

## **THEA 3040: Chekhov and Gender**

Fall 2018

M/W/F, noon–12:50 pm, East Academic Building, room 151

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Office Hours: by appointment

Anton Chekhov is one of the most prolific and celebrated writers of modern literature. We'll read his famous short stories and plays. Topics of gender and sexuality permeate not only Chekhov's writing, but also have come into the spotlight in film adaptations of his works and in signature theatre productions of his plays. The course will focus on both dramatic analysis and theater aesthetics of modern Russia, including innovations of the performing body on stage. Analysis of the body naturally segues into discussions about representations of gender and sexuality. In thinking about what Chekhov is saying about sex and gender, students will gain skills to articulate how sexuality is represented in significant literary and artistic works of modern Russia. This course compliments the Fall Conservatory Season's production of *The Three Sisters*.

By meeting course requirements and expectations, you will

- ! develop close analytical reading and argumentative skills while coming to a close understanding of the original style and world view of Russia's most prolific and celebrated writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose works are deeply shaped and penetrated by modern theatre ideas.
- ! connect developments in modern Russian theatre to a broader world history and current artistic practices.
- ! improve skills in interpreting non-text media, including theatre and film.
- ! continue to exercise critical thinking and reading skills, demonstrating insight through a variety of written assignments, presentations, class discussions, and content quizzes. Use terms about literary and dramatic theory to articulate ideas.
- ! write about theatre effectively, showcasing an ability to explain key contextual shifts in theatre production throughout the modern period in Russia, Europe, and parts of North America.
- ! gain an understanding of issues concerning Women's history and sexuality from the end of the 1800s through the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of Russia, Europe, and parts of North America.
- ! gain the ability to interpret the body as a marker of labor, class, and gender in discussing Chekhov's theatre and the theatre of his contemporaries and successors.
- ! gain an understanding of the major historical and cataclysmic events of the "long 20<sup>th</sup>-century" in Russia because culture cannot be appreciated without knowledge of its historical background.
- ! Use terms about gender theory to articulate ideas.
- ! Undertake a research essay inspired by academic inquiry.

## **Readings:**

The following texts are required for this course:

- ! *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin (A Norton Critical Edition, 2014)
- ! *Chekhov: The Essential Plays (The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters and The Cherry Orchard)*. Translated and edited with Michael Henry Heim (New York: The Modern Library. 2003

Additional readings will be made available electronically or through handouts.

## **Course material and weekly reading schedule**

Read the plays and short stories actively: approach the scripts and stories as documents that exemplify the trends and innovations we are discussing. The more familiar you become with the plays assigned, the more productive the peer-led discussions can become.

### **Week 1. The Beginning of Chekhov's Career: Short Stories**

August 27. Introduction. Read syllabus together. Discuss the style of Chekhov, and together read xv-xxi *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin.

August 29. Students will have read and prepared to discuss: "The Death of a Government Clerk," pp. 15 -18; "Grief" pp. 42-47 and "The Little Game," pp. 57-60. *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin. In class we will discuss formal writing qualities of Chekhov's style, which will come to light through discussion of the "The Superaddressee" in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Austin: University of Texas Press (1979), pp. 127 -152.

August 30. Students will have read and prepared to discuss: "Let Me Sleep" pp. 150-155 and "Gusev" pp. 202-214. *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin.

*No class on Labor Day Sept. 3*

### **Week 2. Chekhov's Short Stories II.**

September 5. Students will have read and prepared to discuss: "The Pragmatics of Insignificance: Chekhov, Zoshchenko, Gogol" by Cathy Popkin, pp. 17-49 (scan emailed to students), "The Little Game," pp. 57-60 and "The Student" (1894) pp. 290-204 in *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin.

September 7. Students will have read and prepared to discuss "Peasant Women" 214 – 226 in *Anton Chekhov's Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin. Students will have read excerpts (about 30 pages) from Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Berkeley, 2007)

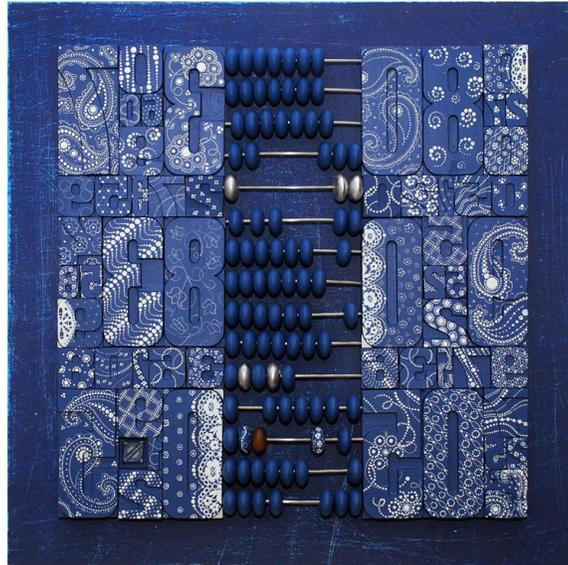
### **Week 3. Women in Russia at the end of the 1800s/early 1900s**

September 10. Students will have read and prepared to discuss *Russia Through Women's Eyes*. Excerpts emailed to students.

September 12. Students will have read and prepared to discuss *Russia Through Women's Eyes*.

Excerpts emailed to students. Students will have read and prepared to discuss “Anna on the Neck” pp. 315 – 227 in *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin.

September 14. Students will have read and prepared to discuss Judith Butler, “Performative Acts. Gender Constitution” and “American, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Women Defining and Defying Femininity” by Dr. Katie Krafft.



#### **Week 4. Embedded Theatricality in Chekhov’s Short Stories**

September 17. Students will have read and prepared to discuss “The Kiss” (1887) pp. 115-130 and “Randomness: Chekhov’s Incidental Detail” by Alexander Chudakov pp. 550-561 in *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin.

September 19. Students will have read and prepared to discuss “Lady with a Lapdog” pp. 414-427 in *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, ed. Cathy Popkin.

September 21. Students will have read and prepared to discuss “The Bishop” pp. 466-479.

#### **Week 5. Character Embodiment I**

September 24. Students will have read and prepared to discuss “Chekhov and the Divided Self” by Yuri Corrigan, pp 2-24. After discussion, we will do an embodied sequence that applies the ideas in the reading to rules of time and space.

September 26. ***Due at beginning of class: students write a short story in the style of Chekhov. Directions will be announced in class in September.***

Students will have read and prepared to discuss “Stanislavsky and Chekhov” in *The Director and the Stage* ed. Edward Braun, pp 60-76 and “When Acting is an Art” pp 488 - 492.

Discussion followed by lecture about the formation of the Moscow Art Theatre.

September 28. Students will have read and prepared to discuss “Design for Chekhov” by Arnold Aronson in *The Director and the Stage* ed. Edward Braun, pp. 194 - 208.

**Week 6. *Uncle Vanya***

October 1. Students will have read and prepared to discuss pp 59- 88 *Uncle Vanya* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim

October 3. Students will have read and prepared to discuss pp. 89 – 114 *Uncle Vanya* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim

October 5. Students will recite memorized monologues in class from *Uncle Vanya*.

**Week 7. *The Cherry Orchard***

October 8. Students will have read and prepared to discuss pp. 191 – 227 of *Cherry Orchard* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim

October 10. Students will have read and prepared to discuss pp. 228 – 251 of *Cherry Orchard* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim.

October 12. “Nature,” “property ownership and women” will be major themes in discussion, and students will work in pairs to compare *The Cherry Orchard* to *Uncle Vanya* in interpreting Chekhov’s plays for messages about nature, property ownership and women. After discussion we will talk about how to write a theatre review for a scholarly journal and for an arts magazine.

**Week 8. *The Seagull***

October 15. ***Summary of theatre review due in class.***

Students will have read pp. 3-30 of *The Seagull* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim.

October 17. Students will have read pp. 31 - 58 of *The Seagull*.

October 19. Discussion followed by lecture about “What is Art?” in *The Seagull*.



October 22-26 Fall break

### **Week 9. *Three Sisters***

October 29. ***Due at start of class your theatre review of a recent performance that you saw.*** Students will have read and prepared to discuss pp. 115 – 157 of *Three Sisters* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim.

October 31. Students will have read and prepared to discuss pp. 158 – 190 of *Three Sisters* in *Chekhov: The Essential Plays*, trans. Michael Heim.

November 2. Students will recite in class memorized monologues from *Three Sisters*.

### **Week 10. Character Embodiment II**

November 5. Students will have read and prepared to discuss Susanna Weygandt, “Theory of Gesture in Russian Avant-Garde: Affect and Embodiment in Stanislavsky’s Philosophy of Performance” forthcoming in *Stanislavsky Studies* (peer-reviewed article will be emailed to students). Students will have read and prepared to discuss excerpts from Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Hapgood, 1948

November 7. Students will have read and prepared to discuss excerpts from Alma Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia* (1996). In class we will also practice some of Meyerhold’s techniques.  
Visuals in class: excerpts from *Metropolis*, dir. Friz Lang (1927)

November 9. In class hands-on practice with character embodiment using Stanislavsky’s techniques for rehearsing Chekhov’s plays. Please be dressed to move. For creating mini performances, students will use text from Chekhov and from some of the scholarly articles we’ve read thus far. Students will be given directions for creating their mini performances.

### **Week 11. American Women Abroad on the Soviet Stage**

November 12. Students perform mini performances in class which they prepared over the weekend. Peer-critique/feedback in class.

November 14. Students will be prepared to discuss *excerpts* from Julia Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (2017). Soviet women had abortion rights, property rights, the right to divorce, maternity benefits, and state-supported childcare. These developments attracted several iconic women of U.S. history to Russia.

November 16. Students will be prepared to discuss selected Hallie Flanagan Papers, ca. 1923-1963 (New York Public Library). Flanagan extensively researched Russian theatre abroad in the Soviet Union. After discussion I will lecture about Soviet culture after Chekhov.

### **Week 12. Sex Scandals on the Soviet Stage**

November 19. Students will have read and prepared to discuss Mikhail Bulgakov's *Zoya's Apartment / Zoikina Kwartira* (drama, 1925).

November 21. Students will have read Sergei Tret'iakov, *I Want A Baby* (1926). After discussing the drama in class, students will look at photos of Constructivist stage design of *I Want a Baby* by El Lissitsky and directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold.

*Thanksgiving break: no class November 23.*

### **Week 13. Chekhov During Soviet Stagnation: Re-Imagination of the Good-Bad Fellow, or the Chekhovian Ambiguous Hero**

November 26. Students will have read Chekhov, "The Duel" short story (pdf will be posted or emailed to students).

November 28. Students will have read excerpts from *How The Steel was Tempered* (Nikolai Ostrovsky) (1934). Students will have read Lilya Kaganovsky, "Introduction: 'Bodies that Matter,'" in *How the Soviet Man was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity Under Stalin* (2008): 1-18.

November 30. Students will have read "The Late Soviet Face of Chekhov: Postdramatic Roots, Heroic Abyss, and the End of Love-and-Justice" (journal published by Warsaw University Press) by Susanna Weygandt (25 pages). Students will have read Lev Shestov's "Creation from the Void" pp. 3-59 and will be prepared to discuss these materials.

Visuals in class: clips from the film *The Duel: Plokhoi khoroshii chelovek* (1973) by Josef Kheivits, based on Chekhov's "The Duel," shown in class.



#### **Week 14. Desperate Housewives**

Dec. 3. Students will have read and will be prepared to discuss Helena Goscilo, “Perestroika or Domostroika: The Construction of Womanhood during Perestroika” in *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood during and after Glasnost* (1996): 5-20.

Dec. 5. Students will be prepared to discuss, Liudmila Petrushevskaia, *Three Girls in Blue* (1984).

Visuals in class: clips from video recording of play at Lenkom Theater, 1989.

Dec. 7. Students will have read and will be prepared to discuss the novella, Natalia Baranskaia, *A Week Like Any Other* (*Nedelia kak Nedelia*, 1969).

#### **Week 15. 100 Years After Chekhov: The Drama of Everyday Life, with a Political Slant**

Dec 10. Students will have read *Plasticine* (2001 by Vasily Sigarev) in *New Russian Drama: An Anthology* (Columbia UP), eds. Maksim Hanukai and Susanna Weygandt.

Visuals in class: video clips and images from Kirill Serebrennikov’s 2001 production of *Plasticine*.

Dec. 12. Students will perform short performances in class as part of final project (those students who choose creating a performance in place of research essay).

Dec. 14. Students will perform short performances in class as part of final project (those students who choose creating a performance in place of research essay).

#### **How will our classes be conducted?**

Class will include a mix of discussion, lecturing, group activities, brief film viewing and occasional

hands-on learning designed for you to put some of the ideas in the course readings into the rules of

time and space. Furthermore, **I will assign a different student to present twice during the**

**course of the semester on material in the reading list.** Here are the directions for this brief assignment: identify one word, phrase, or sentence from an item on the week's reading list that encapsulates an essential idea of that reading. In one short paragraph, explain why you chose this quote. This exercise will help you synthesize your thoughts about the reading and it is good preparation for the longer written assignment. Always strive for elegance and clarity in your writing

and in presenting your paragraph. At the start of class the student will read out loud his or her paragraph. The oral presentation "tunes the orchestra," inviting classmates to comment and elaborate on the initial remarks, so other students are welcome to form answers to the questions posed by the presenter. My instruction will fold into class as I elaborate upon themes mentioned by students. The presenter should type his/her paragraph on a sheet of paper and print it out to give to me after the presentation. I will give informal feedback about your writing.

### **Course requirements and expectations:**

#### **Reading**

In-class reading quizzes—unannounced—will be used to monitor your reading, provide a springboard for discussions, and hone writing skills. **2 pop (a.k.a. "suddenly") reading quizzes will take place throughout the semester.** If you have done the reading, then you will be able to respond to the pop quizzes well. The quizzes will ask you to identify passages from recent reading and explain their context. They are brief!

#### **Participation**

Participation grades are based not merely on class attendance but also upon informed involvement in class activities. You are expected to do the readings and to come to class prepared to participate in conversations. Your participation grade is based on the thoughtfulness of your comments, questions, and observations, and your engagement with the course materials and with your classmates. There are many times to speak during class and contribute to class discussion. Those who respectfully listen to their peers and build upon their peers' comments with thoughtful comments receive a good participation grade. If you are shy about speaking in class, talk to me, and we will think of ways that your opinion about the reading can be heard.

- Every student is entitled to full participation in class without interruption. This class abides by the Conservatory of Theatre Arts Statement of Respect, as detailed in the Conservatory Handbook ([www.webster.edu/documents/fine-arts/conservatory/handbook17.18.pdf](http://www.webster.edu/documents/fine-arts/conservatory/handbook17.18.pdf)).
- Classwork missed due to unexcused absences, including quizzes and peer review, cannot be made up.
- **Regular attendance (10% of your course grade)** at classes is required. Roll will be taken. In the case of illness, religious holidays, family emergencies, or university obligations such as sporting competitions or volunteering, please notify me in advance of your absence. Otherwise, it will be marked as an unexcused absence. For every five unexcused absences a student incurs over the course of the

semester, that student's overall grade will be lowered by one letter grade (e.g. from an A- to a B+).

Attendance will be graded on a five-point scale. Students who arrive to class on time receive the full five points for daily attendance. A one-point penalty will be imposed on the class attendance grade for each 10 minutes you are late for each class.

- Although each student learns differently, please note recent studies confirm that students who write out their notes on paper—as opposed to typing them—learn more effectively ([www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away](http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away)).
- Students are welcome to enjoy their lunch in this course.

**Your progress will be assessed through a variety of assignments.** Specific guidelines for each of these assignments will be provided separately. Please keep copies of all of your graded assignments handy throughout the semester and refer to comments made in one assignment before turning in a new one.

- **The “Chekhovian incidental detail” writing project** will ask you to create an original dramatic scene or short story in the style of Chekhov. Due September 26<sup>th</sup>.
- **2 short oral presentations** will ask you to summarize the significance of a reading assignment and present it to the class (see instructions above in “How will our classes be conducted” section).
- **1 summary of a theatre review (due October 15<sup>th</sup>) and a fresh theatre review that you create (October 29<sup>th</sup>)** will be assigned in class. This project will take place in the middle of the semester. Write 3-4 paragraphs summarizing the review. This exercise teaches students how to write reviews (many of the leading drama and theatre journals are always seeking new reviews). When summarizing, pay attention to the gender message of the performance/film being assessed. Due in class on October 29<sup>th</sup> will be a theatre review about a live performance that you watched recently, or one posted recently on Youtube that you saw.
- **A take-home test (due November 19<sup>th</sup>)** will be assigned. Part I of the test is identification of Chekhovian text and explanation of its significance. Part II of the test is a short essay that responds to a question related to course material. Thorough directions about how to prepare for the in-class exam will be given in class. If you keep notes during discussion, in particular about the “guiding questions” that are motifs in our course, you will do well.
- **At the end of the semester you will produce a research essay or short performance (accompanied by a short essay).** Choose a topic for your final project about which you are curious and passionate, and a form that will engage you, choosing from a research paper or creating a performance. Your project should grow out of the class readings and discussions. It should discuss gender

and Chekhov. **Your research essay is due to me (sent via email) by 5pm on December 22<sup>nd</sup>.** You might expand on one of your in-class practical applications from earlier in the semester or class discussions. I'm happy to discuss your ideas at any time.

- If you choose to write a research paper, it should be 2,750-3,500 words.
- If you choose to create a short performance inspired by the course reading materials, it must be accompanied by a written report (1,200-1,800 words) that describes your methodology for making the performance and the gender message you intend to convey. Your performance must be approximately 15 minutes long and no longer than 20 minutes. You must be able to perform it on either Dec 12<sup>th</sup> or Dec 14<sup>th</sup> in class. **Your accompanying essay is due to me (sent via email) by 5pm on December 22<sup>nd</sup>.**
  
- In preparation for your research essay or for your in-class performance, you will write a 1 or 2-page outline or "roadmap." Upon writing your outline, you should already have in mind the structure of your research essay or short performance and the argument/message you will make so that you can produce an outline backed up by examples. **Each student will discuss their proposed topic with me (or initial ideas of a research topic) prior to handing in the outline.** Clear writing is a result of clear thinking. **Outlines are due to me, printed out and handed in at the start of class on November 28<sup>th</sup>.** We'll review the structure of the outline in class.

### **Writing Rules:**

- ! Organization and clarity are paramount and will be central in grading all works submitted.
- ! Is there a well-articulated thesis statement? Do topic sentences of the essay's paragraphs lead back to the thesis statement? I will distribute/post helpful guidance for writing.
- ! Your final essay/writing project must be paginated and include your name and date of submission.
- ! All your work should use citations when referring to or citing the ideas or evidence or any other piece of another work. Be sure to attach a bibliography on a separate page for your research essay.
- ! **The Writing Center** offers bookable individual appointments with experienced tutors for help with all written work, including presentations, slides, speeches, posters, and all aspects of papers.

### **Student evaluation:**

- ! Class participation 15%
- ! Attendance 10%
- ! Summary of dramatic review and your own original review 10 %
- ! 2 oral presentations 10%
- ! Pop reading quizzes (2) 10%
- ! The "Chekhovian incidental detail" writing project 10%
- ! Research Essay or in-class performance (with essay) 20%
- ! Outline 5%

! Take-home test 10%

- A Superior mastery of essential elements and related concepts & demonstrated excellence or originality.
- A- Above average mastery of essential elements and related concepts & a high level of understanding.
- B+ Above average mastery of essential elements and related concepts.
- B Mastery of essential elements and related concepts.
- B- Mastery of essential elements.
- C+ Above average knowledge of essential elements and related concepts.
- C Acceptable knowledge of essential elements and related concepts.
- C- Acceptable knowledge of essential elements.
- D Minimal knowledge of a sampling of related concepts only.
- F Unsatisfactory progress. Assigned also in some cases of academic misconduct, such as cheating, plagiarism, and excessive absence.

#### **Academic Adjustments for Students with Disabilities:**

If you have a diagnosed learning or other disability that may have some impact on your work in this class or require accommodations, please see me so that these can be arranged. Visit [www.webster.edu](http://www.webster.edu) and choose Academic Support Programs/Academic Resource Center under Quick Links to learn more. Contact me as soon as possible to discuss your needs.

#### **Academic Integrity:**

Students at Webster University are expected to practice academic honesty. Plagiarism is intentionally claiming or implying that another person's work is your own (through inadequate or inaccurate citations of source materials). This applies both to *written* and *oral* presentations. Any time you borrow another person's work, whether as a direct quotation or paraphrased, you must use a citation. All citations must be properly documented and references must be provided. You should follow MLA or Chicago citation guidelines for assignments in this class. We will use Turnitin.com in this class as a tool with which to learn about the citation process. You will submit papers and projects to Turnitin.com to determine if any part of the paper has been copied and not properly cited. Students who plagiarize will earn no credit for the assignment. At the discretion of the instructor, the student may also fail the class and/or face further disciplinary actions. I encourage you to ask questions whenever you are in doubt about quoting or referring to someone else's work. Many cases of plagiarism can be easily avoided through a proactive approach: ask first so that you can present your own work confident that you have not violated any rules or laws. You can find additional information about Webster's guidelines for academic integrity at [www.webster.edu/catalog/current/undergraduate-catalog/academic-policies.html#conduct](http://www.webster.edu/catalog/current/undergraduate-catalog/academic-policies.html#conduct).