

Anna Sica

Chekhov's Poetic and Social Realism on the Italian Stage, 1924–1964

This article explores the introduction of Chekhov's plays to Italy through émigré circles in the first decades of the twentieth century, and traces how they were appropriated to suit the ideological exigencies of the time during the fascist period. It concludes with observations about Luchino Visconti's celebrated productions of the 1950s, which stressed the idea that Chekhov was first and foremost a political writer, and suggests how this particular view of the dramatist evolved in the early 1960s as the theatre once again reflected social attitudes and values. Anna Sica is a lecturer at the University of Palermo. She has published monographs in Italy on the *commedia dell'arte* (1997), Arthur Penn (2000), and theatre in New York (2005), as well as articles on Pirandello and contemporary Italian drama in various journals.

CHEKHOV'S SOCIAL REALISM was first introduced into Italy by Russians committed to changing the political order in their homeland. Émigrés who arrived between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917 found sympathetic audiences among like-minded Italians, and this cultural exchange initiated one of the most interesting periods of contemporary Russian life, influenced, as it was, by its connections with Italian culture and policy. From the time of the first revolution, Russians established bases in Milan, Florence, Turin, and Naples, and devoted themselves to the intensive study of Italian culture. Most were revolutionary socialists, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks, strongly influenced by the charismatic Gorky, who arrived in Naples in 1906 after his initial exile in the United States. The populists among them had a particular interest in the *Risorgimento*, while Lenin's review *Proletarii* reached its western European readership thanks to the maritime trade between Genoa and Odessa.¹

After the political events of 1905, a significant number of Russian students exiled in Capri and in Naples began to attend the Parthenopean University in Naples. Most had been either expelled from Russian universities or branded as subversives because they were Jewish. Some moved to Naples to recover from tuberculosis; others were attracted to southern Italy by its peasant life,

which was reminiscent of its Russian equivalent. The cultural and artistic correspondence between the Russian intelligentsia and southern Italian socialist intellectuals such as Carlo Cafiero (1846–91) and Arturo Labriola (1873–1959) continued to evolve after the first Russian revolution and increased after Gorky's arrival in Capri.² In 1913, Umberto Zanotti Bianco (1889–1963) decided to found a Russian library in Capri in co-operation with Aleksei Alekseevich Zolotarëv.³ This produced a Neapolitan nucleus of translators who collaborated in translations of the works of Russian authors. Chekhov's work was thus first seen in printed form, not to be staged, however, in Italy until later.

Federico Verdinois⁴ translated one of Chekhov's early short stories, 'Typhus', for *Rassegna internazionale* in 1900, which had first appeared in Italian in *Fanfulla della Domenica* in the 1890s.⁵ Very possibly this translation was also by Verdinois, as he often contributed to *Fanfulla*. The cultural fellowship of Russian and Italian intellectuals in Turin, Milan, and Florence generated extensive literary exchanges and numerous works in translation. In Florence, the journals *La Nuova Antologia* and *La Voce* published 'Peasants' in 1898, and the first Italian translation of *Three Sisters* by Olga Pages and Domenico Ciampoli in 1901.⁶

Cesare Castelli (1859–1939) published the first Italian version of *The Cherry Orchard* in

1906. *I Quaderni della Voce* also published some of Chekhov's prose works, including 'The Lady with the Little Dog' and 'Typhus', translated by Serge Jastrebov and Ardengo Soffici in 1910. A second translation of *Three Sisters* appeared in 1913. In 1918, Olga Resnevic Signorelli, a Russian doctor and writer in Italy, tried again unsuccessfully to promote Chekhov's writing in *La Nuova Antologia*; but the editor, Giovanni Papini (1881–1956), rejected Chekhov's 'severe realism', preferring the work of Dostoevsky.⁷

In 1919, Ettore Lo Gatto and Zoe Voronkova translated *Uncle Vanya* for the Neapolitan publishing house L'Editrice Italiana for a collection of titles by foreign authors edited by Lo Gatto.⁸ The Russianist Odoardo Campa translated *The Seagull* in 1914 and *Uncle Vanya* in 1922 for the publishing house Carabba of Lanciano. Boris Jakovenko, who had an intensive correspondence with Odoardo Campa from 1921 to 1941, translated *Three Sisters* in 1925 for the Florentine publishing house Vallecchi; and between 1923 and 1926 Vallecchi also published Chekhov's plays, excluding *Three Sisters*, which had been translated by Carlo Grabher (1897–1968). In 1932, Iris Felyne (1906–88) translated 'The Evils of Tobacco', which was published by Osip Felyne in his review *Teatro per tutti*, printed in Milan, which Felyne founded and directed during his long exile in Sanremo.⁹

Sustaining the Links with Russia

In 1926, Alfredo Polledro (1885–1948) founded the publishing house Slavia (Società editrice di autori stranieri in versione integrale), and in 1926 launched an editorial programme that ran until 1933, in which he undertook to produce faithful Italian translations of five pre-eminent nineteenth-century Russian writers, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenyev, Gogol, and Chekhov. Polledro's aim was to offer these complete works in direct translation from the Russian: most of the previous translations, except for those by Campa and Grabher, were the result of a combination of work by Russians and Italians, resulting in not a few free interpretations of the original versions.¹⁰ At the beginning of the century, political

events in both Russia and Italy influenced the public attitude to Russian drama, which was thus marked by moments of vivid interest as well as pauses of silence and neglect. Renewed interest in Chekhov's work came about primarily through the efforts of the Florentine intellectuals Odoardo Campa and Ardengo Soffici. Campa, a philosopher and writer, and Soffici, a poet and painter, belonged to the intellectual circle behind *La Voce* (1908–16), founded by Giuseppe Prezzolini, and both published their translations of his plays through the Carabba publishing house in Lanciano.

Campa (1879–1965) was one of the promoters of the Florentine review *Leonardo* (1903–07), founded by Giovanni Papini. He also played a leading role in the creation of cultural exchanges between Italy and Russia in the early decades of the century by serving as a link between the Muscovite Symbolists and Florence's avant-garde. He went to Moscow for the first time in 1907, and there his passion for theatre led him to translate Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Andreev. In 1908, he married a Russian woman with whom he had three children. His first translation from Russian was published in 1911. In 1912 Carabba published his translation of *The Seagull*. After the First World War he began to distance himself from his circle of friends at *Leonardo*, since they were beginning to adopt the right-wing philosophy of the Futurists.

On 22 April 1918, with the support of Anatoly Vasilevich Lunacharsky, Campa managed to open his 'Studio' at the Library of the Rumyantsev Museum in Moscow – a society for the dissemination of Italian culture in Russia. Campa was primarily a philosopher dedicated to disseminating the work of the Russian thinker Afrikan Aleksandrovich Spir (1837–90), who was known in Italy thanks to Campa's translations. Campa also had a long correspondence with the Russian philosopher Boris Jakovenko from 1921 to 1936.¹¹

Ardengo Soffici (1879–1964) started writing for the review *La Voce* in 1908. He was a Futurist painter, critic, and writer, and later one of the most prominent intellectuals of the fascist regime. His correspondence with

Giuseppe Prezzolini and Giovanni Ungaretti was published posthumously. Soffici first moved to Paris on 6 November 1900, and lived there for a decade. After 1916, dividing his time between Italy and France, Soffici became a leader of the fascist cultural programme, and his analysis of Chekhov's writing was very influential in establishing the perception that Chekhov's realism was more decadent and poetic than political. It might be said that he redrew Chekhov as a poet of the pessimistic Russian soul, thereby undercutting the writer's social commitment.

Changing Interpretations

Soffici's interest in Chekhov was sparked by the Russian émigrés Serge Jastrebov, a Cubist painter (1881–1958, also known by the pseudonyms Jean Cerusse, Sascia Rudnieff, and Serge Férat) and Hélène d'Oettingen, a novelist and poet, known by the pseudonyms Roch Grey and Edouard Angibout. These two were cousins, and in 1903 met Soffici, who brought them into the artistic circles of the Parisian avant-garde. Jastrebov and d'Oettingen introduced Soffici to Russian language and literature, inspiring his interest in Chekhov and Dostoevsky.

Although the five-year relationship between d'Oettingen and Soffici ended in 1908, they continued to have a strong artistic and intellectual connection. In his preface to *Three Sisters*, Soffici wrote that, while Chekhov's writing was rich in psychological and poetic atmosphere, he had invented a form in which poetry and truth, realism and emotion, were harmoniously fused in a way that was not felt in real life.¹² Nevertheless, he also saw a message regarding collective living and political activism in Chekhov's plays, describing *Three Sisters* as:

a big fresco in which the figures of the background share with the figures of the foreground the inviolable right to exist. They join together in action; together, they are necessary for the development of action and of acting; they are alternatively in the light and in the shadow and their farce and their tragedy are in parallel.¹³

Ettore Lo Gatto (1890–1983), one of Italy's most outstanding Slavic scholars and founder

of the academic tradition of Slavic Studies in Italy, wrote a commentary for the first Italian translation of *Uncle Vanya* of 1919. According to Lo Gatto, it was his quintessential Russian melancholy that made Chekhov's realism unique. Lo Gatto also emphasized the distinction between a playwright who is an observer of his time and one who is a narrator of his own emotions – the difference, he argued, between Chekhov and Ibsen, who had declared that every single one of his works was a form of personal catharsis.¹⁴

Italian critics influenced by Soffici's and Lo Gatto's commentary labelled Chekhov's aesthetics 'decadent'. In 1923, Guido Ruberti wrote a brief essay in the review *Comœdia* in which he defined Chekhov's realism as 'impressionist' and 'crepuscular', rejecting the idea that the Russian author had had any interest in fomenting rebellion against the society of his time.¹⁵ Carlo Grabher also supported this view, considering Chekhov to be a painter of intimate portraits who was in no way active in contemporary movements for social change.¹⁶

Just as it is the nature of theatre to be involved in the life of its time, so, too, does cultural criticism reflect a society's ability to interpret the trends that shape it. And so it was with perceptions of Chekhov: where earlier readers had seen an incitement to revolution in his work, with the dawn of fascism in Italy criticism began to see impressionist melancholy and passive acceptance of the 'inevitable' decline of the quality of human life.

Theatre Structures in the Fascist Era

The first time a Chekhov play appeared on an Italian playbill was in March 1921. This saw the emergence of the Vergani-Cimara-Almirante repertory company under the artistic direction of Dario Niccodemi. This company, known as the Compagnia Drammatica Italiana of the Teatro Valle, had announced *Three Sisters* among its projected 'revivals of forgotten works', but for various reasons a production never came to pass. Thus Chekhov's actual debut on the Italian stage was in 1922, and came about when Pio Campa, one of three heads of the company

Palmarini-Campa-Capodaglio, staged his brother Odoardo Campa's translation of *Uncle Vanya* at the Niccolini Theatre in Florence.

Chekhov's delayed debut was due to the vicissitudes of Italian theatre organizations. Repertory companies structured in the Italian *capocomico* ('head actor') tradition, headed by their leading players, could buy plays directly from authors through the Italian Drama Society of Authors' Rights (Società italiana degli autori) led by Marco Praga (1862–1929), while the Re Riccardi House (Società Re Riccardi), under Alfonso Re Riccardi (1861–1943), controlled the purchase of foreign plays. For nearly twenty years, dating back to 1903, these two companies had been sworn enemies; and their ongoing war exerted a constant subterranean influence on Italian drama at this time, and is the likely cause of the delay in producing Chekhov.

Re Riccardi had a trade alliance with Virgilio Talli's repertory company, which mainly staged foreign plays. In 1918, Re Riccardi was arrested for suspicious business practices, and Marco Praga, profiting from Re Riccardi's disgrace, pressured all head actors, including Virgilio Talli (1858–1928), not to produce plays belonging to the Re Riccardi House but to stage only the plays held by his company. This precipitated a serious financial crisis for companies and theatres. Head actors finally resumed production of the Re Riccardi House titles and, on 17 May 1923, the Italian Drama Society of Authors' Rights was forced into an alliance with the Re Riccardi House and the Drama House (Società d'arte drammatica) directed by Paolo Giordani, who promoted Italian repertory, as well as with the Association of Italian Heads of Theatre Companies (Associazione dei capocomici italiani del teatro di prosa). The merger saw the birth of a trade monopoly that was to be more easily controlled by the cultural branches of the fascist government. Praga left the Italian Drama Society, which moved from Milan to Rome, and repertory companies once again began to include titles from the Re Riccardi House on their playbills.¹⁷

The Campa brothers had managed to escape the monopoly of these warring companies. Pio Campa (1881–1964) commissioned

a new translation of *Uncle Vanya* from his brother Odoardo. Pio Campa, after many years' work as a character and ensemble actor, had founded his own repertory company with his wife Wanda Capodaglio and the actor Umberto Palmarini in 1919. He had made his debut as an actor with Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Iorio's Daughter* (*La figlia di Iorio*) in 1904 with the repertory company Talli-Gramatica-Calabresi directed by Talli, whom Antonio Gramsci considered to be the best director in Italy. In 1908, Pio Campa joined the new company founded by Talli with the actress Maria Melato (1885–1950) who in 1924 created her own repertory company, which premiered *The Cherry Orchard*, translated by Carlo Grabher and copyrighted by the Italian Drama Society.

The Early Productions

Campa's *Uncle Vanya* opened on 3 May 1922. The show was loudly booed on opening night and had only one more performance. Italian critics blamed Campa's actors for their lack of training as well as their inability to reach the depths of Chekhov's characters. The production then opened in August at the Olimpia Theatre of Milan and enjoyed moderate success. The acting was considered creditable, if still too declamatory, some critics noting that Chekhov's plays required 'melodious and unassuming acting'.¹⁸ It was not until the end of the Second World War that Italy began to produce mature directors able to extract viable dramatic and tragic performances from actors who seemed to be almost genetically inclined towards the *commedia* traditions of their forebears.

In 1924, *The Cherry Orchard* opened at the Manzoni Theatre of Milan, staged by the company founded by Maria Melato and Ernesto Sabbatini (1881–1954). Maria Melato was a great actress, and later trained many gifted Italian actors who played principal roles in Visconti's Chekhov productions in the 1950s. The company worked for three seasons from 1921 to 1925, and was also the first permanent repertory company of the Valle Theatre of Rome. The critic Renato Simoni appreciated Chekhov's passionate last

play and Grabher's translation. However, he did not like the production, and accused Melato and Sabbatini of giving infantile performances and having no cohesive acting style. He noted that the interpretation of the role of Trofimov changed the poetic perspective of Chekhov's drama.¹⁹

The fiasco of the first Italian Chekhov productions lay in how Italian repertory companies manipulated the play to highlight the main actor. Thus, for instance, there was no mention of the director in the programme of this *Cherry Orchard*, only the names of the main actors who led the company. Nine years later, Simoni celebrated Nemirovich-Danchenko's Italian production of *The Cherry Orchard*. He considered this version of the play, staged by an Italian repertory company founded by the Ukrainian actress Tatiana Pavlova (1893–1975), the most beautiful play of the last thirty years.²⁰

The Influence of Tatiana Pavlova

After gaining some experience in theatres in Russia and Ukraine without any significant professional success, Tatiana Pavlova left Russia for Paris in 1919 with her mother and one of her brothers. Soon hired as a film actress, she became a star of the silent movies before she returned to the theatre in Italy, where difficulty with the language impeded her work, which included performances of Chekhov. She strove to improve her grasp of Italian, studying with actor colleagues who included Cesare Dondini and Italia Vitaliani. Later, she shared the teachings of her mentor Pavlev Orlenev with the actors of her Italian company, co-founded with actor Alberto Capozzi. She introduced her Italian troupe to a long and rigorous rehearsal process and obliged them to work without a prompter, which Italian critics considered a radical innovation. Between 1935 and 1938, Pavlova also imparted Orlenev's lessons to students at the National Drama Academy (Accademia d'Arte Drammatica Silvio D'Amico).

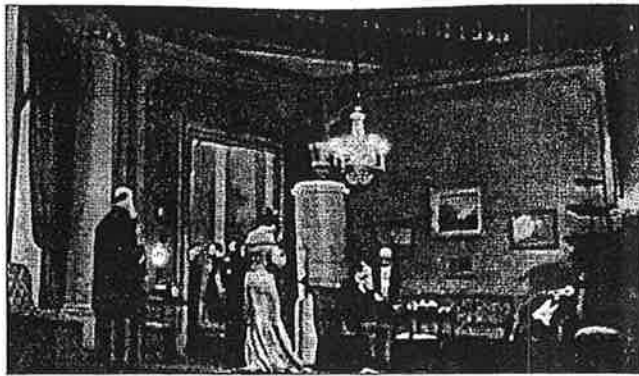
Pavlova made her debut on the Italian stage with *Surgery* in 1923 at the Teatro Valle, adapting the short story of the same name to a one-act play set mainly in a *zemstvo* hospital.



Nemirovich-Danchenko's production of *The Cherry Orchard*, with Tatiana Pavlova as Lyuba and Wanda Teltoni as Anya. Photo: Lucio Ridentini bequest, courtesy Fondazione del Teatro Stabile di Torino, Biblioteca e Archivi.

The plot revolves around the character of a *feldsher* (roughly equivalent to a medical intern) who takes the place of the doctor in his absence. While *Surgery* went virtually unnoticed by critics, her production of *The Cherry Orchard* was extremely successful in theatres throughout Italy. Nemirovich-Danchenko's long stay in Rome to direct the play attracted many professional Italian actors eager to observe rehearsals: he was already well known in Italy as one of the two great Russian directors who had founded the Moscow Art Theatre and promoted Chekhov's plays; and various articles and reports on Chekhov at the Moscow Art Theatre were published in *Comoedia* during his stay in Rome.²¹ Danchenko's direction of *The Cherry Orchard* also introduced the MAT's acting system to the Italian stage; the Italian actors of Pavlova's company were the first to take on this approach, although, while working under Pavlova, they were already well versed

From Act Three of Nemirovich-Danchenko's production of *The Cherry Orchard*. Photo: Lucio Ridenti bequest, courtesy Fondazione del Teatro Stabile di Torino – Biblioteca e Archivi.



in the system developed by Orlenev, with whom she had studied from 1909 to 1911.²²

Orlenev was a progressive teacher and director who had left the Suvorin Theatre in St Petersburg in order to bring theatre to the working class of the vast Russian provinces. His company undertook a long trip through Siberia in which the then seventeen-year-old Pavlova took part. In her memoirs, Pavlova characterized Orlenev's method as acting which focused more on the characters' emotions than on realism per se: his goal was to push every actor to discover the kernel of his character, and thus to link the essence of the character to the play's themes.

In her autobiography, Pavlova writes of Jakob Lvov, a Russian Jewish émigré impresario who managed to move in the same circles in Italy as the most powerful fascist theatre personalities. Through him, Pavlova met Giuseppe Paradossi, who had been given the monopoly of all Italian theatres by the regime.²³ Pavlova's career on the Italian stage was manipulated by Paradossi and other power brokers of the emerging fascist theatre corporations, and they promoted her as one of the greatest Russian actresses of Stanislavsky's theatre, although she was in fact from Ukraine and not a member of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Mussolini's 'Cultural Programme'

In the early 1920s, before he established his regime in 1926, Mussolini had had a vivid interest in supporting art theatres. He promoted Anton Giulio Bragaglia's (1890–1960)

Teatro degli Indipendenti and Luigi Pirandello's repertory company, Teatro d'Arte. He had also been closely involved with Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), the founder of the Italian Futurist movement, and with Ardengo Soffici. Unfortunately, Bragaglia's theatre did not live up to Mussolini's expectations and, while Pirandello experienced great success as an author, his 'art theatre' did not speak to the masses.

After his initial policy of supporting art theatres, Mussolini decided to dedicate his cultural programme to creating a popular fascist theatre in support of his regime. He set about doing this with the help of the critic Alessandro Pavolini (1903–45), who became the Minister of Popular Culture from 1939 to 1943. Also collaborating with Mussolini on this agenda was the writer and director Giorgio Venturini (1908–84), who founded the Experimental Theatre of University Fascist Groups (Teatro Sperimentale dei Gruppi Universitari Fascisti – GUF) in Florence in 1934. He later renamed this the National Theatre of University Fascist Groups (Teatro Nazionale dei GUF) and served as its director until 1943. Mussolini hoped for a 'Theatre for the Masses' that borrowed from the new theatrical experiments in Germany and in Soviet Russia, mistakenly thinking that his ideas for a popular theatre could be clothed in the forms originating in the Soviet avant-garde.

It is necessary to specify that this discussion of the reception of Chekhov's work in Italy takes into consideration the unique fabric of Italian society in the 1920s. This

society was characterized by a close network of individuals who managed to create a subterranean cultural system that by-passed censorship, at least until the fascist regime was firmly established. These collaborating ideologues played a fundamental role in the reception of authors such as Gorky and Chekhov, the social contents of whose works were never completely neutralized. In 1924, Dino Segre (1893–1975), a very successful writer-editor from Turin, founded a bi-monthly publication called *Le Grandi Firme* (*Great Names*) which published short stories by foreign writers. Chekhov and Gorky had a wide Italian readership through this review.²⁴

Productions by Émigrés

During the earlier years of the fascist period *Three Sisters* and *Uncle Vanya* made an impact on the Italian theatre. Both were directed by Russian émigrés, Georges Pitoëff (1884–1939) and Pietro Scharoff (1886–1970). Pitoëff's production of *Three Sisters* opened at the Manzoni Theatre in Milan on 20 March 1929. The critic Renato Simoni, who tended to neglect naturalism in favour of 'imaginative' drama, wrote that, while the play was an analysis of social class, it was treated brilliantly by Pitoëff as a carefree story of three Russian sisters dealing with the boredom and hopelessness of their everyday life. Simoni also noted that, based on his own reading of Chekhov, he had been expecting a different kind of play.

He questioned Pitoëff's direction, asking whether it exemplified the 'Russian way' of staging Chekhov and what its relationship was to the MAT acting style. Although he found much to appreciate in this production, Simoni criticized Pitoëff for failing to explore the deeper truth underlying the sisters' aspirations for different, more fulfilling lives. Later, in 1941, Simoni reviewed a production directed by one of the first women directors in Italy, Wanda Fabro (1909–43). He reiterated much of what he had written about Pitoëff's *Three Sisters*, stressing the director's talent for creating intimacy among the characters. There was no mention of how the director had failed to give any socio-political dimension to his production.²⁵

Uncle Vanya was staged in 1932 by Pietro Scharoff (whom Pavlova had invited to Rome in 1929 to direct Ostrovsky's *The Storm*) with the Filodrammatici company of Milan, and brought a new Chekhov to the Italian stage. His cast involved a group of eminent Italian actors including Ugo Cesi as Vanya, Kiki Palmer in the role of Sonya, and Giulio Oppi as Astrov. For the first time, an ironic and sometimes hilarious rendering of Chekhov's work now reached the Italian stage. Scharoff did not observe Stanislavsky's approach strictly, having been primarily a disciple of Meyerhold and Vakhtangov before his exile in Prague and then in Germany. In 1933 he moved to Italy and worked with many of the most important repertory companies, including Pavlova's and Gramatica and Ruggeri's.

In 1934 Scharoff also directed *The Seagull* with the repertory company of the Eliseo Theatre in Rome, and *Uncle Vanya* with the Compagnia Italiana di Prosa led by the actor Guido Salvini (1893–1965), which opened on 21 November 1943 at the Teatro Argentina. In 1946 he produced a second version of the play at the Odeon Theatre in Milan. In 1945 he accepted the position of director of The Free Theatre Academy of Rome (La Libera Accademia di Teatro) founded by Angelo Rendine. He directed the school until his death. To this day it is called the Scharoff Academy.

Mattoli was the manager of a group of actors who, from 1928 to 1934, mainly produced revues under the acronym ZaBum. He produced Chekhov's little French-style vaudeville *The Bear* (1888) at the Teatro Argentina, opening on 7 February 1932.

Wartime Productions

Chekhov's visibility and popularity grew as the fascist period entered its final phases. In May 1941 the experimental theatre group of the GUF in Naples mounted the one-act play *The Proposal*.²⁶ This was reviewed as an amusing comedy that had been well performed by amateur actors (Arturo Govi in the role of a picturesque Chubukov, Nino Fricelli as the quarrelsome Lomov, and Laura De Roberto as Natalia Stepanovna). In the

same year, the GUF in Padua also staged the one-act play *Swan Song*, directed by Bajano.²⁷

The one-act play *An Involuntary Tragedian* was staged on 26 January 1943 by the Compagnia del Teatro Umoristico (one of the repertory companies approved and funded by the Department of Culture and Propaganda) at the Teatro Argentina, adapted by Titina De Filippo (1898–1963) and directed by Eduardo De Filippo (1900–1984). The adaptation opened out the play, elaborating on the circumstances of its plot and incorporating additional, sharply defined characters. Two weeks later, on 8 February, the one-acter *The Wedding*, directed by Accursio Di Leo, was produced by the Eleonora Duse Studio, which was led by the actor Guido Salvini (1893–1965), who also taught directing at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (Reale Accademia d'Arte Drammatica). This was one of the first displays of the directorial work of the Academy, which was funded by the Department of Culture and Propaganda in 1935 and led by Silvio D'Amico. For the first time in the history of Italian drama, an institution had been established with the express goal of training young Italian actors to direct.

In December 1941, even as European towns and cities were being reduced to rubble, *Uncle Vanya* was performed by the Torrieri-Carnabuci repertory company at the New Theatre of Milan and by the Palmer-Pilotto company in Rome. Both productions were well received. Critics now looking at Chekhov's theatre with new eyes marvelled at his ability to use ordinary episodes from daily life to create a complicated web of emotional and social conflicts. Torrieri-Carnabucci's production was directed by Enzo Ferrieri (1896–1969), who had edited the text, cutting lines from the original version to lessen actors' difficulties with the 'non-action' of the Chekhovian characters. Gherardo Guerrieri's translation, as edited by Ferrieri (who adapted the original version of the play), was published later in the review *Il Dramma* in June 1944; and in October 1945 the review *Filodrammatica* published the little known one-act plays *Swan Song* and *The Evils of Tobacco*, both translated by Vassily Petrov.

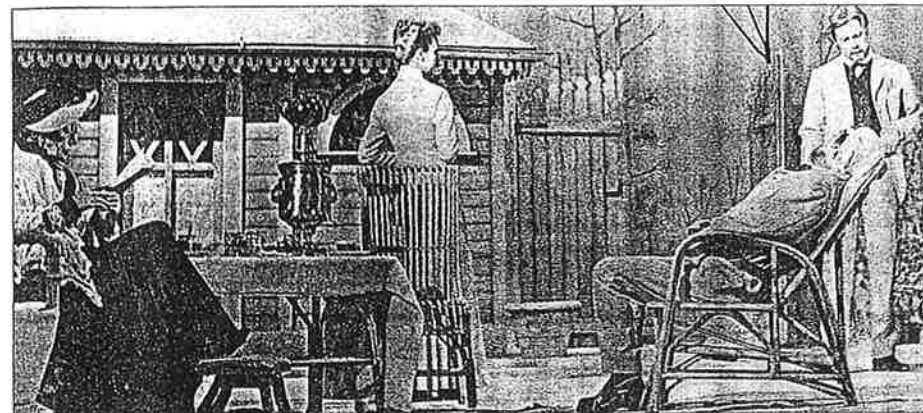
Visconti and the New Realism

Chekhov's name appears in Gramsci's letter of 12 December 1927. Writing to his sister-in-law Tatiana from jail, he asks her to send him a collection of Chekhov's short stories. In a letter of 9 January 1928, he thanks her for the two volumes received. Later, in 1936, writing to his teenage son, Delio, Gramsci states that Chekhov must be considered a political writer because he illuminated specific social and political situations and held distinctly progressive ideals concerning contemporary life.

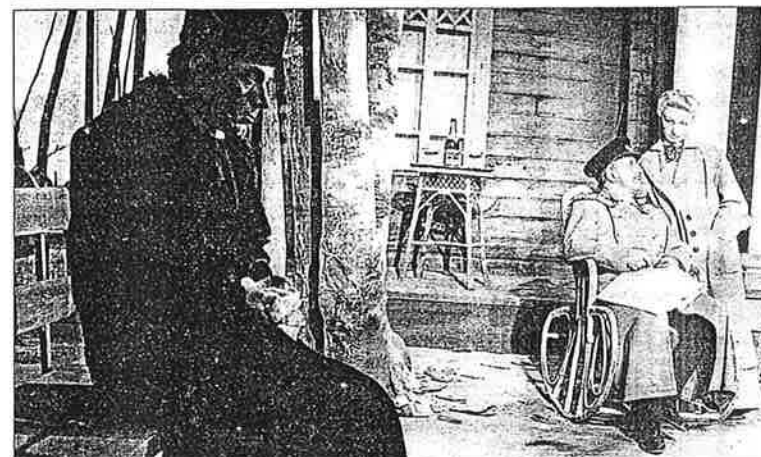
Gramsci believed that Chekhov's sophisticated rendering of Russia's socio-economic reality had helped secure the demise of the middle class, since he had shown that bourgeois intellectuals were 'windbags, stingy, full of putrid gas, laughable and ridiculous', and unfit to shape Russia's future.²⁸ In the 1950s, Gramsci's assessment of Chekhov was shared by the Italian Communist Party, which celebrated the playwright's social realism as interpreted by Luchino Visconti in his *Three Sisters*, staged in 1952–53.

The perception that Chekhov was a political playwright appeared most clearly in Visconti's and Giorgio Strehler's productions. Both directors brought to light the social realism that had inspired Chekhov's plays, although their aesthetic approaches were distinctly different. Visconti's direction followed many of Stanislavsky's principles, while Strehler's productions were totally detached from that influence. Both approaches were typified by social and poetic realism and contributed to the rebirth of Italian drama.

Visconti's productions were a milestone in Italian theatre and dominated Italian drama in the second half of the twentieth century. *Three Sisters*, translated by Gerardo Guerrieri and staged by the Compagnia Italiana di Prosa at the Eliseo Theatre in Rome on 20 December 1952, was a revolutionary reintroduction of Chekhov's work to the Italian stage. It was performed as a play with a message, clearly and successfully straddling its poetic and social content. Visconti also took measures to create a world that still existed – a symbolic place representing Chekhov's Russia of the early twentieth century.²⁹



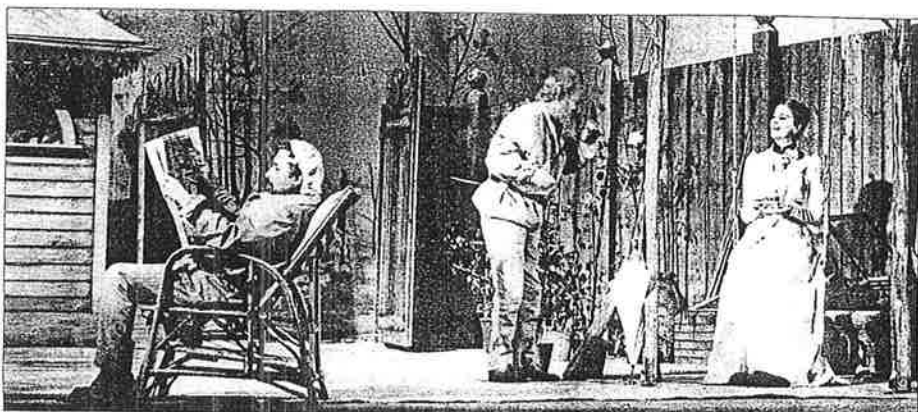
Above: from Visconti's production of *Uncle Vanya* at the Teatro Eliseo, Rome, 1955.



Left and below: from Visconti's production of *Three Sisters* at the Teatro Eliseo, Rome, 1952.



Photos: Lucio Ridenti bequest, courtesy Fondazione del Teatro Stabile di Torino, Biblioteca e Archivi.



From Visconti's production of *Uncle Vanya* at the Teatro Eliseo, Rome, 1955. Photo: Lucio Ridenti bequest, courtesy Fondazione Teatro Stabile di Torino, Biblioteca e Archivi.

Collaborating with Franco Zeffirelli, Marcel Escoffier, and Franco Mannino, who provided the set, costumes, and music, he brought the Prozorovs' estate to life, liberating it from the 'time capsules' created in earlier productions. Thus, true to Chekhov's intentions, Olga, Irina, and Masha reflect on their dull existence, fantasizing about a day when they might hope for a better life – for future generations, if not for themselves. The members of Visconti's company were to become some of the most important actors of twentieth-century Italian theatre, among them Memo Benassi (1891–1957), Marcello Mastroianni (1924–96), and Rossella Falk (1926–).

Visconti's treatment of Chekhov's plays can be attributed, in part, to his seemingly effortless pursuit of a strong symbolic throughline in an otherwise realistic context. His ability to draw out the plays' didactic elements without damaging their poetry attracted the interest and support of the Italian Left.

An Integrated Ideology

Visconti believed that all distinctive works of art were inherently ideological, though he preferred art in which ideology was sufficiently integrated to be tangible without being intrusive. He considered Chekhov to be an eminently ideological writer whose portraits of a vanishing world in crisis did not require explanation through 'declarations and prog-

rammes'.³⁰ It was his opinion that nothing in Brecht attained the polemical sophistication of *Three Sisters*, let alone *The Cherry Orchard*. Some critics like Vitto Pandolfi disapproved of Visconti's vision, feeling that he had reconstructed Chekhov as a Marxist writer.

Chekhov's preoccupation with the division of labour recurs throughout his oeuvre. In *The House with the Mezzanine* (1896), the two main characters clash when the landscape painter accuses Lida, a convinced populist, of not having thought seriously about the distribution of work through the class system:

You must take some of their labour on your own shoulders. If all of us town and country dwellers unanimously agreed to divide among ourselves the labour that is normally expended by humanity on the satisfaction of its physical needs, then each of us would probably have to work no more than two or three hours a day. Just imagine if all of us, rich and poor, worked only two or three hours a day and had the rest of the time to ourselves.³¹

Two fundamental themes introduced in *Three Sisters* and elaborated more urgently in *The Cherry Orchard* are the problem of the allocation of labour and the hope for a different future. In *Three Sisters*, Tusenbach thus says to Chebutykin and Solyony:

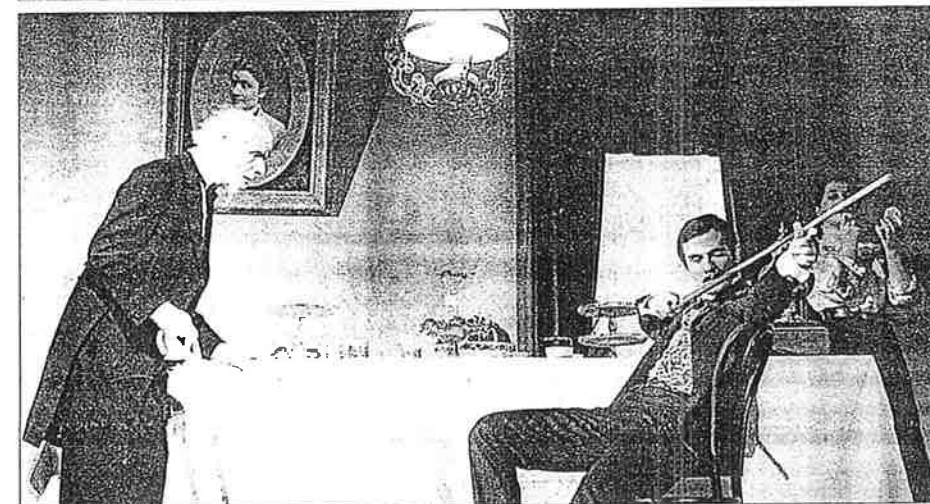
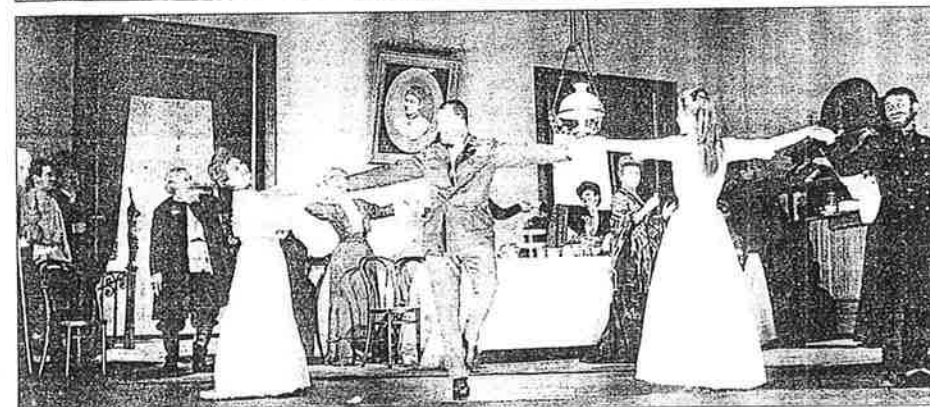
The longing for hard work, oh dear, how well I understand it! I've never worked in my life. I was born in Petersburg, cold, idle Petersburg, to a



From Visconti's production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Teatro Valle, Rome, 1965.

Left: Rina Morelli as Liubov and Paolo Stoppa as Gaiev.

Photos: Lucio Ridenti bequest, Fondazione Teatro Stabile di Torino, Biblioteca e Archivi.



family that didn't know the meaning of hard work or hardship. . . . The time has come, there's a thundercloud looming over us, there's a bracing, mighty tempest lying in wait, close at hand, and soon it will blow all the indolence, apathy, prejudice against hard work, putrid boredom out of our society. I shall work, and in twenty-five or thirty years everyone will be working. Every last one of us!³²

Visconti commented in his directorial notes:

Tusenbach is a Marxist. He is interested in the present day. He opposes contemporary reality to Vershinin's dreams for the future: he is interested in working. Vershinin is a soldier; he is not interested in working. He is interested in war.³³

It is clear from Visconti's notes how he created a psychological duel for the characters: their ideologies and emotional responses are inseparable from their social positions, and their inability to see this leads inexorably to conflict. The director felt this approach served Chekhov's intentions, and enabled him to guide the actors to a new and relevant form of social realism.

The performance was a triumph at the Manzoni Theatre in Milan, where it opened on 15 March 1953. Critics hailed *Three Sisters* as a masterpiece; the extraordinary set design of the young Zeffirelli received special accolades. The play also shocked audiences at the Manzoni, which usually presented comedy revues and theatre in the more traditional *commedia dell'arte* style of Italian acting. Yet here was a tragedy like the classical plays of antiquity, that was tragic without showing violence on stage. The Left press applauded Visconti for remembering that Chekhov had written the play in the years leading up to the revolution of 1905.

Visconti's direction highlighted what, in retrospect, seemed to be the inevitable process of radical change from a capitalist to a socialist system: the main protagonists are three heroines from the Russian provinces who do not dream of Moscow, but of a future in which there exists a changed Moscow.³⁴ As a consequence, rather than stressing the ideological and social content of the play, he presented it as a prophecy. The play, in this rendering, assumed the value of a historical

document that presaged the revolution of 1905 and the later October revolution.

In an interview published by *L'Unità*, Visconti responded to some of the criticism the play had received:

Maybe some people do not like this play because whoever sees this production knows that, today, the utopia Chekhov's characters are searching for is not a utopia any more. This play needs a working-class audience, who would be able to understand the tragedy of these three sisters and their friends: it is a tragedy which did not lead to the crisis of a group of individuals, but to the end of a whole society.³⁵

Using the Moscow Art Mise-en-Scène

Preserved at the Gramsci Institute in Rome among Visconti's personal documents are sketches of the set design in various Moscow Art Theatre productions as well as pictures of Olga Knipper in the role of Masha and of Luzhsky in the role of Andrei. There is a photo of the third act of *Uncle Vanya* in the 1900 Moscow Art Theatre's production, with the actress Maria Lilina in the role of Sonya, and of the second act of the same production with Stanislavsky as Astrov. Visconti also owned pictures of Gogol's *The Bourgeoisie* directed by Stanislavsky in 1902, and a photo dated 1908 from the fifth act of Gogol's *The Government Inspector* with Luzhsky, Meyerhold, and Ludmila Roksanova.³⁶

Visconti worked from a breakdown of the first Russian mise-en-scène of *Three Sisters* at MAT to create a credible Russian environment, and then invested it with objects familiar to the actors. He was a strict believer in Stanislavsky's interpretation of Chekhov, since the Russian director and his troupe had the unique distinction of having discussed Chekhov's ideas about staging directly with the playwright. He studied the correspondence between Stanislavsky and Chekhov from December 1900 to May 1902, carefully transcribing everything the director and playwright had said about the work into his notebooks.³⁷ His effort to emulate as closely as possible the Russia of Chekhov's time extended to his use of music, which mirrored Stanislavsky's choices for each act.

Visconti sent pictures of the opening scenes of the MAT production to Marcel Escoffier, his costume designer; he also included some photographs of his mother in her youth. On 2 May 1952, Escoffier wrote to tell the director that he was creating the costumes of the female characters following the fashion dictates of the 1890s, which he considered more suitable, and more feminine, than the styles of the early 1900s.³⁸ In a letter of 12 May, Visconti replied that he would prefer the costumes to adhere to the fashion trends of the early twentieth century instead of those of the last decade of the nineteenth: this captured 'a shade, a tone, an atmosphere' that he liked better and that would coincide with his desire to evoke 'a familiar environment'.

The outdoor scene of Act IV was unanimously acclaimed as the most impressive set created by the young designer Zeffirelli. Visconti considered this to be the pivotal scene of the play. Zeffirelli worked backward from his conception of the garden to the indoor settings in previous acts, the sitting room, and Olga's room. The vision of the garden, achieved by blending images and tones from a number of Levitan's paintings, thus dictated the design of the rest of the production.³⁹

Visconti recycled the set he had built for Goldoni's *La Locandiera*, using it as a foundation for the set of *Three Sisters*. And he gave Zeffirelli a seemingly impossible task: to have the set, from one scene to the next, be 'humid, wintry, springlike, nocturnal, and lit by the flames of the fire of the third act'. It also had to take into account the details of the characters' clothes. Escoffier's costumes and Zeffirelli's scenography were praised by the critics as 'monuments' of Visconti's production. The set was not simply decorated with props, but was properly furnished, as is clear from the list of furniture signed for by Visconti.⁴⁰ Even in this one can see the legacy of the Moscow Art Theatre: the young Stanislavsky had been strongly influenced by the stage realism of the Duke of Meiningen's company, which, contrary to custom, used real furniture for its productions.

Visconti was generally considered to be more an 'auteur' than a 'creative director': he usually embraced a single concept, exploring

it in as great a depth as possible. He did not use a text as a starting point for his own creation; nor did he use it as a pretext to voice his own ideas. Rather, he respected the text and strove to reveal its inner truths by focusing on the best possible execution of his vision as a director. His systematic construction of the realities of time and place yielded a realism harmonious with that of Chekhov, which Gorky had described as 'inspired by symbols arrived at through profound meditation'.⁴¹

Rescuing Neorealismo

Working from Chekhov's example to create a realism composed of real events and emotion, Visconti started incorporating personal elements in his work. He first adopted this method in *Three Sisters* and gradually used more and more explicit autobiographical material in his directing. His choice of fashions from the early twentieth century, for example, enabled him to recreate a world he remembered from his youth, when his mother moved in similar social circles. Thus he was able to imbue his portraits of Olga, Irina, and Masha with his memories of his mother's way of living and thinking.

Visconti refined this approach in his production of *The Cherry Orchard*, deliberately undertaking to provide every single scene of the play with the poetic rhythm of life in the Italian countryside in the early twentieth century. At the same time he recreated the atmosphere of Chekhov's estate at Melikhovo, based on meticulous research.

Visconti founded La Compagnia Italiana di Prosa in 1946, bringing an unprecedented discipline to the Italian theatre. His repertory company was a group formed by some of the most gifted Italian actors of the time – Rina Morelli, Paolo Stoppa, Memo Benassi, Mariella Lotti, Giorgio De Lullo, Massimo Girotti, Augusto Mastrantoni, Carmen Fraccaro, Franco Zeffirelli, and Arnaldo Foà. He approached every production as a research project and created what he called 'art events'. He further directed his energies towards reforming the theatre by making low-cost tickets available to workers. He was convinced of the theatre's fundamental role in

the civil emancipation of Italian society after its long struggle under fascism.⁴²

In 1950 the communist newspaper *L'Unità* remarked that all the proponents of *neorealismo*, such as Alessandro Blasetti, Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Luchino Visconti, supported the cultural agenda of the Communist Party. Eleven years later, the international political scenario had changed. Roberto Rossellini wrote to Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, stating that the party had relaxed its cultural supervision and, as a consequence, the values of *neorealismo* were being lost in the cinema and on stage. Rossellini thought it was not in the country's best interests for the party to appear to encourage a sort of 'interior lyricism' representing 'humanity distressed by sophisticated private inhibitions' with which audiences identified or loved to watch as detached observers.

He was concerned that Italian theatre was making no attempt to analyze the political and social problems of contemporary society and was dealing in stories that revolved around fabricated characters' problems, such as communication, sex, and loneliness. He wrote:

They discuss a load of nonsense with solemnity, for example, the theme of 'wasted youth', which deliberately tries to turn the political aspects of our contemporary problems into the eternal conflicts between parents and children, old and new.⁴³

Togliatti responded to Rossellini's letter saying he was ready to start a 'cultural-political' initiative to rescue *neorealismo* from the growing commercialism of film and theatre.⁴⁴ It was not possible, however, to reverse the tide: as Chekhov's young student Treplev said, 'a new time requires new forms'. The neorealism of the 1960s needed new narrative structures that might dress social realism in the more palatable lyrical forms of the period.

In 1964, De Lullo, who had played Tussenbach in Visconti's production, began work on *Three Sisters* with La Compagnia dei Giovani, which he founded with the actors Romolo Valli, Rossella Falk, and Elsa Albani. He was a director in the *capocomico* tradition,

and played the role of Andrei Prozorov. The production opened on 15 May 1965 at the Pergola Theatre in Florence. While faithful to Visconti's realism, De Lullo was determined to draw something new out of Chekhov's work. He studied Chekhov's own notes on the premiere of *Three Sisters* at the MAT. Working from Stanislavsky's directing notes and from the correspondence between Nemirovich-Danchenko and Chekhov as well as between Knipper and Chekhov, De Lullo succeeded in creating a new 'painting' of the play. His rendering was less archetypal, less vague and rhetorical than Stanislavsky's first production of 1901. It was also less naturalistic than Nemirovich-Danchenko's second production of the play at the MAT in 1940.

De Lullo's aim was to create a production free from both the traditions of Stanislavsky and the MAT and the influences of Visconti's emblematic Chekhovian style. By overcoming the poetic realism of the early decades of the century and by renewing Chekhov's social realism, he hoped to create a new form which he named 'lyrical realism', located somewhere between the perception of the writer's work as fin-de-siècle decadence and as the forerunner of social realism. While he aimed to revitalize Italy's naturalistic acting style, he also hoped to create a *Three Sisters* that corresponded to the author's intentions. De Lullo thus faithfully followed Chekhov's notes to Olga Knipper, urging her to let her character live between irony and distress with simplicity, directness, and courage:

If you don't get Act III right the whole play will be ruined and I'll be booted off the stage in the declining years of my old age. Alexeyev's letters are full of praise for you and for Vishnevsky. Even though I can't see what you are doing, I praise you as well. Vershinin's 'tram-tram-tram' should be like a question, and yours should be, as it were, in reply, and it should strike you as such an original thing to say that you utter it with a slight smile. . . . You should say 'tram-tram-tram' and give a little laugh, not a loud one, just a hint.⁴⁵

De Lullo moved beyond the influence of Visconti's version of the play in part by avoiding heavy naturalistic scenery. His 'lyrical realism' employed only essential furniture to remind the audience of the historical circum-

stances of the play. Pier Luigi Pizzi designed both set and costumes. Although sketches of his stage design are reminiscent of the naturalistic scenery used by Visconti, the photographs from De Lullo's production vividly illustrate a pared-down naturalistic set that contrasts sharply with the exaggerated Viscontian naturalistic design.

De Lullo and his designer created sets and costumes that did not reflect a particular fashion or a specific historical time, but captured emotions. The director incorporated chromatic elements that he felt conveyed the affective tone desired by Chekhov. The set in the first act was brightly coloured, conveying the high spirits of Olga, Masha, and Irina, which decline gradually into melancholy. Eventually this gloom infuses the fourth act, when hope disappears following the death of Tussenbach and the departure of the soldiers. Hope remains only in the bright colour of the set, and in Olga's line: 'Our suffering will turn to joy for those who live after us, happiness and peace will come into being on this earth, and those who live now will be remembered with a kind word and a blessing.'⁴⁶

Notes and References

1. Angelo Tamborra, *Esuli russi in Italia dal 1895 al 1917* (Roma: Laterza, 1977), p. 12–23.
2. Piero Cazzola, *L'Italia dei Russi tra Settecento e Novecento*, Vol. II (Moncalieri: C.I.R.V.I., 2004), p. 249–50.
3. Angelo Tamborra, 'Umberto Zanotti Bianco, la biblioteca italo-russa di Capri e la Russia rivoluzionaria', *Esuli russi*, op. cit., p. 87–101.
4. Federico Verdinois was born in Caserta in 1844 and died in Naples in 1927. The life of peasants and the working class inspired his short stories. An exponent of the Neapolitan intellectuals of his time, he edited the cultural page of the newspaper *Corriere del mattino*. He also wrote for *Il Fanfulla della domenica* in Rome and *Illustrazione Italiana* in Milan, often using the pseudonym Picche. He knew English, Polish, and Russian, and translated many foreign authors, including Oscar Wilde, Henrik Sienkiewicz, and Anton Chekhov. He was close to the Russian refugees in Naples. See Benedetto Croce, 'Federico Verdinois', *Literatura della Nuova Italia* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1943), Vol. V, p. 175–86; Federico Verdinois, *Profili letterari e ricordi giornalistici*, ed. Elena Craveri Croce (Florence: Le Monnier, 1949).
5. *Typhus* was published in *Peterburgskaya gazeta* in 1887, and included in the collection *Rasskazy* in 1888.
6. Domenico Ciampoli was a journalist who was born in Atezza (Chieti) in 1852 and died in Rome in 1929. He translated the works of Pushkin and Chekhov into Italian. He also wrote *Saggi critici di Letterature Straniere* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1904).

7. Letter from Giovanni Papini to Olga Resnevic Signorelli of 2 July 1918: see *Carteggio Papini Signorelli*, ed. Maria Signorelli (Milan: Quaderni dell'Osservatore, 1968), p. 112–13. Olga Resnevic Signorelli was born in Latvia in 1883 and died in Rome in 1973. She emigrated to Berna in 1902, where she started studying medicine. In 1904 she moved to the University of Rome 'La Sapienza', where she received her degree in medicine in 1908, and, in 1910, married Angelo Signorelli. Her literary salon, located on the ground floor of Villa Bonaparte in 20 Settembre street in Rome, became one of the major intellectual centres of the 1920s. She translated Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Kolokolov, and also published in Italian *V. Ivanov e M. O. Cherscaison*, 'Corrispondenza da un angolo all'altro' (Lanciano: Carabba, 1932); *La Duse* (Rome: Signorelli, 1938); and *Lev Tolstoj: corrispondenza con Alessandra Andrejevna Tolstaja* (Turin: Einaudi, 1943).

8. Ettore Lo Gatto (1890–1983) was a founder of Russianist Studies in Italy in the early 1930s. He was a professor of Russian Literature at Rome University 'La Sapienza' and published *Storia del teatro russo* and *Storia della letteratura russa*, among other titles, with the Florentine publishing house Sansoni.

9. *Della dannosità del tabacco* (*The Evils of Tobacco*), *Teatro per tutti*, Milan, No. 7 (July 1932), p. 39–41. Osip Blindermann (1882–1950) was an aeronautics engineer and a literary scholar who had published several works in St Petersburg under the name of Felyne before emigrating to Italy in 1920. He wrote short stories and plays which were published by Italian reviews. In 1924, Alda Borelli repertory company staged his play *La tramontana* at the Teatro Argentina in Rome. He was authorized by Andreev's wife Anna to translate and produce her husband's posthumous works in Italy. See Marina Moretti, 'Felyne', *International Symposium CIRVI: L'Italia terra di rifugio* (Turin: CIRVI, 2005).

10. See Angelo d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), and Maria Luisa Dodero, *La traduzione letteraria dal russo nelle lingue romanze e dalle lingue romanze in russo* (Milan: Cisalpino-Goliardica, 1979).

11. See Catia Renna, 'Boris Jakovenko e la cultura filosofica europea: una ricostruzione biografica', in *eSannizdat*, 2004, p. 97–105; Daniela Rizzi, *Lettere di Boris Jakovenko a Odoardo Campa, 1921–1941* (Trento: Dipartimento di Scienze Filosofiche e Storiche, 1977); 'Artisti e letterati russi negli scritti di Ardengo Soffici', *Archivio Italo-Russo II*, ed. Daniela Rizzi and Andrei Shishkin (Salerno: Università di Salerno, Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari, 2002), p. 309–14.

12. *Le tre sorelle* (Lanciano: Carabba, 1913).

13. *Ibid.*, p. 10–13. My translation from Italian.

14. Ettore Lo Gatto, 'Chekhov', *Lo zio Vanja*, trans. Ettore Lo Gatto and Zoe Voronkova (Naples: L'Editrice Italiana, 1919), p. b–h.

15. Guido Ruberti, 'Il drammaturgo della consolazione', *Comœdia*, No. 5 (March 1923), p. 9; see also Guido Ruberti, *Storia del Teatro Contemporaneo* 3, V (Bologna: Cappelli, 1928).

16. Carlo Grabher, *Anton Čechov* (Rome: Istituto per l'Europa Orientale; Turin: Slavica, 1929), p. 103–17. See Carlo Grabher, 'Anton Pavlovič Čechov', *Enciclopedia Italiana*, Vol. IX, 1931.

17. Alfredo De Sanctis, 'Di Marco Praga e di Adolfo Re Riccardi', *Caleidoscopio Glorioso* (Florence: Giannini, 1946), p. 280–97; see also Adolfo Re Riccardi, *I segreti degli autori*, with a preface by Lucio D'Ambra (Milan:

- Corbaccio, 1928); Lucio Ridenti, 'Piccolo Ricordo', *Dramma* (Turin), Nos. 412-13 (15 October-1 November 1943); 'Direttori e Regia', *Il Dramma* (Turin), No. 318 (May 1963), p. 45-53; *Teatro italiano fra le due guerre: 1915-1940* (Genova: 1968).
18. Renato Simoni, 'Zio Giovanni', *Comœdia*, 20 (May 1922), p. 474-5. See also *Trent'anni di cronaca drammatica 1911-1923*, Vol. I (Turin: UTET, 1951), p. 391-3.
19. Renato Simoni, 'Il giardino dei ciliegi', *Trent'anni di cronaca drammatica 1924-1926*, Vol. II (Turin: UTET, 1954), p. 73-6.
20. Renato Simoni, 'Il giardino dei ciliegi', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 30 January 1933.
21. Giacomo Lwow, 'Cecov in Patria e in Italia' and 'Il giardino dei ciliegi nella interpretazione della compagnia di Tatiana Pavlova, direzione di Nemirovitch Danchenko', *Comœdia*, (Milan), No. 2 (February-March 1933), p. 11-13.
22. See Ettore Lo Gatto, *Storia del Teatro Russo*, Vol. II (Florence: Sansoni, 1952), p. 247-9; Tatiana Pavlova, 'Autobiografia: ricordo di Paolo Orlenev', in *Tatiana Pavlova: diva intelligente*, ed. Danilo Ruocco (Rome: Bulzoni, 2000), p. 181-242.
23. See Victoria De Grazia and Sergio Lizzatto, ed., 'Teatro drammatico', in *Dizionario del Fascismo*, Vol. II (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), p. 716-19; Patrizia Ferrara, *Censura teatrale e fascismo, 1931-1944: la storia, l'archivio, l'inventario* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zacca dello Stato, 2004).
24. Angelo D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, op. cit., p. 174-5.
25. Renato Simoni, *Trent'anni di cronaca drammatica*, Vol. IV, 1933-1945 (Turin: UTET, 1958), p. 523-4.
26. *Il Dramma*, Turin, No. 355 (1941), p. 34.
27. *Ibid.*
28. The full context of this citation is as follows: 'Please repeat the question you asked me once about Chekhov, which I never answered: I really do not remember what it was. If you were saying that Chekhov was a social writer, you were right; but one reason why you should not be too impressed with yourself is that Aristotle already said that all men are social animals. I think you wanted to say something more, namely, that Chekhov revealed a particular social situation; he illuminated certain aspects of the life of his time and expressed it in a way that compels one to consider him a progressive writer. Or so I think. Chekhov, in his way, by using forms of his time and culture, helped to eliminate the middle class, the intellectuals, the petty bourgeois who fancied themselves to be shaping Russian history and its future: these people really believed they were protagonists in who knows what kind of miraculous innovations, and Chekhov showed them as they were - stingy windbags full of putrid gas, laughable and ridiculous.' See Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. 858. My translation from Italian.
29. Vito Pandolfi, 'Roma: grande impegno', *Il dramma*, No. 173 (January 1953), p. 45-7.
30. Luchino Visconti, *Il mio teatro*, Vol. I, 1936-1954, ed. Caterina d'Amico.
31. *The House with the Mezzanine* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 15.
32. *The Three Sisters*, edited by L. Senelick (New York: Norton, 2006), Act One, p. 887.
33. Luchino Visconti, 'Note per la messinscena di Tre Sorelle di Anton Cecov', *Arena*, Nos. 10-11 (July/December 1955), p. 274. My translation from Italian.
34. G.T., 'Le tre sorelle di Cecov nella regia di Luchino Visconti', *L'Unità*, February 1953.
35. Luchino Visconti, *Il mio teatro*, Vol. I, 1936-1953, Vol. II, 1954-1976, ed. Caterina d'Amico de Carvalho and Renzo Renzi (Bologna: Cappelli, 1979), p. 220. My translation. See also *Il teatro di Visconti: scritti di Gerardo Guerrieri*, ed. Stefano Geraci (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 2006).
36. *The Three Sisters*: notes for costumes in folder CR-014363, Visconti Archive, Gramsci Institute.
37. *Ibid.*, Folder TP 27-2606.
38. *Ibid.*, 'Correspondence Visconti-Escoffier'.
39. *Ibid.*, Franco Zeffirelli's set design for Act Four of *The Three Sisters* at the Eliseo theatre.
40. 'Furnishings for *Three Sisters*: a big table for 14 people, two divans, four armchairs, 18 chairs, a small table, a cupboard (new or used), grandfather clock; second act: as above; third act: a small rug, notes for armchairs, chairs and a divan: height cm 20 to ordinare hand made L8.500 each metre, we need 11 m: 3.60 m. for the divano, 4.20 m. for three armchairs, 3.00 m. for the table. Dinner service for 14 people (deposit L100.000), 6 oil lamps with batteries included; silverware on loan with a deposit. Artificial flowers L25.000; watches to break on stage; samovar, piano, pictures, prints, icons, tea cups and glasses for tea with metallic bases.' See Visconti's directorial notes, Folder TP27-1610, Visconti Archive, Gramsci Institute.
41. Gorky's letter to Chekhov, 21-22 January 1900.
42. Luchino Visconti, 'Lettera al direttore generale, Ministero del Teatro, 1946', Folder CT1 015617, Visconti Archivi, Gramsci Institute.
43. Roberto Rossellini's letter to Palmiro Togliatti, 1 March 1961, Archive of the Italian Senate in Rome.
44. Palmiro Togliatto to Roberto Rossellini, 2 May 1961, Archive of the Italian Senate in Rome.
45. Anton Chekhov, 'Letter to Olga Knipper, 20 January 1901, Nice' in *Anton Chekhov: a Life in Letters*, ed. Rosamund Bartlet (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 453.
46. Giorgio De Lullo, 'Come ho realizzato Le Tre Sorelle', *L'Unità* (Rome), 24 October 1965. In 1980, an updated version of De Lullo's production by the Romolo Valli Free Theatre of *Three Sisters* opened at the Parioli Theatre in Rome.