



Department of Slavic Languages and  
Literatures

# Russian 463

MW 1.00-2.30



# Anton Chekhov

A detailed examination of the literary career of Anton Chekhov: his prose and drama are analyzed and assessed in the context of the literary, social, and political currents of his time, and as masterpieces of Russian literature. An informal lecture course, with contributions and discussion from students encouraged. This course should appeal to anyone interested in short story or in modern drama. It is taught in English, and all readings may be done in English. Two papers, three one-hour, in-class examinations.



**Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures**

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/slavic>  
[mlmakin@umich.edu](mailto:mlmakin@umich.edu)



# Anton Chekhov

(1860-1904)

Some useful internet  
resources in English and  
Russian.  
Brief chronology of his  
life and works

## Internet Resources:

Three web sites with brief (and sometimes rather old) biographies of the author, and some useful links:

[Anton Chekhov \(1860-1904\)](#)

[Anton Chekhov](#)

[Anton Chekhov — Theatre Database](#)

A mirror of a site established, but no longer maintained, by a Chekhov enthusiast, with some useful links (most of which are still current):

[The Anton Chekhov Page](#)

201 Chekhov stories, as translated by Constance Garnett, who introduced the major Russian authors of the nineteenth century to Anglophone readers, plus links to other Chekhov translations online (Garnett's translations have often been criticized, but they remain readable, and they set the standard for future translators):

[The Eldritch Press Chekhov Page](#)

The Chekhov section of the Russian Internet's largest online library:

[Maxim Moshkow's Chekhov Library](#)

The Chekhov section of another Russian online library:

[The Russian Public Electronic Library Chekhov Collection](#)

A large Chekhov site in Russian, with sections on the various Chekhov museums, and on other places associated with the author, as well as an extensive iconography, and a long biography:

[Anton Pavlovich Chekhov](#)

## Bio-bibliographical Chronology:

**1860** Born, 16 January, [Taganrog](#), Southern Russia. Son of an unsuccessful merchant, grandson of a serf. Third of seven children.

As a child, receives decent education, reads, shows interest in theatre. Financial problems of father induce early maturity.

**1868** Enters local *gimnaziya* (secondary school).

**1876** Father flees Taganrog to escape creditors. Anton remains with younger siblings and mother, struggles to manage family affairs.

**1879** Completes secondary school in Taganrog, leaves for Moscow. Family reunited. Enters medical faculty of Moscow University.

Follows elder brother Aleksandr into popular literature, writing comic sketches under a number of pseudonyms, of which most famous is Chekhonte.

**1880** Publishes first comic story, the very brief "[Pis'mo k uchenomu sosedu](#)" (Letter to a Learned Neighbor) in the weekly journal *Strekoza* (Dragonfly). It sets tone for hundreds of comic stories, published in a variety of popular periodicals, playing with familiar comic types and situations. Chekhov's sketch-writing becomes major source of income for family.

**1881** Apparently writes play generally known as *Platonov*. Although (justifiably) rejected by the theatre to which he submitted it, the play has many elements which will be familiar in his mature dramas.

**1882** Begins association with Leikin's popular *Oskolki* (Fragments), published in St Petersburg. Leikin a demanding, even tyrannical editor, but his calls for brevity and wit had powerful influence on Chekhov's early prose.

**1883** "Smert' chinovonika", "Tolsty i tonkii", "Doch' Al'biona" (Death of a Civil Servant, Fat and Thin, Daughter of Albion), and other famous early stories. Often combine irony with obvious humour, provide unsettling versions of familiar comic situations.

**1884** Chekhov graduates with certificate of General Practitioner (he never completed the thesis necessary for the degree of "Doctor"). He practices medicine intermittently throughout the rest of his life.

During these years of popular writing, studies, etc, Chekhov leads an active and diverse social life, with many female friends, but, establishing a pattern for his mature life, seems reluctant to make any serious attachments.

Publishes first collection of stories, *Skazki Mel'pomeny* (Tales of Melpomene)..

Begins publication of *Drama na okhote* (Drama at the Hunt, usually translated as *The Shooting Party*). His longest piece of fiction (over 170 pages in the *Collected Works* of the 1980s), it is a sort of "crime novel". Like the majority of the early fiction, Chekhov excluded it from his mature collections.

**1885** Begins to publish in the *Peterburgskaya gazeta* (Petersburg Gazette), with the story "Eger" (The Huntsman), a lyrical and intriguing portrait of an odd relationship, marking, like a number of stories of this period, growing maturity and literary complexity.

**1886** Begins association with *Novoe vremya*, a newspaper owned by the right-wing press baron Aleksei Suvorin. He and Chekhov, despite differences, became good friends, and Chekhov was once more moving up on the ladder of publications.

Publishes *Pestrye rasskazy* (Motley Tales), containing many of his best recent stories. The collection is well reviewed.

Begins to visit Petersburg regularly.

**1887** Writes first version of *Ivanov*, an interesting, if somewhat clumsy, estate drama.

**1888** "Spat' khochetsya" (Sleepy) -- famous narrative of apparent murder of infant by exhausted child-minder.

Publishes long story, "Step" (The Steppe) in *Severnyi vestnik* (Northern Herald). This, Chekhov's first appearance in a "serious" or "fat" journal, conventionally marks the end of his period of comic sketch writing. Up to this point he had composed 528 stories. From now until his death he composes 60.

"Step" is a fascinating and "genre-breaking" journey narrative.

Chekhov no longer publishes in comic magazines, although he continues his association with *Novoe vremya*.

**1889** Death of brother Nikolai, from tuberculosis. *Ivanov* performed. "Skuchnaya istoriya" (A Dreary Story) -- long, first-person narrative of university professor, exploring typical themes of professional man, locked into self and situation, and apparently capable of self-deceit. Writes *Leshii* (The Wood Demon), another estate-based play. Disastrously premiered in December, reworked somewhat for publication next year.

**1890** Having just achieved significant literary fame, but perhaps disappointed with *Ivanov* and *Leshii*, certainly distressed by brother's death, and apparently feeling guilty that he had abandoned medicine, undertakes journey across Russia to penal colony of Sakhalin, where he conducts complex survey of the island. Works on the materials collected there intermittently but intensively for three years before publishing *Ostrov Sakhalin* (The Island of Sakhalin).

**1891** "Duel" (The Duel) somewhat schematic long story, exploring intellectual conflicts, and their relationship to behaviour and psychology. First trip to Western Europe, with the Suvorins.

**1892** Buys small estate at Melikhovo, south of Moscow, where spends mostly happy times intermittently until 1899. "Poprygunya" (The Flibberty-gibbit), ironic portrait, based rather closely on acquaintances, of egotistical wife; "Palata nomer shest'" (Ward no. Six) -- ironic treatment of intellectual pretensions, containing apparent polemic with Tolstoyanism.

"Zhena" (Wife) long story, in first-person, set against background of the famine, and exploring psychology and intellectual issues.

**1893** "Chernyi monakh" (The Black Monk) -- another self-deluding academic, this time with hallucinations, who destroys people and things around him, including his naive young wife, and the beautiful and practical orchard she inherits.

Chekhov's social life as active as ever. Period of "misogynist" portraits of voracious and destructive heroines.

**1896** Premiere of *Chaika* (The Seagull) on which he had worked since last year. A fascinating and original work, with famous "play-within-a-play", which shocked and distressed contemporary audiences with its themes and presentation of action. Premiere a disaster.

"Moya zhizn'" -- interesting treatment of urban social mobility, with another apparent treatment of Tolstoyanism.

Probably works on transformation of *Leshii* into *Dyadya Vanya* (Uncle Vanya) at this time.

Works on "Muzhiki" (Peasants), a portrait of village life which marks a new phase in his fiction.

**1897** Publishes "Muzhiki". Goes to South of France. Health deteriorating. Becomes committed to defence of Dreyfus.

**1898** Begins association with the new Moscow Arts Theatre, of Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky. It will stage *Chaika*, and all the later plays, successfully, and make Chekhov's name as a dramatist. It will also, at long last, provide him with a wife, the actress Ol'ga Knipper. Spends winter in Crimea (for health). Buys a cottage in Yalta.

After successful performances of *Dyadya Vanya* in the provinces, Chekhov allows the MAT to stage it in Moscow.

**1899** Signs a rather unfavourable contract for his *Collected Works*. Selection and preparation of stories for these volumes, plus the terms of the contract help to explain decline in prose output (as does ill health). Last summer at Melikhovo, which is sold that year. In the autumn, moves into new house in Yalta.

"Dama s sobachkoi" (Lady with the Little Dog) -- ironic masterpiece, exploring consequences of a Yalta summer romance.

**1900** "V ovrage" (In the Ravine) -- bleak portrait of entrepreneurial but wretched family of merchants. Spends part of year with Ol'ga Knipper. Work on *Tri sestry* (Three Sisters). Goes to Western Europe at end of year.

**1901** Highly successful premiere of *Tri Sestry*. Finally marries (secretly, and without attending own wedding reception). Honeymoon spent taking health cure.

**1902** "Arkhierei" (The Bishop) elegiac and ironic treatment of death of lonely prelate.

**1903** Further ill health. Work on *Vishnevyi sad* (The Cherry Orchard).

**1904** Successful premiere of *Vishnevyi sad*. Ol'ga takes Chekhov, now very ill, to Badenweiler, in the Black Forest, for treatment by a distinguished German doctor. There he dies on 2/15 July, his last words "Ich sterbe".

---

Russian 463/855

# Anton Chekhov

Fall Term, 2004

M W 1-2.30

B117 MLB

---

This course studies the life and work of Anton Chekhov, locating him and his *œuvre* in the cultural and intellectual history of Russia. The course will examine in some detail a representative sample of his prose and drama, and will discuss in more general terms a large number of his most significant works. It is intended both for those with a general interest in Russian literature, and for those with a specific, scholarly or literary interest in Chekhov. The latter are invited to join a seminar group, meeting for two hours every week, time to be arranged. All graduate students are expected to attend these seminar meetings.

It is expected that most students in this course will not know Russian, and it should be emphasized that they will in no way be at a disadvantage. Russian and REES undergraduate concentrators, however, are expected to complete a significant amount of the required reading in Russian (and are also expected to be able to demonstrate that they have done so); graduate students in Russian and REES are expected to complete at least 50% of the required reading in Russian.

This course is a so-called “meet-together”, combining Russian 463 and Russian 855 (a graduate seminar). If you are taking the course as 463, you will be expected to complete two five-to-eight page papers and to take three in-class examinations. If you are taking the course as 855, you will be expected to give a presentation to the seminar meetings and to write a research paper (of some twenty pages). Dates of the examinations and due dates for the short papers are indicated below. Dates for 855

presentations will be in the last weeks of the semester; 855 research papers will be due after the end of classes.

The course combines a small number of informal lectures with a large number of classes in which Chekhov's prose and drama will be discussed within a format designed to encourage active participation by all class members. Biographical lectures, at roughly even intervals throughout the course, will introduce aspects of Chekhov's life and work, and briefly raise other issues of Russian literary history. Other classes, with a few exceptions, will be based around specific works, as indicated in the schedule below (the week devoted to the "early stories" is something of an exception: a large number of very short works has been assigned as the specific works around which discussion will be based). The specific works indicated on the schedule will form the core assignments for one or more classes, and will be discussed at length, while further readings from the books listed below will be recommended from time to time to supplement these core assignments. While the order of core readings is chronological, taking the student from the early Chekhov to his very last prose, the supplementary readings will reflect thematic, stylistic, and other associations, in addition to chronological proximity. Prior to each new core reading, a brief handout with a list of required and recommended supplementary readings, and a series of topics for discussions, will be provided as a guide to the coming classes.

Final grades will be determined on the following basis for Russian 463: each examination -- 15% of total grade; each paper -- 20% of total grade; class participation -- 15% of total grade. More than four absences from class will detrimentally affect the final grade. Final grades for 855 will reflect the quality of participation in class and seminar meetings, the quality of the seminar presentation, and the quality of the research paper.

The books ordered for the course are all from the OUP "World's Classics" series, and are mostly translations by Ronald Hingley, translator of *The Oxford Chekhov*. The books listed below provide versions of the vast majority of Chekhov's "mature" prose (conventionally taken to be that written in and after 1888), his four most significant dramas, and a limited selection of his "early" prose (written before 1888). There are

many other translations of Chekhov, some of which are very good. I do not insist on every member of the class using the same text, although it does have some practical advantages. If you are reading the texts in Russian, you need not, of course, buy any of the ordered books.

**Books Ordered for the Course:**

- Chekhov, Anton, *Early Stories*, tr. Patrick Miles and Harvey Pitcher, World Classics Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1994;
- Chekhov, Anton, *The Steppe and Other Stories*, tr. Ronald Hingley, World Classics Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1991;
- Chekhov, Anton, *Ward Number Six and Other Stories*, tr. Ronald Hingley, World Classics Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1988;
- Chekhov, Anton, *The Russian Master and Other Stories*, tr. Ronald Hingley, World Classics Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1984;
- Chekhov, Anton, *A Woman's Kingdom and Other Stories*, tr. Ronald Hingley, World Classics Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1989;
- Chekhov, Anton, *Five Major Plays*, tr. Ronald Hingley, World Classics Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1988.

**Schedule of Classes**

Core readings, examinations, and due dates for papers are indicated in **bold**.

**September:**

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| W | 8  | Introduction to course. Chekhov's early life -- biographical sketch                      |
| M | 13 | Early stories<br><b>(“Rapture”, “The Death of a Civil Servant”, “Fat and Thin”, “The</b> |

**Daughter of Albion”, “Oysters”, “A Dreadful Night”, “The Chameleon”, “The Huntsman”, “Sergeant Prishibeyev”, “The Misfortune”, “Romance with Double-Bass”, “Grisha”, “Revenge”, “Easter Night”, “The Chorus Girl”, “The Orator”, “Typhus”, “The Kiss”, “No Comment”, “Let Me Sleep” – all from *Early Stories*).**

- W 15 cont.
- M 20 The beginnings of maturity -- bibliographical sketch. **“Steppe”**
- W 22 conc.
- M 27 **First in-class writing assignment**
- W 29 Sakhalin -- the major break in Chekhov’s career, biographical sketch. **“The Island of Sakhalin”**. Extracts on course web site.

**October:**

- M 4 “Island of Sakhalin”, conc.
- W 6 The playwright -- biographical sketch.  
*Uncle Vanya, The Seagull.*
- M 11 conc.
- W 13 **The Butterfly**’.
- M 18 **Study Break**
- W 20 **“My Wife”**
- M 25 conc.  
**First Paper Due**
- W 27 conc.

**November**

M 1      **“Ward no Six”**  
W 3      The late nineties -- biographical sketch. **“Peasants”**  
  
M 8      conc.  
W 10     **Second in-class writing assignment**  
  
M 15     The Trilogy (**“A Hard Case”, “Gooseberries”, “About Love”**)  
W 17     conc.  
  
M 22     **“My Life”**  
W 24     conc.

### **THANKSGIVING**

M 29     The 1900s – biographical sketch. **“Three Sisters”, “The Cherry Orchard”**

### **December:**

W 1      cont.  
          **Second paper due.**  
  
M 6      conc.  
W 8      **“The Bishop”.**  
  
M 13     **Third Examination.**

Michael Makin  
3016 MLB  
Tel. 647-2142  
E-mail:mlmakin@umich.edu  
Office Hours:  
M 10-11, W 3-4, or by appointment