

Title: Masquerade and Identity in Chekhov's Yuletide Stories
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Although Chekhov's Yuletide and Shrovetide cycles of stories are a colorful menagerie of plots, settings, and characters, the motif of concealment or masquerade, coupled with inevitable exposure, resurfaces in almost all of them and thus binds them together. Some of the protagonists' masks are nothing more than a physical disguise, whether it takes the form of dressing up (as in the first part of "Ryazhenye") or dressing down ("V banye") – that is, "masquerade" in the literal sense of the word. Others, like the story "Chameleon," where 'masks' are assumed to appease authority, are figurative. But the majority is both: literal and figurative, external and internal. This paper examines two versions of Chekhov's "Ryazhenye" in the context of various possible masquerades and the folk/speech genre of the *zagadka*. By clarifying how masquerading the self as other works in these early stories on grammatical and semantic levels, this paper aims to uncover the more subtle motif of masquerade in "Na puti" and "Rasskaz bez kontsa," as well as address the question of how identity is constructed in these more complex stories.

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