

Title: Tennessee Williams's Queer Chekhov

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When asked which writer had inspired him the most, American playwright Tennessee Williams resoundingly answered “Chekhov! Chekhov! Chekhov!” Since then, seemingly much and yet actually very little has been made of this connection. While Chekhov’s influence on Williams is widely acknowledged, it has been sparingly explored by both Chekhov and Williams scholars alike. In 1981, Williams’ first and last direct engagement with the work of Chekhov was actualized in the production of *The Notebook of Trigorin: A Free Adaptation of The Seagull*. While the play updated the language of the original, the most dramatic revision was the introduction of a strong and overt homosexual theme. Williams’ Trigorin is a closeted gay male whose gradual “outing” becomes the central action of the play.

While most critics considered *The Notebook of Trigorin* to be a grossly unfaithful rendering of the original, Williams did not think so, and in the introduction explains that his play merely “says out loud the things that were unspoken in Chekhov.” This paper examines Williams’s “queering” of *The Seagull* as a means to understanding the importance of Chekhov for Tennessee Williams specifically as a gay playwright. Through tracing the echoes of other Chekhov plays and short stories in *The Notebook of Trigorin*, one begins to see that while not explicitly homosexual, Chekhov’s love plots in many ways anticipated many of the tenets of Queer Theory, namely the performative nature of human relationships, and the prevalence of double lives.

#### References

Williams, Tennessee. *Notebook of Trigorin: A Free Adaptation of The Seagull*. New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1997.