

Title: *Uncle Vanya*: The Drama of Sustainability

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Abstract:

In *Uncle Vanya*, its eponymous character (Vanya/Ivan Voinitsky) famously wants us to believe that his choice to work selflessly on Serebriakov's estate was dictated by some purely ethical considerations, such as his devotion to his beloved sister and later his niece, and that it had little to do with his own likings or his own potentiality. But is this true? The 25 years that Voinitsky has allegedly wasted by working on Serebriakov's estate and his subsequent rebellion deserve a closer examination.

Unlike Chekhov's numerous characters, Voinitsky has actually mastered what philosophers describe as "the art of being in the world." Until we meet him in act I, he was an epitome of sustainability. I see Voinitsky's rebellion against Serebriakov not as his spiritual awakening but as a rather misguided attempt at destroying precisely all those things that helped Voinitsky to go on living and even enjoy his life for nearly a quarter of a century. His tragedy is not in wasting 25 years of his life but in being unable to understand what made his life sustainable and in trying to destroy the very system that kept him afloat.

In my talk, I would like to pose and answer the following questions:

1. Why was Voinitsky attracted to Serebriakov in the first place?
2. What happened to Voinitsky's incredible adoration of Serebriakov that lasted 25 years?
3. What are the consequences of Voinitsky's falling out of love with Serebriakov?
4. Does Voinitsky's story offer any significant insight into Chekhov's own life?