekhov is less interested in the process of sexual experience in itself, and more in the physiological and psychological dimensions of this clash between the real and the ideal. The heterotopic space of the brothel, which is the opposite of utopian space, enables Vassilyev’s loss of control.

In the examples discussed so far I analyzed paradigms of marginality in which space functions as a main vehicle of meaning. Chekhov demonstrates a plethora of devices, such as shifts in narrative perspective, codification and interaction of interior and exterior spaces. For this discussion Foucault’s description of heterotopia is especially fitting, all the more so since Chekhov’s ubiquitous adverb of time “*vdrug*” is elaborated and expanded on by the valorization of space in adverbs like “*vdrebezgi*” and “*vdryzg*” when used as capacious metaphors.

In *My Life. The Story of A Provincial*. (“*Moia Zhizn’*. Rasskaz provintsiala”, 1896) the quintessence of his mature narrative technique, the depth of the writer’s philosophical insights, and the power of his ethical messages culminate in poetical

virtuosity. Donald Rayfield qualifies the ultimate significance of the story in the following way: “It is Chekhov’s longest story since ‘The Duel’, and by far his richest in ideas and human material. If some Tamburlane were to decree that all Chekhov’s work save one specimen should be destroyed, one would have to choose *My Life* to stand for everything he achieved in literature.”¹² (Rayfield, 157) Our task here is to reveal how the complexity of ideological discussions and ethical imperatives is signaled through the development of the theme of marginality. Once again, we will concentrate on the poetic means which Chekhov implements in order to organize the poetic texture. We discern two principal paradigms of representation, two major symbols that illustrate the social and psychological marginalization of the main protagonist, Misail Poloznev. The first paradigm is the series of topoi Misail inhabits during his gradual process of marginalization, reflecting his departure from the center of social activities and the mode of life expected from the people of his rank and status. The second domain is that of his theatrical experience of the protagonist and it is the interaction between these two domains that intensifies the discourse of liminality. In the first case, we will scrutinize Misail’s places of inhabitation that speak eloquently about the changes in his private and public life. The character’s encounters with the world of theatre and performance will bring another dimension to the modes of marginality in *My Life*.

In the eyes of his father and the class he belongs to, Misail Poloznev is a disappointment and failure in every possible aspect: he has not completed his university studies, he has only taken petty administrative positions, and his

¹²For further details, see Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov. A Critical Study of Chekhov’s Prose and Drama*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1999, pp. 150-164

performance is unsatisfactory. In other words, Misail is an underachiever within the long line of overachievers in the Poloznev family. Misail's father regards his son's behavior as a shameful act of betrayal of the *noblesse oblige* principle, especially in the light of Misail's excitement over the prospects of taking up the path of physical labor and not resuming his job in a government office. Misail's total lack of ambition and his indifference to the privileges of the "divine spirit" and the "holy fire" of his predecessors incur his father's wrath. Poloznev Sr. ostracizes Misail due to his son's inability, and more importantly, his resistance to claim and secure the social position he is entitled to. Misail is not afraid to be disowned by his father. The economic consequences are not important to him. What saddens him is the fact that in spite of his father's controlling and abusive (both physical and emotional) behavior and the obedient presence of his sister, Kleopatra, he is deeply attached to them and the realization that he cannot be part of their life anymore is excruciating. It is with the same degree of conciliatory estrangement that Misail secretly watches his father and his sister as they conduct their evening stroll down *Bol'shaia Dvorianskia Street* and as he observes the promenade of the town's beau monde. In the situation, Poloznev also watches the passers-by from the side, from the garden gate. Poloznev is equally a stranger at home and on *Bol'shaia Dvorianskia* and this simple parallel is very important for the structure of the story because with the unfolding of the plot line it becomes clear that Misail follows a pattern of private and public encounters that correspond to the dynamics between the interior and exterior places he occupies.

Ironically, Misail, a nobly-born man who lives on *Bol'shaia Dvorianskaia* (Great Gentry Street) — the central and the most representative street of the town, is

uncomfortable in joining in the public walk there: he is “unfashionably and poorly dressed” and his reputation is tarnished. Surrounded by the buildings planned by Poloznev Sr., the main architect of the town, he experiences the same sense of isolation and discomfort he feels at home. The experience blends intellectual confusion and aesthetic repugnance:

How absolutely devoid of talent and imagination he was! [...] When any one asked him to plan a house, he usually drew first the reception hall and drawing-room just as in old days the boarding-school misses always started from the stove when they danced, so his artistic ideas could only begin and develop from the hall and drawing room. To them he tacked on a dining-room, a nursery, a study, linking the rooms together with doors, and so they all inevitably turned into passages, and every one of them had two or even three unnecessary doors. His imagination must have been lacking in clearness, extremely muddled, curtailed. As though feeling that something was lacking, he invariably had recourse to all sorts of outbuildings, planting one beside another; and I can see now the narrow entries, the poky little passages, the crooked staircases leading to half-landings where one could not stand upright [...] And for some reason all these houses, built by my father exactly like one another, vaguely reminded me of his top-hat and the back of his head, stiff and stubborn-looking. In course of years they have grown used in the town to the poverty of my father’s imagination. It has taken root and become our local style. (p.44-45)¹³

Poloznev Sr.’s house projects mirror the architect’s creative impotence and the lack of his ancestors’ “divine fire” to which he proudly refers on numerous occasions. Yet Misail is open to reconciliation owing to his open-mindedness and inherent goodness. He is willing to accept the town’s ignorance and total lack of spirituality and decency just as he is ready to forgive the humiliation and deprivation inflicted by his father because, in the first case, “it is not the town that Misail hates but its people”,¹⁴ and in the second one, his clash with his father is similarly based on their ideological and intellectual differences, not because he lacks filial respect and affection.

Quite the opposite, sensitive to Poloznev Sr.’s profound dissatisfaction with him, Misail literally withdraws from his father’s home. First, it is in the shed in the

¹³ All quotations from *My Life* are from Constance Garnett’s translation of Anton Chekhov, *The Chorus Girl and Other Stories* (New York: The Ecco Press, 1985.)

¹⁴ Rayfield, p. 158

house's yard where he finds a temporary shelter and where his sister clandestinely visits him, 'smuggling' food and sisterly compassion. His new abode — a former brick barn — is as superfluous and "not wanted" as Misail himself is. Accordingly, the protagonist's role in the only societal activity he enjoys being a part of is a peripheral one as well, albeit with a slightly different twist. In *My Life* the protagonist's crucial ideological discussions are alternated with and tested against the backdrop of his theatrical encounters. What is more, Misail's first direct involvement in a charitable performance is at Azhogins', the locus which bring together almost all of the important people in Misail's future life: the house painter Andrei Ivanov (Red'ka), Masha Dolzhikova, Misail's future wife, Aniuta Blagovo, the young woman who secretly loves him all the way through the story but who will never be able to overcome the town's prejudice and to dare to be associated with him. Last, but not least, Kleopatra is also present, with her lingering fear and insecurities. Unsurprisingly, Misail's participation has nothing to do with real acting, his 'role' is supporting and is executed off-stage: he paints the sets with Red'ka, helps with the make-up and stage effects, copies and distributes the parts when necessary and also serves as a prompter. And all of this because: "[...] since had no proper social position and no decent clothes, at the rehearsals I held aloof from the rest in the shadows of the wings and maintained a shy silence." (p. 49) Furthermore, the painting Poloznev usually does is far from the crowd — "either in the barn or in the yard." Thus, in every public or private activity, Misail is always on the periphery, behind the scenes. He lives out of the sight of his father, outside the master's house, in the barn surrounded by old newspapers. At the

Azhogins, whose house is also located on Bol'shaia Dvorianskaia, Misail's perimeter of activity is yet again "in the wings".

Dubechnia — a new railway road' station — is the next locus which gives Poloznev shelter, work and a completely new social environment. As a favor to Aniuta Blagovo, the daughter of the Assistant President of the Court, Dolzhikov, the railway's engineer, gives a position to Misail in Dubechnia. Misail's first meeting with Dolzhikov is charged with a number of essential details that, on the one hand, indicate the transition in his life, and, on the other hand, re-emerge during the second 'audience' the protagonist is granted at Dolzhikov's house (although — this second time around — in a dramatically different way.) The first meeting portrays Misail as a humble applicant who is overwhelmed by the lavishness and the "fragrance of happiness of the engineer's house." Most importantly, Misail feels uncomfortable because he knows that he can offer no expertise or qualifications for the positions available at the station and the awareness of his uselessness is in sharp contrast to the healthy, red-cheeked, confident engineer. Dolzhikov's house is a topos of change and Dolzhikov himself is a figure which signals the upcoming shift in Misail's life. He provides the bridge — both ideological and social — between the worlds of Bol'shaia Dvorianskia and between Dubechnia, between the city and the village, between the domains of bureaucracy and physical labor, between the empty rhetoric and squeamishness of the "divine fire" and the boldness and arrogance of the coach-driver's son.¹⁵

¹⁵ Predictably, the building of railway line is one of the iconic images of the aggressive industrialization and modernization which were underway in Russia at the time. Characters like Dolzhikov, likewise, exemplify the dexterity and flexibility of the new entrepreneurship. When Rayfield scrutinizes Dolzhikov he resorts to a different time in Russian history and finds interesting parallels: "The railway, as always in Chekhov, symbolizes the straight onward thrust of ruthless modernity: the engineer, Dolzhikov, cuts through the countryside, a sort of Peter the Great, turning old family estates into offices.

The station at Dubechnia is on an old, abandoned estate, marked by apparent signs of ruination. Poloznev reaches it by foot and recognizes in his new landlady the former owner of the manor which now belongs to Dolzhikov, and in his new co-worker his old classmate Ivan Cheprakov. Poloznev's peaceful and uneventful coexistence with the Cheprakovs is possible only because he is a low-maintenance tenant, happy with his living quarters crammed with old furniture, visibly indifferent to the malnutrition he is subjected to, and, last but not least, because Madame Cheprakova sees in Poloznev her own former status. The only question she asks upon Misail's arrival is whether he is a nobleman. During the day Misail serves as a clerk, in his leisure time he explores the vicinity. The garden is neglected, "already run wild, and [...] overgrown with rough weeds and bushes," just as the big house is abandoned and the lodges at the sides occupied by Cheprakovs are filled with redundant fixtures.

Misail's position soon proves to be days on end with no actual work. He asks Red'ka to join the painters and moves to Makarikha, to the outskirts of town, and now he lives with his old nurse Karpovna and her adopted son, Prokofii, the butcher. Unlike Karpovna who is terrified by his choice of trade, Misail is finally happy — he really works, he works hard, he works with his hands and this gives him great satisfaction:

At first everything interested me, everything was new, as though I had been born again. I could sleep on the ground and go about barefoot, and that was extremely pleasant. I could not stand in the crowd of the common people and be no constraint to anyone, and when a cab horse fell down in the street I ran to help it up without being afraid of soiling my clothes. And the best of it was, I was living on my own account and no burden to anyone!

p.72

Misail considers his life among house painters as one of comfort and security notwithstanding their petty thievery, violent temperament, and foul language. They

As he repeatedly boasts, he has worked as a simple greaser in Belgium – just as Peter the Great worked as a shipwright in Holland." Rayfield. Op. cit. p.159.

recognize their different roots and occasionally make fun of his peaceful existence explaining it by him being “some sort of religious sectarian,” but the painters’ good-natured jokes have nothing to do with the cruelty of the townsfolk, especially those who like him “earn their bread by hard manual labor.” The latter cannot come to terms either with Misail’s rejection by his father, or with his newly acquired line of work. They despise him; they mock him, they abuse him and now he understands why his fellow painters have the saying that “a painter among men was like a jackdaw among birds.” Poloznev agitates the public decorum in particular when he dares to pass by the rows of street shops, whose owners interpret his presence as a sign of deliberate challenge. It seems that in open space Poloznev is more vulnerable than in enclosed space. The more visible he is to the public eyes, the more victimized he is. And Misail chooses to approach his father’s house only at night. Aniuta Blagovo is still uncomfortable meeting him in public; Kleopatra continues to visit him in secret, begging for his repentance.

Doctor Blagovo is the only person from Misail’s former circle who is not uncomfortable paying him visits. Amidst his workman’s bliss, Misail nonetheless longs for intellectual stimuli and his discussions with Blagovo fill this gap. Blagovo’s compassion and admiration for Misail are genuine; yet in the doctor’s interest in Misail there is a touch of pure curiosity. Their animated discussions reveal Blagovo’s exaggerated theatricality: he approaches Misail’s marginalization as if he is observing a scientific experiment. Blagovo is much more intrigued by the result of this experiment than by the ‘material’ that is being tested itself. He respects Poloznev’s breakage with the lifestyle of his class and has a high regard for his work although he thinks that such

efforts should be channeled into a more significant type of activity and elevated to a higher level of social engagement. Here we discover another metaphor that Chekhov uses to encapsulate a crucial philosophical argument between the two characters. Misail is a misfit, he is very aware of his abilities and his social and personal choices. Blagovo is louder, ambitious and narcissistic. For him personal freedom and human progress require a larger scope of action and application. The doctor compares Misail's voluntary withdrawal from the society and his satisfaction with his humble, secluded and independent life with the existence of "a snail in its shell":

"But, excuse me," Blagovo suddenly fired up, rising to his feet. "But, excuse me! *If a snail in its shell*¹⁶ busies itself over perfecting its own personality and muddles about with the moral law, do you call that progress?"

"Why muddles?" I said, offended. If you don't force your neighbor to feed and clothe you, to transport you from place to place and defend you from your enemies, surely in the midst of a life entirely resting on slavery, that is progress, isn't it? To my mind it is the most important progress, and perhaps the only one possible and necessary for man.

p. 79

Such a comparison brings to mind Bachelard's examination of shell as a poetic image. The phenomenologist approaches the concept from the perspective of dialectics of the "material" (nature) and "formal" imagination (mind). Bachelard is fascinated by the phenomenon's geometrical form achieved through the gradual process of evolution: shells simultaneously epitomize the ultimate simplicity and perfection. On the other hand, the hidden creature within a shell, be it a mollusk or a snail, presupposes a "dialectics of what is hidden and what is manifest" as well as a "dialectics of creatures that are free and others that are in fetters". Finally, shells allegorize a place of inhabitation and protection. All of the elements of the poetic image of shells are present in the metaphor which Chekhov uses through Blagovo's discourse. Misail can be associated with a creature that comes out of its shell, breaks free from its hard cover,

¹⁶ Emphasis mine.

creates its own shell and carries it wherever it goes. The protagonist projects the paradoxically harmonious coexistence of the hostility of his natural environment and his own personal self-sufficiency and spiritual autonomy.

In Bachelard's study of poetic space, among the many representations of interior sites that undergo extensive "topoanalysis", the house image takes the central place in its capacity to become "the topography of our intimate being" and "a tool for analysis of the human soul." Within the cluster of important parts of the house that correspond to various psychological and existential states, the philosopher contemplates "a series of images which may be considered the houses of things: drawers, chests, and wardrobes. What psychology lies behind their locks and keys? They bear within themselves a kind of esthetics of hidden things."¹⁷ Later on, Bachelard refers to them as "psychological documents". It seems to us adequate to 'read' another cluster of images, other unusual metaphors as a "psychological documents," all the more so since these images reverberate through the character of Kleopatra, Misail's sister and his female counterpart. In contrast to Misail's gradual and relatively undramatic marginalization, Kleopatra's development is marked by high melodrama and abrupt tragic dénouement. She undergoes a drastic transformation: from the timid, obedient daughter who worships and dreads her father and who does not even dare to leave the house unaccompanied by him, into a 'fallen woman'. Kleopatra gets involved with a married man, doctor Blagovo, gets pregnant by him, leaves the parental roof, takes shelter with her prodigal brother, and, finally dies while

¹⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space. The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994): pp. xxxvi-xxxvii

giving birth to her child. In other words, we have at present almost all of the necessary melodramatic conventions that anticipate the heroine's ultimate demise.

The first indication of Kleopatra's (at that point subconscious) 'revolt' symbolically coincides with Epiphany. Like Misail, who already enjoys Blagovo's frequent visits and thus feels "morally elevated", Kleopatra is smitten by the charming doctor, by his powerful presence, by his education and impressive range of knowledge. Her world opens toward a new dimension and suddenly she realizes the domestic constraints of her feeble, patriarchal existence. In conversation with Karpovna the realization of her petty being grows into the first act of rebellion:

"Nurse, what have I been living for till now? What? Tell me, haven't I wasted my youth? All the best years of my life to know nothing but keeping accounts, pouring tea, counting the halfpence, entertaining visitors, and thinking there was nothing better in the world! Nurse, do understand, I have the cravings of a human being, and I want to live, and they have turned me into something like a house-keeper (*ключница*)¹⁸. It's horrible, horrible!" She flung her *keys* towards the door, and they fell with a jingle into my room. They were the keys of the *sideboard*, of the kitchen *cupboard*, of the *cellar*, and of the *tea-caddy*, the keys which my mother used to carry.

"Oh, merciful heavens!" cried the old woman in horror. "Holy saints above!" p. 96

The strings of objects and fixtures Kleopatra refers to belong to several categories of spatiality: the household (I would even propose – the "kitchen") space, which in this particular case has an obviously negative connotation, the circumscribed space, the one that constrains and suffocates, and, finally, the katabatic space which hides the heroine from the outer world and arrests her development.

Not coincidentally, there is one more type of space, this time not a real, but a symbolic one — that of theatrical space. In the aforementioned scene it is suggested by Kleopatra's exaggerated gesture when throwing the keys and later when she decides to take part in another charity performance at the Azhogins' house. This ostensibly

¹⁸ Emphases here and throughout this quotation are mine.

innocent episode triggers the series of events that lead to the heroine's downfall. Kleopatra is assigned a small part in the Azhogins amateur production. Although she lacks any experience, let alone a trace of talent for acting, Kleopatra takes up the challenge as an opportunity to break free from the confines of the Bol'shaia Dvorianskaia space. But Poloznev Sr. interprets her desire as an outrageous act of filial disobedience just as the Azhogins construe Kleopatra's stage fright and failure to perform as a shocking display of impropriety in light of her obvious pregnancy. The episode ends in domestic turmoil and public scandal: Poloznev Sr. nearly hits Kleopatra, and the Azhogins ask Misail to take Kleopatra home. Chekhov narrates Kleopatra's transformation not only along the lines of his treatment of interior space, but within the domain of histrionics. If previously the Azhogins' house represented a space of artistic freedom, intellectual delight and spiritual openness, now Kleopatra's shining diamonds replicate her awkward presence on stage and accentuate the hypocrisy and falseness of the Azhogins' claimed progressiveness.

Now it is Misail's turn to protect his sister from their father's wrath and from society's rejection. Chekhov's lines up Misail's proletarianization and Kleopatra's out-of-wedlock pregnancy with the town's cruelty toward "tortured dogs, driven mad, the live sparrows plucked naked by boys and flung into the water" and the societal "spiritual darkness and hatred of liberty." They hope to take shelter in Makarikha, but even there prejudice ambushes them. Prokofii, the butcher, unequivocally states the unacceptability of their conduct: "Every class ought to remember its rules, and anyone who is so proud that he won't understand that will find it a vale of tears." (p.154-5).

The theatrical encounter, the turning point in Kleopatra's character development, is also a significant overlapping point in Misail's path. We already mentioned his 'off-stage' encounters with histrionics. His marriage to Masha Dolzhikova is an account of the heroine's hesitation between her short infatuation with the rhetoric of the "going to the people" movement and her desire to pursue a career in arts. At the beginning of their marriage Masha enthusiastically embraces Misail's marginalization in the fashion of a "necessary woman." Her interest in Misail is the same sort of eccentricity which Blagovo shows in his relationship with Kleopatra. Nonetheless both characters quickly lose interest: Masha gets bored with her experiment on 'small deeds' in Dubechnia, Blagovo prefers his promising career to the sick and dying Kleopatra. He leaves for Petersburg to reunite with his wife and his children and Masha also leaves, first for the capital and then for overseas, to pursue a career on stage as opera singer. Masha's agricultural and educational enthusiasm unavoidably collides with the harsh reality of the Russian village. Despite the young couple's good and still utopian intentions, the spouses unceasingly encounter the peasants' hostility and derision. The villagers cheat them and take any possible advantage of Masha's and Misail's naiveté. Masha's discontentment with the failure of an ambitious project is the beginning of her marriage's collapse. One of their last conversations is a discussion much more about their union and their core values than about the peasants:

There really was filth and drunkenness and foolishness and deceit, but with all that one yet felt that the life of the peasants rested on a firm, sound foundation. However uncouth a wild animal the peasant following the plough seemed, and however he might stupefy himself with vodka, still, looking at him more closely, one felt that there was in him what was needed, something very important, which was lacking in Masha and in the doctor, for instance, and that was that he believed the chief thing on earth was truth and justice, and that his salvation, and that of the whole people, was only to be found in truth and

justice, and so more than anything in the world he loved just dealing. I told my wife she saw the spots on the glass, but not the glass itself; she said nothing in reply... p. 134

Masha projects her disappointment with Dubechnia on Misail and eventually leaves the village and her husband just as doctor Blagovo abandons the dying Kleopatra for a stellar academic career.

Kleopatra's unborn child liberates her spirit. If previously she is the one who constantly attempts to reconcile Misail and Poloznev Sr., now she does not want to have anything to do with the man who chases away his own children. And it is Misail's turn, in light of Kleopatra's worsening condition, to go to his father to ask him for generosity and mercy. Chekhov's makes the brother and the sister 'walk' similar life paths which (albeit with different timing and different circumstances) ultimately make a full circle. First Misail leaves the parental roof and Kleopatra stays behind in her mission to mediate between the son and the father. Then Misail has to approach Poloznev Sr. to try to accomplish an impossible task. Yet again he will go over the fence of the garden, by the back door to the kitchen, to penetrate the house as if he is a servant or a thief. Misail spends his last night in his paternal home in the shed in which he has to build himself a bed out of old papers. And despite the sweeping accusations Misail utters against the monstrosity of the town's ignorance and malice, his further life proves to be more tolerable and peaceful than Poloznev Sr.'s.

The epilogue reveals a sort of reconciliation which Misail achieves with the town, although not with his father. He is not abused by the townsfolk anymore; they learn to accept him as long as he maintains an unostentatious, peripheral existence. The final scene portrays Misail, his little niece and Aniuta Blagovo by

Kleopatra's graveside. But as soon as they approach town Aniuta parts way with the Poloznevs. Chekhov narrates Misail's life as multiple hypostases of marginal presence: a shed, outskirts, church cemetery, a village, the wings of an amateur performance, a supporting role in a marriage — these are only few illustrations of the protagonist's position in the world of interior and exterior spaces. Chekhov's deliberate organization of space in his prose work of the late 1880s prefigured his use of on-stage and off-stage space in his mature dramas. The writer continued to implement marginal sites — whether explicitly heterotopic or psychologically encoded — in order to dramatize marginal existential states.

CONCLUSION

In the early 1980s, Chekhov scholars recognized the need to take a closer look at the works of his contemporaries. A couple of important collections, such as *Writers of Chekhov's Times (Pisateli chekhovskoi pory)* and *Chekhov's Fellow Writers (Sputniki Chekhova)* were published. These anthologies introduced “*Chekhovskaia artel*” (“Chekhov’s guild”) and they provided an important insight into a whole generation of artists that had been overlooked. In the limelight of the collections, however, were primarily prose writers. The dramatists of the 1880s and 1890s are still either simply absent from the literary map, or, if present, consistently maligned and misconstrued. Through my research, I came across a short article by Thomas J. Taylor¹ which discusses the principles of selection of the dramatic texts in academic syllabi on the history of drama of the 18th and 19th centuries. He urges the teachers of drama to familiarize students not only with the “peaks” but also with the “plains”, in other words to include in the curricula both literary and popular playtexts. The same recommendation he gives to the publishers because those “plains” promise “possibly interesting fauna.”

Brooks’s seminal study of melodramatic mode laid the foundation of an entire new direction in literary and cultural studies which not only rehabilitated but also

¹ Thomas J Taylor, “Cumberland, Kotzebue, Scribe, Simon: Are We Teaching the Wrong Playwrights?” in *College English*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January, 1981), pp. 45-50.

completely revised the value of the melodramatic within modern culture. Feminist and film studies in particular also contributed significantly to the field. And yet the very origin of the melodramatic form, genre and mode — the stage melodrama — has remained understudied and neglected. This study has addressed the poetics of Chekhov's earliest dramas against the backdrop of his prose work and the dominant popular drama of the same period and has examined the way they discussed the appropriation of modernity in their texts. Chekhov and the mass dramatists, even though they might appear different stylistically, belonged to the same literary traditions, shared common themes and motifs, utilized similar loci. Their dramas emerged as a response to the changes in the socio-economic and political scene of post-*narodnichestvo* period and illustrated the intellectual and spiritual anxieties of the Russian society.

Two main concepts have been the focus of this thesis: the rhetoric of marginality and the correlation between convention and novelty of melodramatic structure and stratagems as they are demonstrated in dramatic works. Implementing the notion of marginality, I have had to move away from the so called “mainstream constructions” of marginality and that was the main challenge of the present project. Whereas post-structuralism and post-modernism place emphasis predominantly on the analysis of heterogeneous and/or bi/multicultural societies, I have had to examine different type of “heterogeneity” which I have labeled as “marginality.” This type of condition results from a sense of psychological uncertainty, dysfunctionality, alienation and (self-) delineation which, in turn, stems from fundamental socio-economic shifts within a society. Modernity, marginality, and melodrama are inextricably linked.

Ideological destabilization, economic uncertainty and social mutation accompany the progression of modernity. Russia's transition to a "postsacred, postfeudal world in which all norms, authorities, and values are fragile and open to question"² and which are considered to be a key feature of modernity, is the post-reform period and, especially the period of "timelessness." These societal and cultural shifts trigger psychological changes within the fin-de-siècle individual which impact his self-identity, patterns of communication and sense of belonging. Thus marginality and self-marginalization are a logical outcome of the modern experience. On the other hand, melodrama's interest in the social periphery, in the victimized, and in the "weakness as strength"³ embraces marginality as one of its central topoi of literary representation.

Popular dramatists articulated a special interest in social and cultural misplacement. The playwrights responded to the societal changes by developing a new kind of protagonist which clearly showed that they were doing something different with melodrama: heroes and villains could be equally marginalized, and thus, they emerged as different faces of social and psychological marginalization. The playwrights started to implement spatial strategies, which Chekhov further developed. Moreover, his prose from the same period began showing the effects of melodramatic and spatial perceptions. Foucault's concept of heterotopic sites and Bachelard's insights into the poetics of interior, exterior space, and intimate space, help better understanding the changes in the public and private lives of the fin-de-siècle individual.

While conducting my initial research on popular drama in Moscow and sifting through various literary documents, I came across a number of primary sources (such

² Singer, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

³ Vicinus, *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

as memoirs, personal correspondence, official reports and memoranda of the members of *The Society of Russian Playwrights and Opera Composers*, *Russian Theatrical Society*, *Moscow Dramatic Society*, and *Petersburg Dramatic Society*) which offered new avenues of exploration of the theatrical scene of the time. In 1878 *The Society of Russian Playwrights and Opera Composers* established the *Griboedov Prize* for best new drama. Among the winners were prominent literati Aleksandr Ostrovsky, Lev Tolstoy, as well as Petr Gnedich, Evgenii Goslavsky, Aleksandr Sumbatov-Iuzhin, and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. When in 1897 Nemirovich-Danchenko's play *The Price of Life* (*Tsena zhizni*) won the competition, the playwright gave up his prize in favor of Chekhov's *The Seagull*. I intend to expand my current work on turn-of-the-century Russian drama and to explore the history and the cultural value of the *Griboedov Prize*. The project is envisaged as extensive research into the connectedness between the aesthetic criteria and the commercial success of the winning plays and the relationship between culture and social institutions. I will pursue a broader study of the late 19th century drama in the context of the history and status of this literary prize. A closer look at the circumstances surrounding the history of the *Griboedov prize* would provide not only an important perspective on the mechanisms of dramaturgical canon formation of the time, but it would also answer some pivotal questions about the role of such cultural institutions in mediating between the artwork and the public sphere.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aleksandrov Vladimir. "Izlomannye liudi" *Artist* 29, 1893
- . "V neravnoi bor'be." *Artist* 16 (1891)
- Allen, David. *Performing Chekhov*. Routledge, London and New York, 2000
- A.N Ostrovskii, A.P. Chekhov i literaturny process XIX – XX vv.: Sbornik statei v pamiat' ob Aleksandre Ivanoviche Reviakine*. Moscow: Intrada, 2003
- Chekhov, Anton. *The Chorus Girl and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnett. New York: The Ecco Press, 1985
- Antonevich, A.Iu. *Fenomen 'uklonenia ot normy' v proze A.P. Chekhova*. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filologicheskikh nauk. Ivanovo, 2000
- Antropov, Luka K. *Bluzhdaiushchie ogni*. St. Petersburg, 1878
- A.P. Chekhov: pro et contra. Tvorchestvo A.P. Chekhova v russkoi mysli kontsa XIX-nachala XX v.* Introduction, comp. and ed. I. N. Sukhikh. St. Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2002
- A.P. Chekhov v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*. Moscow: Gelios APB, 2004
- Bachelard Gaston. *The Poetics of Space. The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994
- Balukhaty, S.D. *Chekhov dramaturg*. Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1936
- . "Poetika melodramy". In *Voprosy poetiki*. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1990
- . *Problemy dramaticheskogo analiza. Chekhov*. Leningrad: Academia, 1927
- Bargainnier, Earl F. "Melodrama as Formula", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9, 1975
- Beckerman, Bernard. "Dramatic Analysis and Literary Interpretation: The Cherry Orchard as Exemplum". *New Literary History*. Vol. 2, No. 3, Performance in Drama, the Arts, and Society. Spring, 1971
- Beliaeva, Larisa V. *Mikrosistema kliuchevykh slov, nazyvaiushchikh trud, v tekstakh dramaticheskikh proizvedenii A.P. Chekhova*. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filologicheskikh nauk. Leningrad, 1990

- Berdnikov, Georgii P. *A.P. Chekhov. Ideinye i tvorcheskie iskania*. 3rd expanded ed. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1984
- . *Izbrannye raboty v dvukh tomakh*. Vol. 2. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura", 1986
- Berlin, Isaiah. *Russian Thinkers*. Ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly. New York: The Viking Press, 1978
- Bitsilli, Piotr M. *Chekhov's Art. A Stylistic Analysis*. Trans. by Toby W. Clyman and Edwina Jannie Cruise. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983
- Boborykin, Piotr D. *Doktor Moshkov*. Moscow: Litografiia Moskovskoi teatral'noi biblioteki, 1884
- Brenner, Gerry. "Chekhov's Neglected Psychodrama: *Ivanov*." *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 24, No. ½, Nov., 1989
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1995
- Cawelti, John G. "The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Literature", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 3 (1968): 318-90
- Chaikovskii Modest I. "Den' v Petrburge" *Artist* 28, 1893
- The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov*. Ed. Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000
- . "The Superfluous Man in Russian Literature." In *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*. Ed. by Neil Cornwell. London and New York: Routledge, 2001
- Chekhov, Anton. *The Complete Plays*. Translated, edited, and annotated by Laurence Senelick. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006
- Chekhov, Anton P. "P'esy (1878-1888)". In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridsati tomakh*. Vol. 11. Moskva: Nauka, 1986
- . Chekhov, Anton. *Platonov. A Play in Four Acts and Five Scenes*. Trans. David Magarshack. New York: Hill and Yang, 1964
- . Chekhov, Anton P. *Platonov*. Adapt. David Hare. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2001
- Chekhov Then and Now. The Reception of Chekhov in World Culture*. Ed. by J. Douglas Clayton. New York: Peter Lang, 1997
- . Chekhov, Anton P. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridsati tomakh*. [Works in eighteen vols, letters in twelve vols] Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983

- Chekhoviana: Chekhov i ego okruzhenie*. Moscow: Nauka, 1996
- Chekhov i teatral'noe iskusstvo. Sborik nauchnykh trudov*, Leningrad: LGITMIK, 1985
- Chudakov, A.P. *Mir Chekhova: Vozniknovenie i utverzhdenie*. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1986
- . *Poetika Chekhova*. Moscow: Nauka, 1971
- . *Chekhov's Poetics*. Trans. Edwina Jannie Cruise and Donald Dragt. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983
- Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940*. Ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd. New York: Oxford UP, 1998
- Corrigan, Robert W. "The Drama of Anton Chekhov" in *Modern Drama. Essays in Criticism*. Ed. by Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver. New York: Oxford P, 1965
- . "Some Aspects of Chekhov's Dramaturgy." *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2. May, 1955
- Dickie-Clark, H. F. "The Marginal Situation: A Contribution to Marginality Theory," *Social Forces*, Vol. 44, No. 3, March 1966
- Drama i teatr. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*. Tver', 1999
- Ermolova, Maria N. *Pis'ma. Iz literaturnogo nasledia. Vospominania sovremennikov*. Mocsow: Iskusstvo, 1955
- Fedotov, G.P. *The Russian Religious Mind*. Vol. II. The Middle Ages. The Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries. Edited, with a foreword, by John Meyendorff. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966
- Finke, Michael C. "The Hero Descent to the Underworld of Chekhov." *Russian Review*, Vol. 53, No. (Jan., 1994), pp. 67-80
- . *Seeing Chekhov: Life and Art*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Semiotics of Theater*. Trasl. by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16, Spring, 1986
- Gerould, Daniel. "Russian Formalist Theories of Melodrama". *Journal of American Culture*. Vol. 1. Issue 1, Spring, 1978

- Gheith, Jehanne M. "The Superfluous Man and the Necessary Woman: A "Re-Vision." *Russian Review* Vol. 55 (April, 1996)
- Gilman, Richard. *Chekhov's Plays. An Opening into Eternity*. Yale University Press. New Haven and London, 1995
- Goodlad, J. S. R. *A Sociology of Popular Drama*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972
- Goslavskii, E. "Rasplata." *Artist* 31, 1893
- Gottlieb, Vera. *Chekhov and the Vaudeville. A Study of Chekhov's One-Act Plays*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982
- Gromov, Mikhail P. *Chekhov*. Moscow: Molodaia gvardia, 1993
- . *Kniga o Chekhove*. M: Sovremennik, 1989
- Hadley, Elaine. *Melodramatic Tactics. Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1995
- A History of Russian Theatre*, Ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999
- Home is Where the Hearts Is. Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1994
- Hyslop, Gabrielle. "Deviant and Dangerous Behavior: Women in Melodrama", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 19, No. 3, 1985
- Imitations of Life. Two Centuries of Melodrama in Russia*. Ed. Louise McReynolds and Joan Neuberg. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002
- Ivanov, Sergey A. *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*. Trans. Simon Franklin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006
- Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra. (1862-1881)* Vol. 5. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980
- Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra. (1882-1897)* Vol. 6. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1982
- Istoriia russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra. (1898-1917)* Vol. 7. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987

- Istoriia russkoi dramaturgii. Vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX veka do 1917 goda.* Leningrad: Nauka, 1987
- Kamianov, V. Is. *Vremia protiv bezvremenia. Chekhov i sovremennost'.* Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1989
- Karpov, Evtikhii P. "Ranniaia osen'" *Artist* 13, 1891
- Kataev, Vladimir B. *Literaturnye sviazi Chekhova.* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1989
- . *Slozhnost' prostot. Rasskazy i p'esy Chekhova. Perechetyvaia klassiku.* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo MGU, 1998
- Kelly, Catriona and David Shepherd. *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881 – 1940.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998
- Khalizev, V.E. *Drama kak rod literatury.* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1986
- Kot, Joanna. *Distance Manipulation. The Russian Modernist Search for a New Drama,* N Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999
- Krylov, Viktor (pseud. of Vladimir Aleksandrov). "Razlad". *Artist* 36, 1889
- Leach, Robert. *Makers of Modern Theatre. An Introduction.* Routledge, London and New York, 2004
- Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics by Anton Chekhov.* Sel. and ed. by Louis S. Friedland. With a preface by Ernest J. Simmons. New York: Benjamin Blom Publishers, 1964
- Likhachev, D.S., Panchenko, A.M. and Ponyrko, N.V. *Smekh v drevnei Rusi.* Leningrad, 1984
- Lindheim, Ralph. *Chekhov's Major Themes. Chekhov Companion.* Ed. Toby W. Clyman. Westport, Conn. – London: Greenwood Press, 1985
- Longman, Stanley Vincent. "The Spatial Dimension of Theatre." *Theater Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Mar., 1981), pp.46-59
- Lotman, Iurii M. "The Decembrist in Daily Life", "The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Eighteen –Century Russian Culture." In *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History.* Eds. A.D. and A.S. Nakhimovsky. Ithaca, 1985
- . *Kul'tura i vzryv.* Moscow: Progress, 1992

---. "The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Eighteen –Century Russian Culture." In *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*. Eds. A.D. and A.S. Nakhimovsky. Ithaca, 1985

---. "Theatre and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth-Century Cultural History" In *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*. Ed. Ann Shukman. Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1984

---. *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Introd. Umberto Eko. Trans. Ann Shukman. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000

Lovell Stephen. "Between Arcadia and Suburbia: Dachas in Late Imperial Russia." *Slavic Review* 61, Spring, 2002

McKellor Reid, John. "Ivanov: The Perils of Typicality." *Modern Drama* 49.1, 2006

Melodrama. The Cultural Emergence of a Genre. Ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou. New York: St Martin's Press, 1996

Mercer, John and Martin Shingler. *Melodrama. Genre, Style, Sensibility*. London: Wallflower Press, 2004

Mirsky, D. S. *A History of Russian Literature from its Beginning to 1900*. Ed. Fr. J. Whitfield. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1996

Modern Theories of Drama. A Selection of Writings on Drama and Theatre 1850-1990. Ed. George W. Brandt. New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1998

Molodye issledovateli Chekhova. Ed. V.B. Kataev. Vol. 3. Moscow: MGU, 1998

Murav, Hariet. *Holy Foolishness. Dostoevsky's Novels. Poetics of Cultural Critique*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1992

Nelidov, Vladimir Al. *Teatral'naia Moskva. Sorok let moskovskikh teatrov*. Moscow: Materik, 2002

Ot Nekrasova do Chekhova. Russkaia dramaturgiia vtoroi poloviny XIX veka. Moscow: Pravda, 1984

Otto, Beatrice K. *Fools Are Everywhere. The Court Jester Around the World*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001

Panchenko, A. M. *O russkoi istorii i kul'ture*. St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000

Paperny, Zinovii S. "Vopreki vsem pravilam..": *P'esy i vodevili Chekhova*. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1982

Paperny, Zinovii Samoilovich. *Zapisnye knizhki Chekhova.*, Sovetskii pisatel, M: Sovetskii pisatel', 1976

R. E. Park. "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" *American Journals of Sociology*, 33, May 1928

Petrovskaia, Ira F. *Istochnikovedenie istorii russkogo dorevoliutsionnogo dramaticheskogo teatra*. Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1971

---. *Teatr i zritel' rossiiskikh stolits. 1895-1917*. Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1990

Pisateli chekhovskoi pory. Izbrannue proizvedeniia pisatelei 80-90 godov v dvukh tomakh. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1982

Pyliaev, M.I. "Polubarskie zatei", *Istoricheskii Vestnik*. 25, 1886

Polotskaia, Emma A.. *O poetike Chekhova*. Moscow: Nasledie, 2001

Rahill, Frank. *The World of Melodrama*. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania UP, 1967

Rayfield, Donald. *Anton Chekhov. A Life*. London: Harper Collins, 1997

---. *Chekhov's Uncle Vania and The Wood Demon*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1995

---. *Understanding Chekhov. A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Drama*. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1999

Rokem, Freddie. *Theatrical Space in Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg. Public Forms of Privacy*. UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986

Roosevelt, Priscilla R. "Emerald Thrones and Living Statues: Theater and Theatricality on the Russian Estate." *Russian Review*. 50, January, 1991

---. *Life on the Russian Country Estate. A Social and Cultural History*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1995

Rosenfeldt, Paul. *The Absent Father in Modern Drama*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1995

The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature, Ed. by Neil Cornwell. London and New York: Routledge, 2001

Rubtsov, Aleksandr B. *Iz istorii russkoi dramaturgii kontsa XIX – nachala XX veka*. Vol.I Minsk: Izdatel'stvo Belgosuniversiteta im. V. I. Lenina, 1960

Russia. A History. Ed Gregory L. Freeze. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997

Russia. Women. Culture. Ed. Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996

Russkii dramatičeskii teatr kontsa XIX – nachala XX vv., Moskva: GITIS, 2000

Sedegov, V.D. *A.P. Chekhov v vos'midesiatye gody.* Rostov-na-Donu: Knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1991

Senelick, Laurence, *The Chekhov Theater. A Century of the Plays in Performance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997

Shcherbenok, Andrei. *Dekonstruktivnaia i klassičeskaia literatura. Ot ritoriki teksta k ritorike istorii.* Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005

Seeley, Frank F. *From the Heyday of Superfluous Man to Chekhov: Essays on 19th century Russian Literature.* Nottingham: Astra Press, 1994

Shklovskii, Viktor. *Povesti o proze.* Vol. 2. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1966).

Shpazhinskii, Ippolit V. "Sam sebe vrag". *Severny vestnik.* No. 5, 1887

---. "V zabytoi usad'be" *Delo* 12, 1880

Singer, B. *Melodrama and Modernity. Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Skaftymov, A.P. *Nravstvennye iskaniiia russkikh pisatelei: Stat'i i issledovaniia o russkikh klassikakh.* Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1972

Sobennikov, A.S. *Dramaturgiia A.P. Chekhova 90-kh godov i poetika "novoi dramy". (Problema khudozhestvennogo simvola).* Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filologičeskikh nauk. Tomsk, 1985

Soloviov, Nikolai Ia. *Likvidatsiia.* Moscow: Litografiia Moskovskoi teatral'noi biblioteki E.N. Razuokhinoi, 1883

---. *Medovy mesiats.* Moscow: Litografiia obshchestva rossiskhikh dramatičeskikh pisatelei, 1881

Sputniki Chekhova. Ed. V. B. Kataev. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1982

Starshova, A.P. *Khudozhestvennaia kartina mira A.P.Chekhova v kul'turnom kontekste rubzhei vekov*. Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata iskusstvovedeniia, Iaroslavl', 2002

Stepanov, A.D. *Dramaturgiia A.P. Chekhova 1880-kh godov i poetika melodramy*. St. Petersburg: Sankt-Peterburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1996

---. "Melodramatizm v russkoi drame 1870-1880-kh" In *Iz istorii russkoi literatury*. Cheboksary : Cheboksarskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1992

---. *Problemy kommunikacii u Chekhova*. Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2005

---. "Psikhologiiia melodramy" in *Drama i teatr*. Vol. 2. Tver': Tverskoi goudarstvennyi universitet, 2001

Stonequist, E. V. *The Marginal Man. A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937

Stuart, Elden. *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Project of a Spatial History*. London: Continuum.

Styan, J.L. *Drama, Stage and Audience*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975

---. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice*. Vol. 1. *Realism and Naturalism* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981

Sukhikh, Igor' N. *Knigi XX veka: russkii kanon. A.P. Chekhov*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 2001

---. *Problemy poetiki Chekhova*. Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta 1987

Sumbatov, Aleksandr. I. *Lichnye zametki ob obshchikh voprosakh sovremennogo teatra*. Sankt-Peteburg: Trud, 1903

Sumbatov-Iuzhin, Aleksandr I. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii kniazia A. I. Sumbatova*. Vol. 3. Moscow: Izdanie A. V. Dumnova, 1901

Taylor, Thomas J. "Cumberland, Kotzebue, Scribe, Simon: Are We Teaching the Wrong Playwrights?" *College English*. Vol. 53, No. 1. January 1981

Thompson, Ewa M. *Understanding Russia. The Holy Fool in Russian Culture*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987

Thurston, Gary. *The Popular Theatre Movement in Russia. 1862-1919*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1998

Time, G. A. *Ideino-khudozhestvennye iskaniiia v russkoi dramaturgii 1880-kh- nachala 90-kh gg.* Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filologicheskikh nauk, Leningrad: IRLI (Pushkinskii dom) AN SSSR, 1980

Time, G. A. *U istokov novoi dramaturgiiv Rossii (1880 – 1890-e gody)*, Leningrad, Nauka, 1991

Tolstoy, Helena. "From Susanna to Sarra: Chekhov in 1886-1887." *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No. 3. 9Autumn, 1991), pp. 590-600

Tvorchestvo A.P. Chekhova (Poetika, istoki, vliianie): Mezhvuzovskii sbornik nauchnykh trudov. Taganrog: Sfinks, 2000

Verbitskaia, Anastasiia A. "Besplodnye zhertvy" [Semeistvo Volginykh] *Teatral* 133, 1897

Vinogradova, E. "Shekspirovskaia tsitata u Chekhova. " *Voprosy literatury*, Vol. 004, 2006

Wirschafter, Elise Kimerling. *Social Identity in Imperial Russia.* Dekalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1997

The Works of Anton Chekhov. New York: Walter J Black, 1929

Zabelin, Ivan. *Domashnii byt russkikh tsarei v XVI i XVII stoletiiakh.* Vol. I. Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2000

Zhernovaia, G.A. *Russkii teatr i obshestvenno-politicheskaia situaciia 1880-kh gg.* Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata iskusstvoznaniia, Leningrad: LGITMIK, 1983

Zingerman, Boris I. *Teatr Chekhova i ego mirovoe znachenie.* Expand. 2nd ed. Moscow: RIK Rusanova, 2001