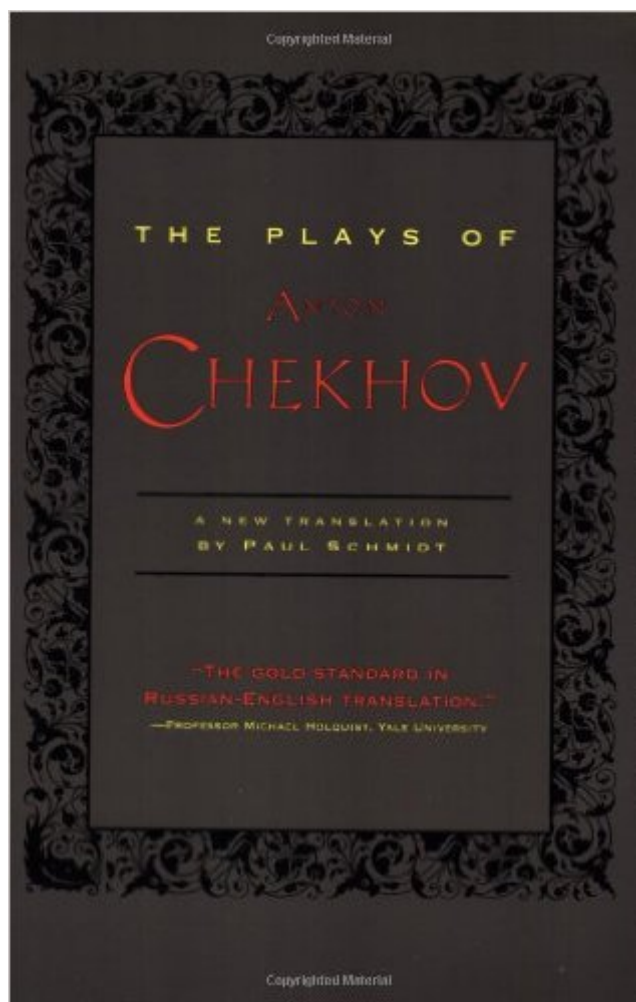


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# The Plays Of Anton Chekhov



## Synopsis

These critically hailed translations of *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and the other Chekhov plays are the only ones in English by a Russian-language scholar who is also a veteran Chekhovian actor. Without compromising the spirit of the text, Paul Schmidt accurately translates Chekhov's entire theatrical canon, rescuing the humor "lost" in most academic translations while respecting the historical context and original social climate. Schmidt's translations of Chekhov have been successfully staged all over the U.S. by such theatrical directors as Lee Strasberg, Elizabeth Swados, Peter Sellars and Robert Wilson. Critics have hailed these translations as making Chekhov fully accessible to American audiences. They are also accurate -- Schmidt has been described as "the gold standard in Russian-English translation" by Michael Holquist of the Russian department at Yale University.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Having taught Chekhov for a number of years, using translations by Constance Garnett, Elizaveta Fen, David Mamet, and others, it's a pleasure to discover Schmidt's recent translation of Chekhov's major plays. His translations, at times daring linguistically, bring a fresh vitality to Chekhov's plays. I am especially fond of his translations of *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*. New generations of Chekhov readers will find Schmidt's work interesting, accessible, and energetic.

This translation, which incorporates the original vernacular seamlessly into a contemporary translation, is by FAR the finest translation of Chekhov's plays (especially *\*Uncle Vanya\**) I have

ever read, or am likely to. As a professor of dramatic literature, I will never again teach Chekhov without assigning my students this fine edition--may it long stay in print.

Schmidt's translation sounds smooth to a modern American, and thus eases the American actor's job. It fails, however, to bring the real Chekhov to the English language. Chekhov's writing has a rhythm, a compactness, and a vocabulary that is uniquely his, one that inimitably captures a very distinctive slice of Russian life as it existed one hundred years ago. It is possible to show this slice to an English speaking audience, but Schmidt had no interest in doing this. That is why this translation is a failure. A secondary but equally unforgivable fault is that he adds his own stage direction to the text. For instance, he adds the word "beat" to the text in places where Chekhov had nothing at all. The American concept of a stage "beat" had not even been invented yet!

I haven't read Chekhov's plays in Russian so I can't say anything about the translation except that it is very readable. Chekhov had his own unique style in that his plays were usually mere verbal interaction with most significant action taking place offstage. Even though most of his plays, especially his four act plays, take place at rich, country houses far removed from any sort of normal life, he seems to pick out timeless themes of humanness in several characters and weave them together into an almost plotless commentary. The fact that his plays have endured as long as they have are a testament to his genius and his skill at seeing timeless ideas. Chekhov's long plays are always revered and remembered as classics but this collection gives the reader a chance to see what an unbelievable short play writer he was. They have their own special feel apart from his longer works and give short little insights to the comedy and often comedic tragedy of human nature and human absurdity. The Cherry Orchard, the Seagull, and Uncle Vanya are classic four acts by Chekhov but don't overlook Ivanov. It was one of his earlier ones and one of my favorites. Chekhov does a good job of making several unique characters and having them react around the central situation and an older man and a younger woman give you an interesting view at an interesting love story. For short plays I would recommend "The Bear", "The Proposal", and "A Reluctant Tragic Hero". Especially in the Proposal Chekhov's comedy is especially portrayed. This collection, in general, an all-around good read. Well worth reading this collection of one of the best playwrights.

Renowned Director and Chekhov aficionado David Cromer swears by this translation of Chekhov's greatest (and lesser-known as well) works. I agree, it's truly the most accessible translation for the American mouth I've ever read/performed. Perfect for monologue auditions, or productions of your

own. ACTORS, STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS ALIKE SHOULD ALL OWN THIS TRANSLATION!

Schmidt presents a 'smooth' translation of Chekhov including his insertion of '(Beat)'s. However it is not faithful to the TIME and CONTEXT of Chekhov's Russia. TIME: Chekhov's language often reflects the social customs of the period and manner with which to approach communication. It's not always meant to be economical or direct (although he is direct in his day). So an 'updated' translation which flows quickly will flatten these nuances. CONTEXT: One has to understand the development of Theater in Russia in his time. His plays are not meant for melodramatic performances (prior to his time) or 'Method' acting (our time). Hence, a translation written for performances today will be colored by the directorial style preferred today. It is important to take that into consideration. By these standards, then no translation is acceptable. However if you find one that will generously tell the reader the difficulties in translating, present the various versions, include historical resources, notes and essays, and have plenty of footnotes. Then you are likely to have a good idea. I recommend Bristow's translation from Norton. PS - I'm reviewing this from the point of view of a director. For actors or literature students or everyday readers, it is obviously a different matter.

As an avid Chekhov reader and admirer (I've read just about the entire canon of his work, prose and drama, published in English translation), I am always on the lookout for fresh translations. Paul Schmidt's seemed interesting. Translations can often be a matter of taste, but there is a limit: I am willing to go along with updated phrases, expressions, varying level of formality in diction, etc, to a certain extent. But what is inexcusable and criminal is altering themes and content to such an extent that the name "translation" becomes a misnomer. For eg: In Lopakhin's famous monologue about his origins and connection to the Ranevskys, he speaks about how he comes from a family of serfs. The serf of course, is a loaded word with reference to feudal Russia, and the transition away from feudalism forms a signature theme of this play. In Schmidt however, the very motif of bonded labor all but disappears: Instead, Schmidt's Lopakhin refers to himself as a "poor boy from the country," that his "father was poor," and now he is rich. That is all. The theme of the play here becomes: a poor boy from the country, now suddenly rich, buying up the estate of the old rich family. Forget about accuracy and intellectual honesty--this is reductive at best. Chekhov's original theme concerns how Lopakhin, a descendant of bonded laborers, finds himself in a position to take over the old estate where his father and grandfather were serfs--a theme that has many layers of meaning, given that Chekhov himself was descended from a family of serfs (within living memory, a

grandfather bought freedom). Not to mention the many instances where words, phrases, and the very sense of sentences are falsely rendered: but above all, the disfiguring of themes such as above insults the writer, the work, and the audience this is supposedly pandering to. A drastically altered, limited and limiting adaptation masquerading as a translation.

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