

Integration of several basic paradigms into the mytholiterary continuum. The task becomes more complex, however, when more than one mythological paradigm is considered. In my analysis of *Three Sisters*, I state that in addition to the calendar myth, there is at least one more paradigm forming the implied space; namely, the myth of the Holy City (Sacred City), which is the eschatological myth of Rome as a symbol of the world. The integration of various metaparadigms requires the same sequence of steps as the integration of literary and mythological structures into a mytholiterary continuum. The first step is to search for isomorphisms in order to find compatibility between the structures. The next step is to outline their differences, which would then suggest a new metaparadigm.

From the point of view of processing, both calendar and eschatological myths are united by the idea of the cosmic cycle, represented as the movement of the universe toward its end with its subsequent revival. In the myth of Rome, the concept of cosmic rhythm as ruling the world is basic for its tales; this includes the myth of the Great Year, according to which Rome is predestined to burn to ashes.¹¹ The allusion to the myth of Rome in the implied space appears as a result of some direct and indirect allusions to Romans and interactions between the notions of fire and the city, as observed in the space of action.

Thus, in the mytholiterary continuum, the town is a combination of three cities that have fire as common denominator: Moscow, Rome, and the city of three sisters. Fire in the implied space appears in the form of a great fire symbolizing the end of the world (Act 3) and a Shrovetide fire symbolizing the end of a winter season (Act 2). The integration of all the notions of the fire in the space of action and the implied space creates a new paradigm that in the mytholiterary continuum becomes the burning of a "straw-universe"—a paradigm that serves to highlight the limited potential of a Chekhovian "Sacred City."

In conclusion, the integration of several basic paradigms into the mytholiterary continuum serves to highlight the weight and sign of the universe represented by the artist in a global way.

CHEKHOVIAN 'ROMANS'

The Roman Myth is represented in the play in two ways: as a description of "Roman" society and as a myth of the Great Fire. The latent image of Rome pervades the whole structure of the play, penetrating even small and seemingly minor details. The mythological allusions to Rome become apparent if they are considered in relation to Chekhov's early works, where his humorous references to Rome are clearly pronounced.

One can see that already at the beginning of the play the "Roman" (in Chekhov's sense) atmosphere surrounds the world of *Three Sisters*. Thus, the first indication of the presence of the Chekhovian "Rome" pertains to the month when the action commences. According to Olga's remark, the action occurs in May, the month that has its original humorous description in Chekhov's "calendar." In his early short story *About March. About April. About May. About June and July. About August.* (*literary notes*) Chekhov writes about May the following:

The month of love, serenity and white nights. . . . It received its designation at the bidding of Romulus from maiores--the elders, or senators, who in their old age would sit in the Roman senate and sprinkle sand on official papers. While others maintain that it was named in honor of the Pleiade Maja, who was born of Atlas. A small but ticklish question: how could Atlas have become a father, if he were required to hold the firmament on his shoulders day and night, without resting for even moment? I'll leave that question open. . . . Maja herself gave birth to the stockmarket wiz and shrewd businessman Mercury. Among the ancients May was dedicated to old age, and in this month it was strictly forbidden to enter into marriage. Anyone who married in this month was referred to as an ass (asinus), a fool (stultus) and a milksop. "May is the month of love, but not of marriage," wrote Cornelius Nepot. Don't go limp, citizens, and don't fall into a trap! Recognize the fact that May love ends in the beginning of June and that, although in May your most ardent fantasy had seemed ethereal, in June it will seem like a ray of hope (XXVI, 7). In the opinion of the Russian, he who marries in May will toil through his whole lifetime--and this is fair. For astronomers May occupies the third place in ecliptic and the sun enters the sign of Gemini. Among women in their summer dachas it occupies first place, since it is then that soldiers march off to their camps. If the camps are located near to the dachas, then the sign of Gemini can serve as a warning: don't get carried away in May because in the winter you'll have to deal with twins! In may are born May beetles, mayors and poets a la Maykov.¹

Actually, in the play this Chekhovian "Rome" is represented in its "full measure." A comparison of the two texts reveals that all the details enumerated in the short story (the majors, the love, and the billeting) take their place in the plot of *Three Sisters*. Thus, in accordance with the early Chekhov's description of May, in the play the military come to billet in the town of the three sisters. One of the soldiers, Vershinin, whose nickname is a "major in love," arrives in May to take command of a battery. By analogy, Andrey receives his nickname, a "professor in love," because of his romantic involvement with Natasha. Even the "Zodiac twins," the sign of May, are imitated by introducing into the plot the indivisible couple Fedotich and Rode.

The humorous toying with "Roman" tunes appears in another Chekhov early work, his comic playlet *Chaos in Rome*. Chekhov's interest in this subject is accounted for by his ironic attitude toward Slavophilic ideas that Moscow is fated to be "the third Rome."ⁱⁱⁱ In his playlet he actually ridicules that Russian tendency to imitate the ancient Roman society. In *Three Sisters* the apparent allusion to Rome forms Kulygin's speech on the occasion of Irina's name day.

K u l y g i n. The Romans were healthy because they knew how to work and how to rest; they had *mens sana in corpore sano*⁷ Their life was structured in accordance with certain rules. Our director says: the most important thing for any life is its form. . . . If something loses its form it is ended--and the same law spreads on our everyday's life, as well.(133)

Indeed, as Kulygin states, the Romans kept strictly to the established traditions and rituals. No action could be undertaken without consulting with the gods. According to Roman philosophy, the worlds of the dead, mortals, and immortals were strictly divided; each universe had its laws which established relationships between the worlds to avoid mutual interference. For instance, the dead could have entered the human's world only three times per year, the gods were subordinated as the heavenly, earthly, and subterranean.

Indisputably, the ancient Roman society praised in Kulygin's cheerful speech becomes a comic model for the universe of *Three Sisters*. Even some of the protagonists' names transparently convey symbolism of the Eternal City, Rome. For instance,

Chebtykin's patronymic name is "Romanovich," which in combination with his Russian first name, Ivan, implies Chekhov's irony toward the "Romanic" mood in Russian society.

The Roman "gene" is also hidden in Tuzenbach's last name, actually in his third last name. In his conversation with Irina, Tuzenbach mentions incidentally that he has a triple last name--Tuzenbach-Krone-Altshauer. In turn, the name, Altshauer, consists of two parts which are translated from German as *shauer*--thinker and *alte*--a name of ancient Romans and Greeks. This also matches Tuzenbach's "philosophizing,"ⁱⁱⁱ which will be discussed later in detail. For the moment, the very fact that some of the protagonists are named after "Rome" is important, since it gives one more opportunity to speculate about some other "Romanic" details in the text, such as the symbolism of the fire in the city (third act) as an allusion to the fire in Rome.

During all the historical crises there were two apocalyptic myths which always influenced the Roman's mind. The first one was linked to the mystic number 12 that symbolized the years of Roman existence, and the second one pertained to the myth of the Great Year during which Rome was predestined to be burned to ashes (the echo of the concept of cosmic rhythm ruling the world).

The idea of cosmic rhythms and cyclicity was quite popular in ancient Greek and Roman society. Plato, in his *Politician*, elaborated the concept of cosmic catastrophes and regressions which he explained as the double movement of the universe. According to Plato, God sometimes rules the universe Himself and other times He gives it freedom which, finally, causes the movement in the opposite direction. As a result, great changes appear in the universe, but after the catastrophe there begins a paradoxical revival of the world. Mircea Eliade writes:

Greece too knew the myth of the eternal return, and the Greek philosophers of the late period carried the conception of circular time to its furthest limits. To quote the perceptive words of H. C. Puech: "According to the celebrated Platonic definition, time, which is determined and measured by the revolution of the celestial spheres, is the moving image of unmoving eternity, which it imitates by revolving in a circle. Consequently all cosmic becoming, and, in the same manner, the duration of this world of generation and corruption in which we live, will progress in a circle or in accordance with an indefinite succession of cycles in the course of which the same reality is made, unmade, and remade in conformity with an immutable alternative. Not only is the same sum of existence preserved in it, with nothing being lost and nothing created, but in addition certain thinkers of declining antiquity--Pythagoreans, Stoics, Platonists--reached the point of admitting that within each of these cycles of duration, of these aiones, this aeva, the same situations are reproduced that have already been produced in previous cycles and will be reproduced in subsequent cycles--ad infinitum. No event is unique, occurs once and for all (. . .), but it has occurred, occurs, and will occur, perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every return of the cycle upon itself. Cosmic duration is repetition and anakuklosis, eternal return."

This passage seems to be important in regard to the third act of the play, where the fire becomes a nodal point. As Senelick notes, "the fire in Act Three is a *tour de force*; physical danger, mass hysteria and crowd movement, although kept off-stage, have forced the characters into their present situation, both topographically and emotionally."^{iv} Actually, the fire in the play relates to the ancient conception of the cosmic cycles, for it unites three cities: Rome, Moscow, and the city of three sisters. At the beginning of the third act Ferapont says: "In 1812, Moscow was burning, as well. My God! The Frenchmen were so surprised."

Ferapont's remark about the fire in Moscow is meant to build a symbolic bridge between the Sacred City, Rome, and Moscow (according to the popular Russian saying, "Moscow is the third Rome"). Moreover, Moscow is symbolically included in the city of the three sisters: Fedotic remarks that he bought the color pencils for Masha on Moscow Street.

Thus, a "changeless archetype" of the city becomes "repeated" in space and time, and the three cities are "bonded" by the same cataclysmic event. The great fire predetermines the fall of Rome, and likewise the fire in the third act precedes the "fall" of the sisters' city: in the fourth act, the army batteries leave the city, and the "fallen Empire" remains alone. Hence the plot is structured in accordance with the Roman Myth, and in general it may be interpreted as the "Rise and Fall" of a provincial Empire.

In mythology, Rome is a Holy City, a symbol of the center of the world--the axis and the main point of Creation. According to Eliade, the following features define the mythic Center of the World: "(a) a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; (b) this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld), etc."^v

Since the Center of the World belongs to the sacred reality, the reaching of the Sacred City is equal to initiation. Actually, the city of the three sisters has something mysterious in its location which definitely can be interpreted as a hardly reachable place. As Vershinin notes: "It's nice to live here. However, it's really strange that the train station is located twenty miles from here. . . And no one knows why it's so."

Such an abandoned geographical location that puzzles Chekhovian heroes is nothing else but a characteristic of the Sacred City that is surrounded by the sacred waters (the city of the sisters is surrounded by a river) and protected from the profane world by a "difficult way" (the batteries should leave the city by foot since no transportation can deliver them to the station).

The "difficult way" that leads to the Eternal City is an allegory for self-establishing--this is the way that leads one "through oneself to oneself." Similarly, the way that the sisters should pass through to achieve the desirable pertains rather to their internal changes. Since the three cities represent the same archetype, the sisters' dream about Moscow should become their spiritual movement toward themselves. Without deep self-analysis and an attempt to comprehend themselves, their escape to another city will remain merely a geographical replacement.

The city of the three sisters also resembles Plato's Ideal State. The critics point out the fact that the army in the play serves a nonmilitary purpose. Senelick notes that the soldiers "trained to fight while away their time philosophizing and playing the piano,

teaching gymnastics and reading the paper, carrying on backstairs love affairs and fighting duels."

Thus, the question arises naturally: is there need of an army in such a small city at all?

The necessity of the soldiers' presence in the play, their important role in the mythopoetic structure is revealed while referring to the description of Plato's Ideal State. In the *Republic* Plato describes two distinct classes, the craftsmen and the guardians. The best-trained guardians become gradually the rulers of the state and represent then the highest, elite class.

In the play, the soldiers are part of such a "highest society," the "elite" around which the intellectual world of the city is surrounded. As Masha says to Vershinin: "Maybe in some other places it is different, but in our city the soldiers are the most noble and well-mannered people."

Obviously, Plato's guardians are "prototypes" of Chekhovian soldiers who expand on the matter of life and death and are always willing to discuss any "philosophical" problems. Actually, their addiction to "philosophizing" imitates Plato's thought that the philosophic element might be part of the dominance in the state.

Plato insisted that "the human race will not be free of evils until either the stock of those who rightly and truly follow philosophy acquire political authority, or the class who have power in the cities be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers."

In regard to the protagonists' philosophical debates, the arguments between Vershinin and Tuzenbach seem to be a comic echo of Plato's and Aristotle's opposing philosophies. In general, the nature of Vershinin's and Tuzenbach's discussions comes down to the question of what is primary idea or matter.

The comedic "Aristotelians," Kulygin and Tuzenbach, adhere to a pragmatic view of life, they convey a materialistic philosophy in its vulgar interpretation. According to Aristotle, everything that exists is a unity of matter and form while Plato argues that forms (ideas) exist separately, in a different, ideal, world. The form in Plato exists eternally and separately from the particular things. To Aristotle, matter and form are the unity, and there is no "primary matter" as such, in other words, there is no matter without form.

Thus, Kulygin's statement that "whatever loses its shape is ended" is a comic echo of Aristotle's philosophy of form. Needless to say, in Kulygin's mouth this philosophy of form is transformed into a "philosophy" of the uniform. Vulgar materialism is also represented in Tuzenbach's monologue about the moving forces of life.

Actually, Tuzenbach's understanding of the world as a mechanism governed by laws of nature resembles Kulygin's assertions concerning the official society and the crucial role of rules. In his dialogue with Masha, Tuzenbach points out the mechanistic nature of life.

T u z e n b a c h. Birds of passage, cranes, for instance, fly and fly, and whatever thoughts, important or unimportant, wander in their heads, they will, nevertheless, fly without understanding where and why. They fly and will fly, whichever philosophers appear among them; and let them philosophize as they wish, as long as they fly. . .

Masha. But, still, what's the sense?

Tuzenbach. Sense. . . Look, it's snowing. What's the sense?

Unlike Masha, Tuzenbach sees the primary issue of life development in the formal circulation of the things, which keeps the universe in its mechanistic motion. Before the duel with Solyony he shares with Irina the following thoughts: [Look, here is a tree which has dried. Nevertheless, it rustles in the wind along with the others. Thus, it seems to me, that, even if I die, I will participate in life in one way or another.] The Baron's spiritless vulgar "philosophising" is sharpened here to the extreme. The absurdity of such a "philosophy" is ridiculed by Ragin, the main character of Chekhov's story *Ward #6*

Unconscious processes occurring in nature are even lower than human stupidity because stupidity appears as a manifestation of a sort of consciousness and will, while in the processes there is absolutely nothing. . . . To see your immortality in metabolism is as strange as prophesying a brilliant future to a case after its violin has broken and become useless.

Ironically, Tuzenbach, who cares mostly about the "case," becomes suddenly concerned with Irina's statement that her soul is like an expensive piano that is locked and the key is lost.

The "Platonic" view of the world is expressed by Vershinin. His addiction to philosophizing even in inappropriate situations makes this character really laughable. Waiting hopelessly for a cup of tea, he says to Tuzenbach: "What to do? If they don't give tea, let's philosophize, at least."

This protagonist seems to be such a "follower" of Plato's ideas that even his love for Masha is comically transformed into a "Platonic love." Falling in love with Masha, he becomes incredibly wordy, as if he experiences the real "Platonic" excitement, that "enthusiasm" which appears in Plato as a joining of "love" and "cognition."

Vershinin.

(Masha enters with a pillow and sits on the sofa.)

.However, in essence, what is the difference between what is now and what will be in the future! But time will go, and in two-three hundred years they will be terrified with our today's life and ridicule it, for anything that we have today will seem to them awkward, heavy, very uncomfortable and strange. Oh, what a life it will be, I guess, what a life! *(Laughs.)* Sorry I burst in philosophizing again. Let me continue, ladies and gentlemen. I terribly want to philosophize, I'm in such a mood.

(Pause.)

It seems, they all sleep. So, I'm saying: what a life it will be! You can only imagine. . . For instance, there are only three of you in the city, but in the next

generations there would be more and more like you, and the time will come, and everything will change in accordance with your understanding; they will live like you, and then you'll become obsolete, and there will come people better than you. . . (*Laughs.*) Today I'm in a special mood. I awfully want to live. . . (*Sings.*) All ages are submissive to love, its impulses are beneficial. . . (*Laughs.*)

M a s h a. Tram-tam-tam. . .

In this vast monologue one can find several allusions to Plato which mostly refer to the question of cyclicity and the existence of a changeless and perfect ideal world. Thus, Vershinin stresses the identity of the past and the present; according to his assertions, the world is imperfect but its changes are directed toward the goal of becoming perfect.

Vershinin's statement is actually a comic echo of Plato's thought that the imperfect material world is moving toward its established ideal form. Notably, Vershinin's remark regarding the relationships between the individual and the state is also in accordance with Plato, for whom the individual is prior to the state, and the state is based on the nature of the individual that dictates his needs to the state. When the sisters complain that their city does not need their skills, Vershinin tries to assure them that there is a great need for people like them in the cities, and this will dictate the appearance of new educated generations in the state. Internal harmony rules the politics in Plato's ideal State, including the constitution and forms of government; and likewise the internal harmony of the sisters, their intelligence and education, Vershinin believes, will change the world they inhabit.

M a s h a. In this city it is a useless luxury to know three languages. Not even a luxury but a sort of useless appendage, such as sixth finger. We know a lot of extras.

V e r s h i n i n. After all! (*Laughs.*) You know a lot of extras! I think, there is not and there cannot be such a boring and dismal city where there wouldn't be any need for a smart and educated man. Suppose, that among hundreds of thousands of population of this city--of course, such backward and rough as ours--there are only three like you. Obviously, you are unable to conquer the dark mass that surrounds you; during your life you would gradually yield and get lost in a crowd of many thousands; life will suppress you; however you won't disappear, nor will your life be gone with no effect; after you, there will appear maybe six, then twelve people like you, and so on, and it will continue until your followers become a majority.

In his monologue Vershinin uses "geometrical progression" to "prove" his conclusions about the appearance of some new enlightened generation in the city. This also comically alludes to Plato's philosophy of numbers which, meanwhile, may explain the symbolism of number 3 in regard to the sisters.

Three classes of Plato's state correspond to three parts of the soul--reason, spirit, and appetite--which Plato describes in the *Republic*. The appetite and the spirit belong to the irrational realm of the soul, while reason is its rational part that determines and rules passions. The human soul can achieve a real peace only through the rational part that takes care of order and controls the spirit and appetites. In the states, the appetites

correspond to the lowest class, the artisans or craftsmen, while the spirit is embodied by the guardians. Accordingly, the rational part--the reason--is incarnated by the rulers.

In *Three Sisters* the society is also divided in three parts: Natasha, Protopopov, and Kulygin--the "simple people"--represent the Platonic lowest class that is an analog to the appetites (needless to say, the "appetites" of such a heroine as Natasha cause wild changes in the family); the soldiers, along with Andrey, are an imitation of Platonic guardians; Vershinin, Tuzenbach, and the sisters are comic representations of the Platonic "elite."

It should be mentioned here the symbolism of music and gymnastics in regard to Plato's concept of the State. Thus, Andrey plays the violin in the first act; Rode, entering the house, says that he teaches gymnastics in a high school. In *The Republic*, Plato discusses the importance of music and gymnastics. "After music comes gymnastics. . . . And, when a man allows music to play upon him and to pour into his soul . . . if he carries on the softening and soothing process, in the next stage he begins to melt and waste, until he has wasted away his spirit and cut out the sinews of his soul; and he becomes a feeble warrior."

The metaphor of the wasted spirit is the best for Andrey Prozorov, who allows his "music" (his feelings toward his aggressive fiancée, Natasha) play upon him which gradually leads this character to degeneration. He becomes a feeble husband and worthless brother, and at the end of the play is melted as an individual.

Although Rode is a minor character, his presence on the stage also symbolizes (to a certain degree) Plato's idea that the two arts, music and gymnastics, if split in a training of body and a training of soul, become worthless. "And so in gymnastics, if a man takes violent exercise . . . if he does nothing else, and holds no converse with the Muses, does not even that intelligence which there may be in him . . . grow feeble . . . his mind never waking up . . . and his senses not being purged of their mists?"

Needless to say, Fedotkin and Rode represent that cheerful primitive spirit dwelling in a healthy body which mind never wakes up. In truth, they are a good illustration of Kulygin's "Romans" who "had *mens sana in corpore sano*."

In Plato's State both music and gymnastics are designed for the improvement of the soul. When describing the movement of soul, Plato uses a metaphor of a charioteer and horses. In *Phaedrus* he creates the image of a charioteer who drives two horses moving in opposite directions. The passions or appetites are linked to an illusory world, the world of fantasy that could deceive a man, give him false pleasures, and drive him away from genuine happiness. Only the rational part which is capable of distinguishing between the genuine and the false, between the illusory and the real, can drive the "chariot" to true happiness.

Disorder and unhappiness, according to Plato, are the result of man's confusion with the real and the illusory. The good charioteer knows how to rule the "bad horses," the appetites. In the play, the idea of illusory happiness grows through the entire action. The motif of illusory existence occurs first in a remark of Irina.

In the first act Irina exclaims: "You say: life is beautiful. Well, but if we just imagine this!" This remark is developed further in Chebutukin's monologue: "*C h e b u t y k i n*. You just imagine it. . . There's nothing in the world, we don't exist, and it only seems that we exist."

Presumably, Chekhovian "triad" imitates Platonic soul functioning in complete disorder. Thus, sensitive Irina embodies the spirited part of the soul: she speaks of the necessity of inspired labor, and her biggest frustration is that the work she is doing lacks poetry and inspiration.

Masha seems to be an embodiment of the low part of soul, which pertains to passions. Indeed, this heroine is passionate and rough; her speech is "colored" by "strong" expressions, such as: what the hell damned life, and the like. She behaves crudely at Irina's party, speaking like a peasant:

M a s h a (tapping her plate with the fork). I'll drink a small glass of wine! Ya-hoo, my sweet life, damn it all!

K u l y g i n. Your behavior is C minus.

Masha has a wild, unruly temper and does not even try to control herself when she is in a bad mood. Arguing with Anfisa, she behaves like despotic Natasha. Losing her temper, she shouts at the old nanny: "Leave me alone! You bother me, leave me in peace. . . I'm sick of you, old woman!"

While Irina and Masha imitate the irrational parts of the Platonic soul, Olga, as the older sister, is a comic version of the rational part. Olga is successful in her career, and later she is offered a position as a director of a high school, which makes this heroine a real "ruler" in the official world. However, in her own family she is unable to become a "general." Her status as the oldest sister requires her to "govern" her family, but all her attempts to undertake anything to rescue the family are in vain--the "bad horses" gallop in opposite directions, and the family, actually, falls apart.

Thus the play ends with complete disorder in the Prozorov family: Irina is going to leave the city, Olga is not the hostess of the house anymore, Masha is terribly wounded by her feelings toward Vershinin who abandons her, and Andrey becomes alienated from his sisters. In analyzing Andrey's character, Richard Peace writes the following:

Another undisclosed allusion seems to lie behind Andrey's indifference to the fate of the town; for Irina presents him almost as a second Nero, fiddling while Rome burns. . . The theme of "saving the town" lurks behind another literary reference; for when Irina banishes Solyony from the room, he vents his annoyance against Tuzenbach by quoting the final lines of a Krylov fable: "The thought could be further explained but I fear to tease the geese." The quotation is from *The Geese*, and the "thought" when "further explained" points to the foolishness of claiming respect on the strength of the deeds of one's ancestors: "But our ancestors saved Rome." "Just so, but what have you done like that?" The stupidity of geese is proverbial (one thinks of Marina's comments in *Uncle Vanya*). At the same time Solyony's innuendo casts a slur on the baron's social position as well as on his practical abilities, and, as with Andrey's fiddling, it suggests, yet again, an inability to save the "eternal city."^{vi}

This conclusion of Chekhov's "geese" needs to be reformulated here in regard to the matter of comedy in the play. When compared to the mythic geese, Krylov's "geese" reveal their local importance and indisputably weak potentiality. Similarly, Roman heroes and Chekhovian protagonists, despite their resemblance, possess quite different potential. The comparison to Nero is not completely accurate; the characters cannot be judged exclusively by their outward appearance and seemingly similar behavior--their different weight should be taken into account, as well. Thus, if Andrey can be compared to Nero, he might be perceived only as Nero's comic counterpart.

THE MUSE OF COMEDY AND THE CALENDAR MYTH

Andrey marries Natasha, the most ridiculous figure in the city. By this strange marriage he breaks the last hope his sisters have for him. In criticism, Natasha's character is analyzed unequivocally: this heroine is considered as a symbol of banality and aggressiveness. However, new sides of this character are opened when referring to its mythopoetic structure.

On the mythopoetic level Natasha is a personification of the Muse of Comedy. She is the heroine whose name, appearance, and functioning link directly to the myth of fertility, blossoming, and merriment. Her appearance in the first act is accomplished with laughter that follows this heroine as a train. The protagonists poke fun constantly at Natasha, four times the explosion of loud laughter shakes the dining room; and, actually, one can admit that with the entrance of this funny provincial heroine the entire action is transformed into farce.

At the party Natasha appears dressed like a "clown"; her tasteless and motley dress reminds one of a costume, and her high self-evaluation in front of the mirror becomes real clownery. Casting a cursory glance at herself, Natasha pronounces with satisfaction: "It seems, my hairstyle is O.K." Then Irina comes and Natasha congratulates her with an inappropriately emotional and prolonged kiss.

All this is intended to create a comedic atmosphere. "Dramatically the play has an amorphous shape that does not make for clear definition,"^{vii} Caryl Brahms states. Indeed, without having a unified vision of the colorful episodes designing the plot, one will be puzzled trying to gather the pieces into an integrated picture. The mythopoetic analysis of the play helps one to transform the seemingly "amorphous shape" into a well-structured building with a lucid design.

First and foremost, Natasha's characteristics serve as symbolic details pertaining to mythology. Let us analyze the stage direction describing Natasha's appearance on the stage.

Natalia Ivanovna has entered; she is in a pink dress with a green belt..

Pink and green are Natasha's main colors; laughter is Natasha's main attribute. As an instigator of the common mirth (in the first act she constantly evokes laughter and arouses jocular mood in the other protagonists), this character is an allusion to the Muse of comedy. Even her tasteless dress, if considered as a costume, loses the notion of vulgarity and attains a symbolic meaning: the Muse of Comedy and Blooming wears green and pink, the colors which signify spring and blossoming.

In accordance with this, Natasha's given name, Natalia, can be likely interpreted as derived from Talia--the Greek name of the Muse of Comedy. Also, the goddess of spring, Tallo, can be mentioned in this connection. *Tallo* in Latin means "I am blooming, I am blossoming"; both Talia and Tallo pertain to spring and fertile festivities--the time when carnivals first appeared. In Greek mythology, both Muses are often joined into one because of their identical nature. Significantly, names of Greek Muses are encountered on the pages of Chekhov's early works, and the Muse of Comedy is among them.^{viii}

The main accessory of the Muse of Comedy is her ivy garland, the detail that is imitated in Natasha's dress--namely, her "tasteless" green belt. Unlike her "namesake," Talia, Natalia wears the "garland" on her waist, which suggests a jocular play on words

regarding her name: in Russian "on waist" is *na talii*. It was really in Chekhov's spirit to play with the meanings of his protagonists' names. For instance, in his humorous short story *My "She"* Chekhov uses the following associations while describing the sound of his heroine's name: "Do you want to know her name? Well. . . It's poetic and sounds like Lenny, Liz, Nussy. . . Her name is-- Laziness. (11) In the same manner Astrov's name is played up in *Uncle Vanya*: Serebryakov says angrily that Astrov understands about medicine as much as he, Serebryakov, does about astronomy. Actually, one can find numerous analogous examples spilled in Chekhovian works which attest to Chekhov's love of using his protagonists' names for good effect.

Chekhovian "Muse of Comedy," Natalia, should be considered in connection to Shrovetide, the event that structures the second act. Shrovetide is a celebration of the end of winter, which is accompanied by folk festivals. In the Roman Catholic church Shrovetide is the beginning of Lent.^{ix} Most activities are tied to Shrove Tuesday (which precedes Ash Wednesday), which is usually the date for the beginning of spring. Many Shrovetide customs remain popular, such as eating pancakes, having one's fortune told, and so on. During this celebration people ride horses (*troyka*) and watch funny performances with a bear--one of the most important figures in Russian Shrovetide (*Maslenitsa*).

In the play, these essential Shrovetide attributes, including the "bear" and the fire, relate naturally to Natasha. Before this heroine appears, Masha says that Natasha will likely get married to Protopopov, a County Council man.

M a s h a. Oh, how she is dressed! It's not awkward or unstylish but just tasteless. Some strange, bright, a bit yellow skirt with such a tasteless fringe and a red blouse. And her cheeks are washed so clean! Andrey is not in love with her--I don't even think about it, he has his taste; he just teases us, just fools around. I heard yesterday that she is going to be married to Protopopov, the County Council man. It's very good. . ."

This offstage personage, Protopopov, is also mentioned in another connection: he sends a cake to congratulate Irina on her name day which arouses Masha's negative reaction. When the servant Anfisa brings the cake to the sitting room, Masha says unpleasantly: "I do not like Protopopov, this Mikhail Potapych or Ivanych." "Mikhail Potapych" or "Mikhail Ivanych" were the nicknames for the bear in Old Russia. They had been used in folklore, fairy tales, and even now they still keep their primary notion. Besides, Protopopov's last name also relates to the image of a bear, for this animal has another nickname, the "woody bishop," which is a synonym for *protopop* ("archpriest"). Some translators prefer to substitute this name (because it is meaningless to the foreign reader) for its real notion. For instance, Michael Frayn translates Masha's remark about Protopopov as the following: "M a s h a. I don't like that Protopopov man. There's something about him that reminds me of a bear. He shouldn't have been invited."

The mentioning of Protopopov occurs in connection to Soleny's joke that pertains to the "bear topic," as well: "Before he had any reaction a bear grasped him." After that Anfisa enters with a cake from Protopopov. Hence, Soleny's joke predisposes the "appearance" of a bear-like "creature," Protopopov, who later becomes Natasha's secret lover.

In the mythopoetic context, Natasha's strange relationships with the "bear" becomes a recognizable pattern of *Maslenitsa's* merriments. As an "incarnation" of the Muse of comedian cults, Natasha should have a relationship with the bear who is a permanent figure at carnival feasts, especially on *Maslenitsa*.

On *Maslenitsa* the mummers often used the mask of a bear, a symbol of power and hypersexuality, and also took a real bear dancing and gave performances during the Shrovetide festivals. In the second act the guests come to the sisters' house to celebrate Shrovetide; however, their expectations of spending a cheerful time together are unexpectedly broken because of Natasha's sudden decision not to allow the mummers to enter the house.

The reason for such a decision (as Natasha tries to present it) is her son's Bobik's flu. Nevertheless, after the guests leave, Natasha runs immediately out of house to take a ride on a *troyka* with Protopopov. At the mythopoetic level, the celebration of Shrovetide, Natasha's refusal to let in mummers, as well as her frivolous "escape" with the "bear" Protopopov have their hidden symbolism.

As an imitation of the Muse of Comedy, Natasha cannot be a spectator of the festive performance; she is the one who has to instigate the carnival fire herself. She forbids the mummers to enter her house; expressing her "majestic" will, she cancels the celebration that she did not "direct" and starts her own, outside of the house. As it should be with the Muse of Comedy, she is accompanied by the *troyka* and the "bear," the main attributes of Russian public merriment.

Another important detail pertains to the symbolism of fire. In the opening of the second act Natasha walks with a candle around the house, seeking a fire. Obviously, in Natasha's hand the simple candle becomes a symbol of the Shrovetide torch and is tantamount to a sparkling scepter in a hand of the Shrovetide tzarina.

N a t a s h a. What are you doing, Andrey? Are you reading? That's nothing, I'm just asking. . . (*Walks, opens another door and, having looked in there, closes the door.*) Is there any fire? . . .

A n d r e y (*enters with a book in a hand*). What's happening, Natasha?

N a t a s h a. I wonder if the candles are lit. . . Now it's *Maslenitsa*, the servants are too excited, you should watch and watch them to be sure that everything is all right.

Natasha seems to be concerned about the servants' carelessness during Shrovetide week, which could cause a fire in the house. Although Natasha pretends to fulfill thoroughly her domestic duties, her false concerns about sick Bobik, whom she promptly leaves for a "ride" with Protopopov, make her explanation about the servants questionable, as well.

Presumably, the scene with the candle also has its hidden symbolism. The fire is the most important attribute of *Maslenitsa*, hence, Natalia, as a "queen" of comedian cults, wants to "preserve" all "rights" on "owning" it herself. In the context of ritual, Natasha takes the part of the "incendiary." She acts in accordance with Slavic Shrovetide cults, her steps toward "arson" are in the same strict succession that the cult demands: first, she prepares everything for the merrymaking (first act), then she leaves with the

"bear" (second act), and at the end of "carnival" she starts the Shrovetide fire that spreads all over the city (third act).

Thus, if in the second act Natalia is represented as a bearer of fire, in the third act she is "accused" of being an incendiary. In the third act the real fire appears in the city which is associated with Natasha, as well.

N a t a s h a with a candle in her hand walks through the stage from the right door into the left door.

M a s h a (sits down). She's walking in such a manner as if she is an incendiary.

Masha's remark makes a symbolic "bridge" between the Shrovetide in the second act and the fire in the third. The real fire becomes an echo of Shrovetide ritual fire and actually attains the features of the "flammable" feast. The fire in the third act does not seem to be dangerous and crucial. On the contrary, the protagonists behave cheerfully as if the fire were Shrovetide's harmless fire. Against any expectations and common sense, they seem to be surprisingly excited; they laugh, dance, make jokes, and are not concerned about the fire in the city. Conversely, the second act, which is supposed to convey the cheerful atmosphere of Maslenitsa, is completely built on the dull "philosophical" conversations and protagonists' depressive complaints.

At the beginning of the third act, Anfisa and Olga feel sorry about people suffering from the fire. Olga tells about Fedotic with compassion: "Poor Fedotic, he lost everything in the fire, nothing has remained." However, when Fedotic appears singing and dancing this wrong impression is completely changed.

(F e d o t i c enters.)

F e d o t i c (dances). I'm burned, I'm burned! Completely!

(Laughter.)

I r i n a. What kind of joke is this? Did you lose everything in the fire?

F e d o t i c (laughs). Everything. Nothing has remained. My guitar has burned, and my picture has burned, and all my letters.

Fedotic's seemingly inappropriate behavior is actually in full accordance with *Maslenitsa's* rules. Shrovetide is a personification of winter, which in different cultures is represented by a straw man, straw woman, or bear. At the height of the merriment, people take the straw scarecrow of Shrovetide and throw it into a fire. This action is accompanied by ritual games, songs, and public merriment. No one is hurt, nothing is damaged during the feast.

The Shrovetide fire is not harmful, it does not burn the living creatures but their substitutes--the men of straw. In Slavic carnival cults feminine and masculine hypostatized of the winter are represented by Maslenitsa, Kostroma, Yarilo; Bulgarian German; Polish Mara; and so forth. The man of straw is a participant of the carnival and

Shrovetide merrymaking. People take them for a ride on the *troyka* and have fun, dancing with it.

At the end of Shrovetide week they have a funeral for the straw man and burn it on the top of a hill as a symbol of the end of the winter. The funeral is followed by ritual laughter, jokes, processions of mummers, and calls for the spring. In some countries there is a popular custom to provide an "abandoned bride" or "groom" of the "dead" Shrovetide. The crying "fiancee" follows the "coffin" where the Shrovetide lies which encourages the public to make funny jokes, sing the ritual songs, and laugh.

In the play, the role of the burned equivalent of a man is played by Fedotich's photograph, a ritual substitution for a human sacrifice. The stage directions of the third act suggest mirthful actions, such as drinking, dancing, making jokes, and laughing. Laughter appears in this act twelve times and along with dances and protagonists' singing provides special carnival atmosphere.

The fire seems to inspire the protagonists, giving them new forces and energy. As a ritual fire it demands theatricalization and wild enacting supplied by the crowd and mummers. Even the offstage personages, the sisters Kolotilin who are made homeless by the fire, in the context of *Maslenitsa* are mummers--actually, their last name takes part of their mask. As Olga says to Anfisa, the Kolotilin sisters are staying under the stairway and waiting for the things which Anfisa will carry down for them. "Kolotilin" is a meaningful last name that is derived from old Russian verb *kolotit'sa* which means "to knock at the door," "to ask for help," "to live by begging." Hence, young ladies Kolotilin function in accordance with their last name--they stay under the stairway and ask for help.

Also Chebutykin's name can be interpreted as a mask of a drinker, for it is derived from the verbs with the notion of shaking (xt,ehf[yenmcz6 xt,enrfnm). As a matter of fact, this protagonist is addicted to alcohol, and in the third act he has a drinking bout.

Another "masker," Solyony, is a real farcical figure who always tries to play the role of a romantic hero. As Morson states, "because histrionics is Chekhov's central theme, his plays rely to a great extent on metatheatrical devices. . . . That is, he creates characters who would be at home in one genre but places them in the world of another. So Don Quixote, Emma Bovary, and Ilya Ilych Oblomov become comic when forced to live in a realistic world rather than the chivalric adventure story, the romantic novel, or the idyll of which they dream."^x

Solyony is a typical Chekhovian "masker," the histrionic figure, a hero of Chekhov's short stories, such as *The Mummers*, *On Christmas-tide*, and so on. In a letter to Suvorin, in 1896, Chekhov wrote about his meeting with someone called Duchinsky during his journey to Sakhalin. "On Sakhalin I met a certain Duchinsky, the post officer's, Skalkovsky's, relative; he wrote poetry and prose. He created 'Sakhalino'--a parody to 'Borodino'; he always carried in his pocket a big pistol and had a severe addiction to alcohol. It was a Sakhalin 'Lermontov'" (*Pisma*, 6:246).

The description of Duchinsky reminds one a great deal of Soleny, who says of himself: "I have Lermontov's temper. (*Quietly*.) I even look a bit like Lermontov . . . as they say. . .". Presumably, Duchinsky served as a prototype for Solyony.

Although Solyony behaves as a typical "masker," he, nevertheless, is the only protagonist who provides real harm. As Richard Peace notes, this character behaves so aggressively that he even spoils the celebration of *Maslenitsa* by making his terrifying

jokes. Peace writes about the second act: "it is a verbal attack on the forces hostile to *Maslenitsa* in the play, but at the same time, through the grisly image of the frying pan it contrives to pervert the values of Shrove-tide itself. It is worthy of note that the arguments picked by Solyony throughout this act are all in some sense linked to eating and drinking and as such are a series of discordant notes in the Shrove-tide theme."^{xi}

True, through his frightening remark Solyony "transforms" Natasha's child into a Shrovetide "pancake" that is the main food of the feast. This seems to be Solyony's first "attempt" to "manipulate" the real world as if it were a part of the festival universe. The second, genuinely sinister "attempt" occurs in the fourth act in the duel with Tuzenbach started by Solyony.

The duel between the Baron and Solyony is designed in such a way that it arouses associations with Shrovetide customs. Two details are quite remarkable: the duel takes place near the *theater*, and Tuzenbach appears there in a *straw hat*. The symbolism of the place for the duel suggests histrionics. Significantly, one of the duelists, Solyony, enacts Lermontov, which emphasizes even more the idea of a performance.

Thus, while taking the uniform off, the Baron, in accordance with Kulygin's "theory" becomes shapeless, which should lead him to his tragic end. At the same time, in the context of Shrovetide, Tuzenbach wearing a straw hat attains a new "shape": the Baron's appearance in a straw hat alludes to a straw man that should be burned in the Shrovetide fire. Unfortunately, in accordance with carnival rules this new "shape" is predetermined for destruction. As the matter of fact, the Baron is killed by a fire which is a gun fire.

Hence, wearing his straw hat, the Baron acquires the features of the Shrovetide straw man and "shares" its fate. Correspondingly, Irina becomes a ritual "abandoned bride" who must pretend to be crying about her "burned" groom. Indeed, Irina does not really mourn about her dead fiance. After receiving the shocking news she remains emotionally stable: she is planning her future as if Tuzenbach's death were an unimportant event.

The same can be said about all the protagonists who heard the news about Tuzenbach's death. Significantly, none of them discusses the Baron's death: conversely, they admit cheerfully the fact that life goes on. Also quite optimistic music serves as a background of their conversations. Such an "insensitivity" of the protagonists and the general atmosphere that seems to be inappropriate for the tragic denouement has a simple explanation when seen through the Shrovetide tradition: the death of the straw man symbolizes the continuation of life and the rehabilitation of the processes of fertility and blossoming which have been stopped by the wintry conditions.

C h e b u t y k i n. The Baron has been killed in the duel.

I r i n a. I knew it, I knew it. . .

C h e b u t y k i n. (*Sings silently.*) Ta-ra-ra-boombiya. . . Never mind!

M a s h a. we'll be alone to start our life from the beginning. We must live. . .
We must live. . .

I r i n a. Time will come, and every one will know why it happens to us, why we suffer, no mysteries in the future, but now we must live... we must work, just work!

O l g a (embraces both sisters.) The music plays so cheerfully, so enthusiastically, and it evokes one's will to live! Oh, my God! . . . Oh, dear sisters, our life has not been finished yet. We'll live!

One can observe exactly the same reaction at the beginning of the play when Olga recollects the same day last year when their father died: the drama happened but life goes on.

O l g a. Our father died a year ago, exactly on this day, on May fifth, on your name day, Irina. It was very cold and snowing. I thought I wouldn't make it; you lay unconscious, as if you were dead. However, the year's gone, and we speak about it easily, you are in a white dress, and your face is shining.

Two deaths mentioned (not shown!) in the beginning and in the end of the play allude to the dying and reviving universe, though in a comic sense--as *ad infinitum*. Actually, the Calendar Myth that represents seasonal change,^{xii} as well as the Roman Myth are integrated in the mytholiterary continuum of the play through the meta-structure that is similar to the mythic Tree of Life.

THE TREE OF LIFE

Some of the protagonists' names are even derived from the notion of the tree. Thus, the names of Vershinin and Krone (the second name of Tuzenbach) bear the notion of the crown. Evidently, the name Vershinin is derived from the Russian *vershina* (the top, the crown); "Krone" is a German word for the crown (Russian *vershina*).

Hence on the structural level two protagonists form two "crowns" of the same "trunk." Masha and Irina represent two "branches" symbolizing opposite sides of the being: turbulence and tranquillity. All the deadly events in the play are tied with Irina whose radiant appearance deludes some critics. Significantly, the image of death "follows" this heroine from the beginning of the action right to its end: her name day is also the day of her father's death; her fiance, Tuzenbach, is killed in the duel; her "admirer," Chebutykin, loves Irina because of her resemblance to her dead mother. Also, Irina's name in Greek means "tranquil," which also is an allusion to eternal tranquillity.

Tamarli makes interesting observations on the symbolism of white color in Chekhov's plays in regard to the notion of death.

East Slavs used white funeral cloths for their deceased. In accordance with the old custom, the cloths were made from a new white linen. In folklore white color symbolizes oblivion and shroud. In the folk-theater the personification of death used to wear white cloth. In Russian literature white color was used as a symbol of death and mourning. In *Three Sisters* white color is multifunctional. . . . White color introduces a theme of youth, increases one's cheerful appreciation of a sunny day. . . . However, the white color has already entered into a chain 'death-cold-fainting

spell'; it has already acquired a potential of the traditional symbol. Therefore it signals that the dream will die and the hope will not be realized.^{xiii}

However, in accordance with the calendar notion of death, the symbol of mortality is linked to reviving virtue of life, to changes which are inherent both in "death" and "rebirth" of nature. Actually, not only "the first half of the play . . . is fostered by particular seasonal events."^{xiv} As one can see, the four acts are structured around the same festive event that links the matter of fertility and mirth.

From this point of view, the first act that is held in May represents the May festival known as "Tree of May." This festival is an extension of Shrovetide, for it is endowed with the same idea of fertility. May the first was the day when the Romans made their sacrifices to the goddess of fertility, Maya, mentioned also in Chekhov's short story *About March*. . . . This custom of setting up the Tree of May is still a very popular agricultural custom in modern Europe.

In spring or early summer or even on Midsummer Day, it was and still is in many parts of Europe the custom to go out to the woods, cut down a tree and bring it into the village, where it is set up amid general rejoicing; or the people cut branches in the woods, and fasten them on every house. The intention of these customs is to bring home to the village, and to each house, the blessings which the tree-spirit has in its power to bestow. . . . On the Thursday before Whitsunday the Russian villagers go out into the woods, sing songs, weave garlands, and cut down a young birch-tree, which they dress up in woman's clothes, or adorn with many-colored shreds and ribbons. After that comes a feast. . . . Often the marriage of the spirit of vegetation in spring, though not directly represented, is implied by naming the human representative of spirit, "the Bride," and dressing her in wedding attire.^{xv}

In the carnival context, *Maslenitsa* in the second act is actually the continuation of the same fertile ritual represented latently in the first act. In accordance with the symbolism, the fire in the third act becomes an echo of the Shrovetide fire. Finally, Act IV structured around the duel is, in accordance with the Shrovetide poetics, also a continuation of the agricultural festival with the "burning" of the "straw man."

The protagonists are divided into two groups in accordance with their relationships to the sisters. Thus, Irina's "branch" is made by the killed Tuzenbach (the "crown"), the "killer" Solyony, the deadly drunk Chebutykin, the "burned" Fedotik and Rode; Masha's "branch" includes Kulygin and Vershinin. The third sister, Olga, forms the trunk of "The Tree."

In mythology, the middle of The Tree of Life is usually occupied by a "cultural hero"; the top (the crown) is structured by the "elite" while the bottom (the root) is taken by the low strata. In the play, the "cultural hero" is imitated by the intelligent Andrey who never became a professor. The fertile forces of "The Tree" (the bottom) are embodied by the protagonists of the "low" strata, such as "fecund" Natasha, "bear" Protopopov, and nanny Anfisa. Even Andrey sometimes takes a "risk" of becoming a "bear" and moving to the "bottom": in the fourth act Natasha calls her husband Andrey "a

bear," making him equal to her lover Protopopov: "Don't make a noise, Sofia has already slept. You are a bear."

Indeed, both men fulfill the same function toward Natasha, whose animal, brutal nature is characterized explicitly by Andrey:

A n d r e y. My wife is my wife. She is honest, fair, even kind, but still there is something in her that lowers her to the level of a certain petty, blind and brute animal. Certainly, she isn't a human being.

Although in act one Irina is meant to be the heroine of the day,^{xvi} because of her name day party, the appearance of a minor guest, Natasha, rearranges the party in such a way that everything gravitates around this ridiculous figure. Natasha herself becomes a center of the merriment, which suggests that she imitates the ritual "May Bride."

In the connection to May fertility rituals, Natasha's "second" nature as the goddess of blooming, Tallo, is revealed. Hence, the goddess of fertility, Maya, is replaced in the play by Tallo, another Roman goddess of blooming. However, this replacement corresponds to the weakening of potential of fertile forces since the sacred attribute of Maya, the mighty Tree of May, is replaced by the attribute of Tallo/Talia, the ivy. Significantly, Natasha, after becoming a mistress of the estate, is willing to plant the flowers instead of the fir trees growing in the park. Thus, in Chekhovian paradigm, The Tree is replaced by flowers, which changes the potential of the protagonists' world.

In regard to nanny Anfisa, the struggle between Natasha and the old helpless nanny seems to be nonsense. However, on the mythopoetic level this quarrel indicates the vegetative "struggle" for planting the "roots" for a new "family tree." Anfisa, as a nanny, is an incarnation of the family memory; she keeps the old traditions of the house and is a symbol of the family tree, while Natasha is willing to cut off the Prozorov roots to plant her own, which are actually the roots of a weed. Besides, Anfisa's name means "the blooming," which makes this minor character a real rival of "the blossoming" Natalia. Two "vegetable" characters cross their "swords" in the third act in a desire to thrive with no hindrance. In this particular struggle Natasha becomes a winner because of her extremely aggressive nature that in the context of "vegetable" allegory is a nature of the weed.

The metaphor of the weed appears in connection with Natasha at the beginning of the first act when the sisters complain about the brutality of daily life. Irina says that real life is like a weed that takes the living forces from the sisters. After her remark Natasha enters. This "deity of weeds," having "invaded" the house, "thrives" aggressively all over its rooms, supplanting its legitimate hosts with her roots--her children. Thus, "The Tree" becomes eaten by the "weed" which causes its deterioration: it finally becomes a gigantic "Weed of Life." Not only the "crowns" but also the "branches" of this comic "weedy Tree" are disintegrated: husband and wife, bride and groom have no common values, and at the end the whole structure turns into chaos.

ⁱ. Translated by John Holman from Chekhov, *PSSiP, Sochineniya*, vol. III, pp. 191-192.

ⁱⁱ. Nina Toumanova, *Anton Chekhov: The Voice of Twilight Russia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

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- ⁱⁱⁱ. In his letters as well as in his works, Chekhov often used a noun "philosophising" (*filosofstvovaniye*) instead of 'philosophy' (*filosofiya*) in regard to Russian intelligentsia, which signified his irony toward a certain category of Russians. See also Gordon McVay, *Chekhov's Three Sisters* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995), pp. 57-58.
- ^{iv}. Senelick, *Anton Chekhov*, pp. 113-114.
- ^v. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Garland, 1985), p. 37.
- ^{vi}. Peace, *Chekhov: A Study of the Four Major Plays*, p. 111.
- ^{vii}. Brahms, *Reflections in a Lake: A Study of Chekhov's Four Greatest Plays*, p. 79.
- ^{viii}. See "Sovremennye molitvy" in A. P. Chekhov, *PSSiP, Sochineniya*, vol. II, p. 40.
- ^{ix}. Elsa Enajarvi-Haavio, *The Finnish Shrovetide* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1954), p. 7.
- ^x. Morson, "Uncle Vanya as Prosaic Metadrama," in *Reading Chekhov's Text*, ed. Robert Louis Jackson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 215.
- ^{xi}. Peace, *Chekhov: A Study of the Four Major Plays*, p. 110.
- ^{xii}. About poetics of the seasons in Chekhov's works, see Karl D. Kramer, "Chekhov and the Seasons," in *Chekhov's Art of Writing: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Columbus, OH: Slavica), pp. 68-81.
- ^{xiii}. Translated from G. I. Tamarli, *Poetika dramaturgii A.P. Chekhova* (Rostov-on-Don: Iz-vo Rostovskogo Universiteta, 1993), pp. 65-66.
- ^{xiv}. McVay, *Chekhov's Three Sisters*, p. 69.
- ^{xv}. Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion*, pp. 121, 135.
- ^{xvi}. Senelick, *Anton Chekhov*, pp. 112-113.