

Chekhov's gun is when you have something conspicuously introduced early on in the story, but which doesn't become important until later on! It happens whenever Shakespeare loudly mentions how he loves Pop Tarts, and later he eats a bunch of Pop Tarts!



**LITERARY
TECHNIQUE
COMICS**

**today's
technique:**

**CHEKHOV'S
GUN**



It comes from this playwright Chekhov, who said that if you have a gun on the stage in the first act of a play, it had better be fired by the third! It's been used to



sustain interest since forever: James Bond often gets a bunch of gadgets at the beginning of his movie which he'll use later on, and even Perseus got gadgets from the GODS to kill Medusa with! It's the same idea, only Bond's better because he has more explosions. Looks like you lose, Perseus!!



So if you have Bond getting gadgets that he doesn't use, that's not Chekhov's Gun?



Nope!

That's just FRUSTRATED EXPECTATIONS. Honestly, why give James Bond a gun that shoots piranhas if he's never going to fire it? People truly want to see that in action. Also: guns that shoot chainsaws.



I'd like to see your Bond movie.

I WOULD TOO, darn it.

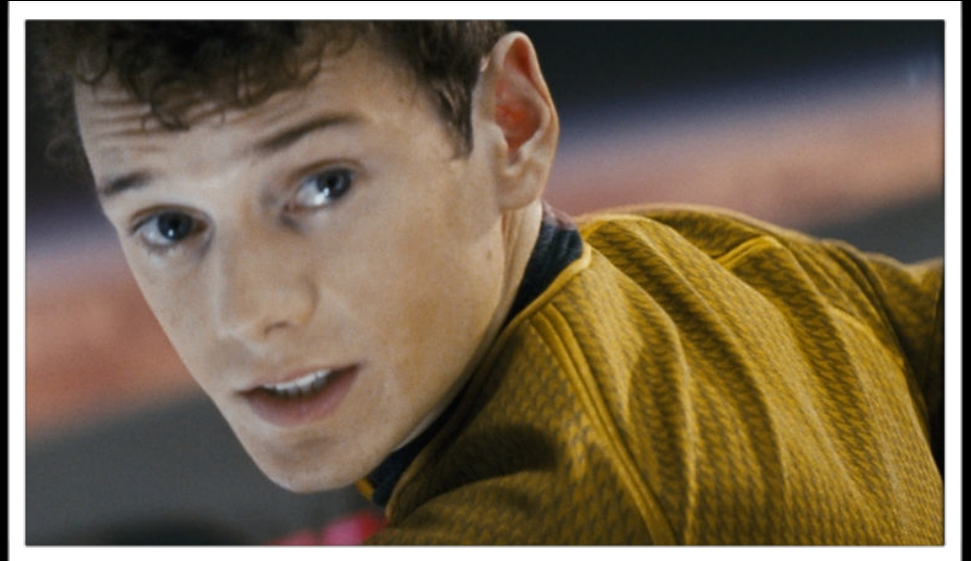
MEANWHILE, IN TUDOR ENGLAND!

Shakespeare, which is better: a gun that shoots chainsaws, or a gun that shoots EVEN BIGGER GUNS?



Shakespeare?

Aw, come on! There's strawberry frosting all over "As You Like It"!



PAVEL ANDREIEVICH CHEKOV

2245-2384



ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV
1860-1904

RUSSIAN

- Lopakhin (luh-PAKH-in)
- Dunyasha (doon-YAH-sha)
- Ephikhodof (yeh-pee-KHOA-doff)
- Firs (FEERS)
- Anya (AHN-yah)
- Madame Ranevsky (rah-NYEV-skee; should be rah-NYEV-sky-yah); also called Lyuba (LYOO-buh)
- Barbara (should be vahr-VAHR-ah)
- Gayef (GAI-uhff)
- Charlotte (shar-LOTT)
- Pishtchik (PEE-shihk)
- Yasha (YAH-shah)
- Trophimof (troh-FEE-mohff)



CHEKHOV: A LIFE

- Doctor: observation, all society, science, environment
- Hard life, late recognition
- 1886—transition year
- The major plays:
 - *The Sea Gull* (1896)
 - *Uncle Vanya* (1899)
 - *Three Sisters* (1901)
 - *The Cherry Orchard* (1903)
- Performed, directed by Stanislavsky



REALISM: IN & OUT

- Grows out of romanticism
- **In:** everyday life
- **In:** individual, but in a social context (especially class)
- **Out:** titanic, tortured artist; intrepid explorer; overwhelming passion; etc.
- **Out:** nature (in: social and economic forces)
- Really **out:** gothic, paranormal



REALISM: WHAT'S NEW

- The tiny detail, the effect of the real
- Psychological nuance: depth psychology with subtlety
- Biology as destiny: the human race is a kind of animal, now seen in the very long term
- Large, irresistible (geological) movements in history; a kind of scientific “fate”; cosmic irony



Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People



Géricault, The Raft of the Medusa



Daumier, The Chess Players



Millet, Woman Baking Bread



Millet, The Gleaners



Millet, The Potato Harvest



Courbet, The Meeting





THE 'OBJECTIVE'

- “For chemists, there is nothing unclean on earth; the writer must be as objective as the chemist” (Chekhov)
- Hence no moral stance, no tone—just an accurate record
- Impersonal social, historical and economic force are the rule
- The breakdown of objectivity is part of modernism—and us; we don't believe in it; they did.





Stanislavsky: inner action; psychological realism; actor seeks motivation for goals; uses own life and experiences to understand and reproduce this motivation; improvisation; use of whole body to achieve proper emotional state

THE PLAY

- Comedy (author) or tragedy (director)?
- Action absent or internal; characters strangely passive
- Mounting tension (Chekhov's dictum)
- Characters are trapped in their own internal worlds of fantasy, memory
- As a result, they communicate poorly...
- ...and lack *emotional reciprocity*
- Real, ordinary speech, as well as its failure
- Gesture, atmosphere, silence



PASSIVITY / COMMUNICATION

LOPAKHIN. You must make up your mind definitely—there's no time to waste. The question is perfectly plain. Are you willing to let the land for villas or no? Just one word, yes or no? Just one word!

LYUBA. Who's smoking horrible cigars here? [*Sits.*]

LOPAKHIN. Just one word! [*Imploringly*] Give me an answer!

GAEV. [*Yawns*] Really!

LYUBA. [*Looks in her purse*] I had a lot of money yesterday, but there's very little to-day.

PASSIVITY / SILENCE

[The stage is empty. The sound of keys being turned in the locks is heard, and then the noise of the carriages going away. It is quiet. Then the sound of an axe against the trees is heard in the silence sadly and by itself. Steps are heard. FIERS comes in from the door on the right. He is dressed as usual, in a short jacket and white waistcoat; slippers on his feet. He is ill. He goes to the door and tries the handle.]

FIERS. It's locked. They've gone away. *[Sits on a sofa]* They've forgotten about me... Never mind, I'll sit here... *[Mumbles something that cannot be understood]* Life's gone on as if I'd never lived. *[Lying down]* I'll lie down...

[He lies without moving. The distant sound is heard, as if from the sky, of a breaking string, dying away sadly. Silence follows it, and only the sound is heard, some way away in the orchard, of the axe falling on the trees.]

CHEKHOV'S GUN

One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep.

Chekhov, letter to Lazarev (pseudonym of A. S. Gruzinsky), 1 November 1889

CHEKHOV'S GUN

*[In a field. An old, crooked shrine, which has been long abandoned; near it a well and large stones, which apparently are old tombstones, and an old garden seat. The road is seen to GAEV'S estate. On one side rise dark poplars, behind them begins the cherry orchard. In the distance is a row of telegraph poles, and far, far away on the horizon are the indistinct signs of a large town, which can only be seen on the finest and clearest days. It is close on sunset. CHARLOTTA, YASHA, and DUNYASHA are sitting on the seat; EPIKHODOV stands by and plays on a guitar; all seem thoughtful. CHARLOTTA wears a man's old peaked cap; she has unslung **a rifle** from her shoulders and is putting to rights the buckle on the strap.]*

MEMORY

LOPAKHIN. How much was the train late? Two hours at least. [*Yawns and stretches himself*] I have made a rotten mess of it! I came here on purpose to meet them at the station, and then overslept myself... in my chair. It's a pity. I wish you'd wakened me.

DUNYASHA. I thought you'd gone away. [*Listening*] I think I hear them coming.

LOPAKHIN. [*Listens*] No... They've got to collect their luggage and so on... [*Pause*] Lubov Andreyevna has been living abroad for five years; I don't know what she'll be like now... She's a good sort—an easy, simple person. I remember when I was a boy of fifteen, my father, who is dead—he used to keep a shop in the village here—hit me on the face with his fist, and my nose bled.... We had gone into the yard together for something or other, and he was a little drunk. Lubov Andreyevna, as I remember her now, was still young, and very thin, and she took me to the washstand here in this very room, the nursery. She said, “Don't cry, little man, it'll be all right in time for your wedding.” [*Pause*] “Little man.”

MEMORY / FANTASY

LYUBA. [*Looks out into the garden*] Oh, my childhood, days of my innocence! In this nursery I used to sleep; I used to look out from here into the orchard. Happiness used to wake with me every morning, and then it was just as it is now; nothing has changed. [*Laughs from joy*] It's all, all white! Oh, my orchard! After the dark autumns and the cold winters, you're young again, full of happiness, the angels of heaven haven't left you... If only I could take my heavy burden off my breast and shoulders, if I could forget my past!

GAEV. Yes, and they'll sell this orchard to pay off debts. How strange it seems!

LYUBA. Look, there's my dead mother going in the orchard... dressed in white! [*Laughs from joy*] That's she.

GAEV. Where?

VARYA. God bless you, little mother.

LYUBA. There's nobody there. I thought I saw somebody.

EMOTIONAL RECIPROACITY

DUNYASHA: You went away during Lent, when it was snowing and frosty, but now? Darling! [*Laughs and kisses her*] We did have to wait for you, my joy, my pet... I must tell you at once, I can't bear to wait a minute.

ANYA [*Tired*]: Something else now...?

DUNYASHA: The clerk, Epikhodov, proposed to me after Easter.

ANYA. Always the same... [*Puts her hair straight*] I've lost all my hairpins...

DUNYASHA. I don't know what to think about it. He loves me, he loves me so much!

REAL (?) SPEECH

ANYA. How's business? Has the interest been paid?

VARYA. Not much chance of that.

ANYA. Oh God, oh God...

VARYA. The place will be sold in August.

ANYA. O God...

LOPAKHIN. [*Looks in at the door*] Moo!... [*Exit.*]

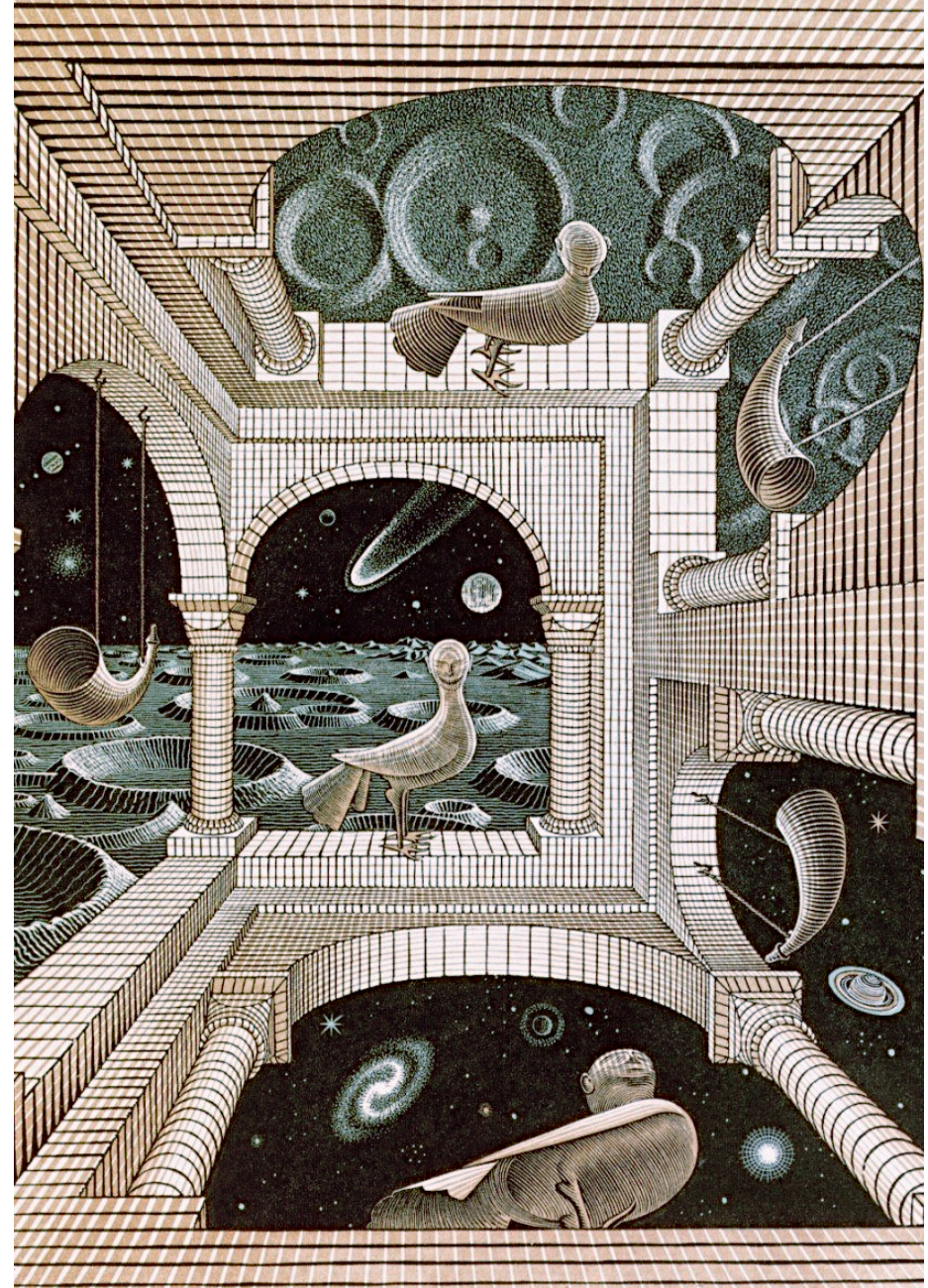
VARYA. [*Through her tears*] I'd like to... [*Shakes her fist.*]



MOO

TIME & SPACE

- Madame Ranevsky lives in a time and space that is archaic (it is “ancient history”), intimate (internal), organic—everything is connected (12)
- Modernity—the telegraph, the railroad, Paris—cuts across the property and their lives. Modern time and space is impersonal, fragmented, mechanical, and is always “at a distance” (1)



THE CHERRY ORCHARD

- Madame Ranevsky: personal loss, death, the core of her being (12)
- Trophimof: the “sins of the aristocracy” (26-27)
- The loss of the orchard is the function of modernity, which...
- ...erases our intimate and organic memory, but also the collective memory of the nation’s past: only future



THE “OTHER SCENE”

- The “andere Schauplatz,” “other scene,” the unconscious
- A drama that takes place off stage but constantly conditions the visible drama we can see
- Something happened in the past to make these people the way they are (personal trauma as the inner truth of all characters)
- Something else is happening elsewhere at the same time (history — the 1861 emancipation of serfs, the decline of the aristocracy, social upheaval)

