

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

CHEKHOV SHORT STORIES

Coordinators: Lesley Herrmann and Ruth Mackaman

Anton Chekhov is the father of the modern short story; volumes have been written about what it means to be a "chekhovian" writer. George Saunders is a writer, teacher and critic who has taught courses in creative writing and the Russian short story for more than 20 years at Syracuse University. In his book, *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life*, he reveals the nuts and bolts of a good short story. In this six-week study group we will sample Chekhov's short stories, using Saunders as a guide to help us identify the elements of a chekhovian short story, and what makes it great.

We will focus on the techniques, themes and topics. We will look at a few examples selected by study group participants of other writers considered to be chekhovian and see how they hold up against the master.

Lesley Herrmann and **Ruth Mackaman** have co-coordinated *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* and love Russian literature.

Type of Study Group: Presentation followed by discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services

A Swim in a Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life by George Saunders, (Random House);

Additional short stories will be sent by email.

We read about 50 pages per week.

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Introduction to Saunders, Chekhov and "In the Cart"

READING:

"Love Letter" by George Saunders

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/04/06/love-letter>

A Swim in the Pond in the Rain: "We Begin" and "In the Cart" (pp. 3-62)

QUESTIONS:

Does this experience change Marya? Has our opinion of her changed?

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What purpose does her encounter with Hanov, the handsome wealthy landowner, serve? Chekhov is known for his “zero” endings. What did you think about this ending? Is it gratifying?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: “The Darling”

READING:

A Swim in the Pond in the Rain: “The Darling” (pp.119-164);
“Chekhov’s Intent in The Darling” by Leo Tolstoy (by email)

QUESTIONS:

Why does Saunders call “The Darling” a “pattern story”? Tolstoy thought this was a story about women. Do you agree? Olenka, the heroine, has become a kind of archetype. In what way is she an archetype?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: “About Love Trilogy”

READING:

A Swim in the Pond in the Rain: “Gooseberries” (pp. 311-348); “The Man in a Case”; “About Love”

QUESTIONS:

What is the point of view in the first paragraph? How does it change?
What is the symbolism of gooseberries, the rain and the pipe? How does “Gooseberries” show Chekhov’s idea of happiness and sadness?

WEEK 4: Female Protagonists

WEEK 5: Mature Chekhov short stories

WEEK 6: Chekovian stories selected by study group members. Participants are invited to bring a short story to the study group for discussion.