Title: Competing Realisms in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*
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Abstract:
As a collaborative and synthetic medium, theater brings together multiple forms of mimetic representation. This paper argues that within the original Moscow Art Theater production of Chekhov's play *Three Sisters* (1901) we witness competing approaches to mimetic representation. These different approaches are brought into focus, this paper contends, during several moments in Acts 1 and 4 when photographs are taken. Similar to the metatheatrical play-within-a-play in *Seagull*, by staging the act of taking photographs, the play invites us to compare photography and theater as two competing modes of visual representation. The intrusion of photography onto the theatrical stage offers a heightened moment in which the play interrogates its own mimetic aspiration of picturing a faithful model of the real world. As I will argue, this moment draws our attention to the devices of representation in order to champion the art of theater over the mimetic promise of the new photographic medium.
However, this competing realism plays out along two axes: in interart encounters between photography and theater, but also within the realm of theater between Chekhov and Stanislavsky's differing approaches to mimesis. Stanislavsky's mise-en-scène questions the supposed objectivity of photographic representation, as it ends up being far more "theatrical" than his naturalism for the stage. Nonetheless, Chekhov's verbal text seeks to reveal the very illusion of Stanislavsky and scenic designer Victor Simov's naturalism in turn. It is in the photography scenes that we can catch a glimpse of these different approaches, precisely because these interart moments are all the more self-aware about questions of representation.