

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Chekhov and the Vaudeville

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



1. Chekhov's self portrait.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's

One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Chekhov and the Vaudeville

A Study of Chekhov's One-Act Plays

VERA GOTTLIEB

Senior lecturer in drama

University of London, Goldsmiths' College

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge

London New York New Rochelle

Melbourne Sydney

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
One-Act Plays
Vera Gottlieb
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521136983

© Cambridge University Press 1982

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1982
This digitally printed version 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 81-18142

ISBN 978-0-521-24170-0 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-13698-3 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*To my mother
and in memory of my father*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's

One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**The Artist [Chekhov]**

He crunched along gray pebbles, passing
 A sloping garden, glanced at reservoirs,
 And sat on a bench . . . Behind a new white house
 The ridge of Yaila rises close and heavy.

All weary from the heat, a slate gray crane
 Is standing in the bushes. Lowered crest,
 And legs like canes. . . . He says, 'Well, bird?
 Not bad to go to Yaroslavl, to the Volga!'

And, smiling then, he thinks of death,
 How they will take him out – how gray like doves
 The mourning *rizae* in the sun
 The yellow fire is, the white on blue a house.

'The bulky priest, with censer, leaves the porch
 And leads the choir out. . . . The frightened crane
 Begins to jug, appealing from the fence –
 And, well, to dance, to rap his beak against the bier!'

A tickle in the chest. The dust from off the road
 Is hot, particularly dry.
 Removing his pince-nez, he coughs and thinks,
 'Ye-es, vaudeville. . . . All the rest is tripe.'

Ivan Bunin

Translated by Joyce Vining from *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience* by Grigori
 Kozintsev, London, 1967.

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
 One-Act Plays
 Vera Gottlieb
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

List of illustrations	<i>page</i> ix
Introductory note	xi–xii
1. Objectivity and commitment: the evolution of a philosophy	I
2. Conventions and innovations in Russian comedy	
1. Chekhov and his theatre of the 1880s	12
2. The farce-vaudeville and comedy techniques	21
3. The farce-vaudeville of the 1880s	41
3. The farce-vaudevilles:	46
<i>The Bear</i>	47
<i>The Proposal</i>	63
<i>A Tragic Role</i>	78
<i>The Anniversary</i>	86
<i>The Night before the Trial</i>	102
4. The dramatic studies:	110
<i>On the High Road</i>	110
<i>Swan Song (Calchas)</i>	119
<i>Tatyana Repina</i>	133
5. A play in one act:	
<i>The Wedding</i>	147
6. A monologue in one act:	
<i>Smoking is Bad for You</i>	174
7. A conclusion	188

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's

One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

Appendix 1: <i>Dishonourable Tragedians and Leprous Dramatists</i>	193
Appendix 2: <i>A Forced Declaration</i>	197
Appendix 3: A note on vaudeville writers	200
Notes	204
Selected bibliography	217
Index	221

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Illustrations

	<i>page</i>
1. Chekhov's self portrait, from Sophie Laffitte, <i>Tchekhov par lui-même</i> , Paris, 1955, by permission of Éditions du Seuil.	ii
2. <i>The Bear</i> , a film directed by Annensky, 1938, from <i>Anton Chekhov, Selected Works</i> , Moscow, 1973.	49
3. <i>The Bear</i> , from Meyerhold's <i>33 Swoons</i> , March 1935.	53
4. <i>The Proposal</i> , from Meyerhold's <i>33 Swoons</i> , March 1935.	74
5. The final scene of <i>The Anniversary</i> , from <i>Anton Chekhov, Selected Works</i> , Moscow, 1973.	101

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's
One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Introductory note

In recent years an increasing number of Western and Soviet productions of Chekhov's full-length plays have begun to challenge the effect of several decades of productions and criticism in which the emphasis was primarily on Chekhov's 'melancholy' and 'nostalgia'. It is, of course, only in the theatre that the delicate balance between tears and laughter may be truly tested, but this book is an attempt to explore Chekhov's 'sad comicality', and the validity of Chekhov's often-expressed view of himself as a writer of comedies. The medium chosen for this exploration is Chekhov's one-act plays: these farce-vaudevilles, dramatic studies, plays and monologues reveal many of the comedy and 'distancing' techniques to be found in *Ivanov*, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*; and it is these apparently conventional one-act plays which illustrate Chekhov's indebtedness to his contemporary popular theatre and inherited comedy techniques. It is, perhaps, exactly because of their seemingly conventional nature, their brevity, and the natural theatrical and literary emphasis on the great full-length plays, that these short plays have received scant critical attention. But Chekhov's one-act plays were written within the period from 1885 to 1903 which produced most of his literary masterpieces and all but the last of his full-length dramatic works; and, as this book attempts to illustrate, the short plays reveal as much about Chekhov's philosophy as they do of his use of theatre.

It is, in fact, the scarcity of critical material on these aspects of Chekhov's work which gives added value to the sources which have influenced this book. I am indebted to a chapter in G. Berdnikov's book, *Chekhov-dramaturg*, entitled 'Chekhov's Vaudevilles'; to the articles written by A. S. Dolinina and E. S. Smirnova-Chikina on *Tatyana Repina*; to V. V. Uspensky and N. Shantarenkov for their collections of Russian vaudevilles; to R. Simonov's account of Vakhtangov's production of *The Wedding*; to Yu. Yuzovsky for his account of Meyerhold's production of *The Bear*, *The Proposal* and *The*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13698-3 - Chekhov and the Vaudeville: A Study of Chekhov's

One-Act Plays

Vera Gottlieb

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Anniversary, and to Peter Brook's brief but illuminating comment on Chekhov's technique in the chapter called 'The Rough Theatre' in his book *The Empty Space*.

I am glad to record my considerable debt and gratitude for the advice, suggestions and help given to me in different yet equally invaluable ways by George Brandt, Sari Feldman, Henry Gifford, Margot Heinemann, Nesta Jones, John Northam and Peter Thomson. In particular, I am indebted to Edward Braun under whose expert guidance this book emerged in its present form, and who generously supplied the photographs from Meyerhold's *33 Swoons*. I am deeply grateful for his generous help and patience with me over a period of some years. I wish also to thank Irene Slatter and, above all, my mother, Nora Gottlieb, for her endless patience, encouragement, and expert criticism. None of those I have mentioned, however, is responsible for the remaining errors and inadequacies – those are entirely my own.

I am grateful also to University of London Goldsmiths' College for granting me a term's sabbatical leave which enabled me to complete this book.

A note on the text

All quotations from Chekhov's plays are taken from the first three volumes of *The Oxford Chekhov*, translated and edited by Ronald Hingley (Vol. 1, 1968; Vol. 2, 1967; Vol. 3, 1964). By permission of Oxford University Press.

References to quotations are abbreviated accordingly:

H. (Hingley), 1, 2 or 3 (volume number), followed by the page number. Thus, Hingley, Volume 1, page 9 is abbreviated as: H.1.9.

The translation of Chekhov's little-known plays or sketches given in Appendices 1 and 2 is, however, my responsibility.