

# THE PEARL

THEATRE COMPANY

## Uncle Vanya

by Anton Chekhov  
translated by Paul Schmidt



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## CHARACTERS



**Alexander Serebryakov or The Professor (played by Dominic Cuskern)** is a retired professor who suffers from gout and rheumatism, now married to Yelena. His first wife, Vanya's sister, died nine years before the play begins. Idolized by his mother in law, Maria, but despised by Vanya. Sonya is his daughter by his first wife.

*"I have devoted my entire life to scholarship. I had my own office, my lecture hall, I had colleagues who treated me with respect – and now, suddenly, it's all gone. I sit here in this graveyard, surrounded by stupid people saying stupid things."*



**Yelena (played by Rachel Botchan)** is the Professor's second wife, who gave up a musical career to marry him. She is considerably younger than her husband and beauty fascinates several other characters in the play.

*"I'm boring, I'm trivial. When I play the piano, when I'm home with my husband, in all my relationships, it's always the same. I'm a trivial person. It's the truth. When I think about it, Sonya, I have to face it. I'm a very, very unhappy woman! There is no happiness for me anywhere; no, none."*



**Sonya (played by Michelle Beck)** is his hard-working daughter by his first wife, also Vanya's niece, who is secretly in love with Astrov.

*"And when we're dead, we'll say that our lives were full of pain, that we wept and suffered, and God will have pity on us, and then, Uncle, dear Uncle Vanya, we'll see a brand-new life, all shining and beautiful, we'll be happy, and we'll look back on the pain we feel right now and we'll smile . . . and then we'll rest. I believe that, Uncle, I believe that with all my heart and soul."*



**Mrs. Voinitsky or Maria Vasilyevna (played by Carol Schultz)** is a widow, Vanya’s mother, and mother of the professor’s first wife. She loves books of learning; is enthralled by the Professor and spends her life furthering his work – played by Carol Schultz

*“You are making a mockery of all your former principles. They’re not at fault; you are. Principles are a dead letter unless you act upon them, do something useful – which is something you have never done.”*



**Ivan Petrovich or Vanya (played by Chris Mixon)**, her son. Has recently come to believe that the Professor is a fraud therefore Vanya has wasted his life supporting him. In love with Yelena.

*“I haunt this house like a lost soul; it makes me crazy, the thought that I’ve thrown away my life and I’ll never get it back. My past is gone, wasted on stupidity, and the present is so pointless it’s grotesque. And that’s it, that’s my life, and that’s my love, and what can I do about it?”*



**Mikhail Lvovich Astrov (played by Brad Cover)** is a doctor. Hard working, but haunted by the death of one of his patients. He is passionate about nature, drinks heavily and is oblivious to Sonya’s love for him.

*“I love life – in general. But our life, this stupid clod-hopping life we lead around here – I can’t stand it. I hate it with every fiber of my being. And my own personal life . . . hell, it’s a complete mess.”*



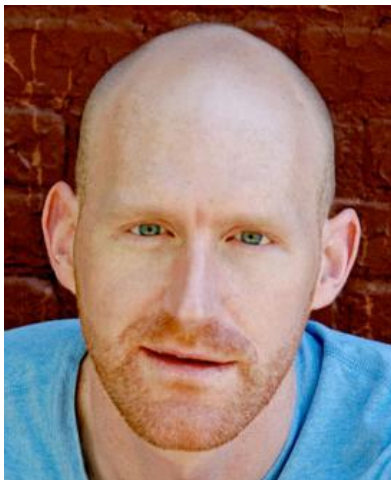
**Ilya Ilych Telegin or Waffles (played by Brad Heberlee)** is an impoverished neighbor landowner. Regularly dines with the family. He claims his wife left him because of his appearance - he is called ‘Waffles’ because of his pockmarked face.

*“I saw your table here, all set for tea, and I don’t know, it was like a wave of happiness washed right over me. The weather’s wonderful, our feathered friends are singing, we’re all friends here – what more could a man ask?”*



**Marina (played by Robin Leslie Brown)** is the family’s old nurse who has served the family for two generations and offers a soothing presence to many in the family.

*“Let’s go, dear, time to go to bed. Come on, my angel, I’ll make you some chamomile tea, get you something to warm your legs.”*



**Workman (played by Joie Bauer)** serves the family as a hired hand.

*“Yes, ma’am. It’s me. – All right; I was just going home. (Whistles to his dog) Here, boy! Come on, boy! Come on!”*

# SETTING

The action takes place on the Serebryakov estate, rural Russia, 1890's

## STORY OF THE PLAY

Serebryakov, a retired professor, and his second wife, the younger and very beautiful Yelena, have returned to live on the family country estate as his health and his income can no longer sustain their city life. The estate originally belonged to Serebryakov's first wife, now deceased. Vanya, his niece, Sonya, his mother, Maria, and their housemaid, Marina, still live on and work the estate.

The arrival of Serebryakov and his wife has caused chaos in the household. The schedule of the working farm has been totally disrupted by the Professor's city ways. Vanya and Astrov, the doctor and friend of the family, have fallen completely in love with the unavailable Yelena. Meanwhile, Sonya is secretly in love with Astrov, who hardly seems to notice her. The doctor has been called to the house to care for the Professor's gout; but when he arrives, the Professor refuses to even see him.

Something has changed Vanya and he has come to believe the Professor is a fraud – that Vanya has spent his entire life and youth working for nothing. When the Professor gathers the family to tell them of his plan to sell the house, Vanya explodes. He tries twice to shoot the Professor, but misses both times.

The Professor and Yelena decide that they must move out. They can't bear the country, are wary of Vanya, and Yelena finds that she is falling a little in love with Astrov – a potentially very dangerous situation.

Vanya and Sonya are left to their work on the estate. But everything is different now. Or does it remain the same?

## THE RUSSIA OF *Uncle Vanya*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Russia was ruled by Czar Nicholas II from 1894 until 1917 when he and his entire family were assassinated during the Russian Revolution. A Czar was the titular ruler in Russia, equivalent to royalty and exercised great power over the people. He would become the last Czar of the Russian Empire, a title that had existed roughly since 1547.



*(Czar Nicholas II; A Royal Portrait of his children)*

Around 1899, the country became increasingly unstable as revolts by all classes began taking place. Peasants were uprising, intellectuals were meeting to discuss new political theories, and the rule of Nicholas II was being questioned by all classes. The people were tired of his tools of repression in the form of censorship, Siberian prison camps, changes to the voting laws and the secret police.

Russia itself was mostly rural, with large estates owned by wealthy aristocrats and farmed by serfs. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia had become the serf capital of the world. It had twenty three million slaves owned privately and the same number again working on state lands, totaling around 46 million enslaved serfs. By comparison the United States had four million slaves, the British Empire 770,000 and Brazil 750,000.

In 1861 all of the twenty three million privately owned serfs were emancipated following the decree issued by Emperor Alexander II. This year also proved revolutionary in regards to the emancipation of the United States slaves, as South Carolina succeeded from the Union and

formed the Union of Confederates States, thus starting the Civil War. This new independence for the serfs would allow them the rights given to all citizens including the right to marry without gaining consent from their employer, to own land and to own a business.

However this new found freedom had a drawback. The serfs were forced into a crippling, 'redemption tax' to be paid to the former landowners. It was a large sum of money and many serfs had difficulty paying it, resulting in many of them having to give away all of their grain to pay the tax. This would leave them with no means of survival. Then in 1866, emancipation followed for the other twenty three million enslaved serfs, this group owned by the state. Unique from their privately owned counterparts, this group received larger plots of land to make a living from.

#### Main Terms of Emancipation, 1861

**Serfs** made legally free of their landlords

**Ex-serfs** were then allowed

- to own property
- to buy land assigned them from their previous owner's estates
- to marry according to their choice
- to trade freely
- to sue in courts
- to vote in local elections.

The freeing of the serfs had mixed results. Some of them were able to leave the rural countryside and move to towns and make money. Industrial cities and areas included Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the Baltic Cities. Some industries were booming there like coal, iron, steel, and oil production. By 1890 Russia had about 32,000 kilometers of railroads and 1.4 million factory workers, most of whom worked in the textile industry. Railroad mileage almost doubled, giving Russia the most track of any nation other than the United States.

Others were not quite as lucky. For many, the result of being freed meant a loss of security because their employers no longer had an invested interest in them. Though they were free, for most, conditions did not improve. Their combined anger would eventually result in the overthrow of the government in 1917.

Besides the nobility and the serfs, another social class from this period was the ‘intelligentsia’ as showcased in *Uncle Vanya* by the character of the professor. The intellectuals held a revered status by all. In Russia, a professor held a status equivalent to that of an army general.

**Vanya:** *I used to worship that Professor...I was so proud of him and his studies; I lived and breathed for him! Everything he wrote was a work of genius to me.*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a great intellectual upheaval as they became more aware of the lack of advances made by their country and sought to change that.

The social class that really began to emerge during this period was a middle class of businessmen. This group of people understood that they had the power to become equivalent to higher class nobility, and while they were a small group, they tried desperately to advance themselves. While this group was essential in the advancements Western Europe was making, they would become one of the first casualties in the Russian Revolution along with the nobility.

Anatoly Cemenka: *A group portrait of intellectuals in Moscow — Tamiji Naito, Boris Pasternak, Sergei Eisenstein, Olga Tretyakova, Lili Brik, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Diplomat Voznesensky*



This portrait shows a group of “the intellectual core of revolutionary Russia.” They are gathered for a friendly salon in Moscow. The Professor, featured in *Uncle Vanya*, would have been considered to have been among the intelligentsia.

On the far left is the Japanese writer Tamiji Naito. Olga Tretyakova was later sentenced to prison for being in this picture with Naito and another photo was used in a trial against her husband, the critic Tretyakov, to show he collaborated with the Japanese.” Sadly, Olga was ultimately imprisoned and died in the Gulag, and her husband was executed.



# THEMES

## **Love: Forbidden, Unrequited, Misplaced**

Many of the characters in the play are in love, or infatuated, with exactly the person they shouldn't be. Sonya is in love with Astrov who has no interest in her. Vanya and Astrov are both in love with Yelena. Yelena, who is married to the Professor, seems to have a crush on Astrov.

- Why do these people, and many of us, in fact, always seem to fall in love with people who are unattainable?
- Are there any other examples of forbidden, unrequited or misplaced love?

## **How to create a happy life – Or not**

When the play first appeared in Moscow in 1899, the critics noted the absence of action, and wrote that "*Uncle Vanya* is significant in that the heroes have no will, no goal, do not know whether the circumstances are profitable for them or not, nor what kind of behavior will be theirs in the next moment. They are passive . . . Here the unity of action is substituted by the unity of mood." (Russkie vedomosti, a Russian newspaper, 1899, No. 298)

- Are any of these characters happy with their lives?
- Do they have the ability to change their lives?
- If so, why don't they do it?
- Is it fate that has caused their unhappiness or is it their lack of action?
- Do they choose to be unhappy?
- Will work give their lives the meaning they desire?

## **Wasted Youth and the Ravages of Age**

Some of the characters in the play seem devoid of any hope, potential, ideas for the future, energy to change the future. They seem to have wasted their youth creating the dismal world they live in today. Yelena destroyed her potential musical career to marry an older, rich husband

who she didn't love. Vanya is full of regret and recrimination, and now disillusioned with the Professor for whom he's worked all of his life. Vanya's mother spends her time reading pamphlets and discussing social issues, but it goes nowhere. The doctor has fallen into alcoholism. Sonya works hard and appears to get nothing in return.

- Who is the most hopeful character in the play and why?
- Who is the most regretful character in the play and why?

### **Ecology, Love of nature, Environmentalism**

Astrov's passionate speeches about ecology are reflections of the author's own concerns. Chekhov planted hundreds of trees on his own farm. Concern for the destruction of the natural environment forms an important subtext to his last three plays. In *Uncle Vanya*, it is crucial to the dynamic of the piece. It says much for Chekhov's vision that Astrov's speeches about ecology are as pertinent today as they were a hundred years ago.

Astrov, Act I: *"All our great woodlands are being leveled, millions of trees already gone, bird and animal habitats destroyed, rivers dammed up and polluted – and all for what? Because we're too lazy to look for other sources of energy? (To Yelena) Don't you agree? You have to be a barbarian to burn all that beauty in your stove, to destroy something that can never be replaced. We were born with the ability to reason and the power to create and be fruitful, but until now all we've done is destroy whatever we see. The forests are disappearing one by one, the rivers are polluted, wildlife is becoming extinct, the climate is changing for the worse, every day the planet gets poorer and uglier. It's a disaster! (To Vanya) Oh, I know, you're giving me that ironic look again, you think I'm being ridiculous, and . . . well, maybe I am, but every time I drive by a stand of trees that I persuaded the owners to spare, or hear the breeze at night in young trees I planted myself, I realize that I can do something about the climate, and if a thousand years from now people are a little happier, then it's partly because of me."*

## DEFORESTATION IN RUSSIA

Considered by scholars to be one of the first ‘green plays,’ *Uncle Vanya* brought attention to the devastating deforestation occurring in Russia in the 1890s. Chekov famously championed the preservation of the environment through the character of Dr. Astrov. The character wonders what Russia will leave behind for future generations and hopes that his forest conservation plans are the answer for preserving the Russia he knows. He passionately champions the beauty of nature and truly believes that man’s capacity to create is stronger than to destroy.

Chekhov was exploring ideas onstage that were touched upon in Agriculture and Horticulture journals of the day. These journals discussed the threat of deforestation and the negative effects it would have on the human race. One of the themes of *Uncle Vanya* and its earlier incarnation *The Wood Demon* is that the destruction of the environment and the selfishness of people coincide.

So did *Uncle Vanya* bring about an environmental change in Russia?

Flash-forward to present day and the simple answer is no. The timber business in Russia is one of their largest economic industries and earns around 20 billion dollars a year. Russia has more than 1/5 of the world’s forests, making it the largest forest country in the world. The forests therefore are important environmentally and economically to not only Russia but on a global scale.

Russia has around 12 million km<sup>2</sup> of forested regions (larger than the Amazon Rainforest). The deforestation rate annually is 20,000 km<sup>2</sup>. While Russia has regulations regarding the timber industry, these restrictions are lax compared to other regions in the world including the United States, Canada, Europe and parts of South Asia.

**Astrov:** *Oh, I don't object, of course, to cutting wood when you have to, but why destroy the forests? The woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the ax.*

While the Russian Government has put laws into effect in the hopes of preservation, the export of illegal timber remains a huge issue. Illegal logging is a common occurrence throughout Russia in an effort to meet the demands of global wood importers. Because the demand of timber is not likely to stop, neither will the deforestation.

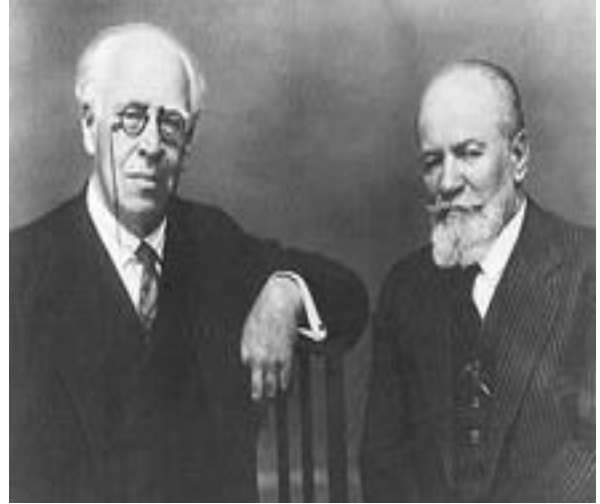
Until consumers are willing to stop exploiting natural resources and demand better regulations on timber, the deforestation will likely continue, and at a more rapid rate. Which means *Uncle Vanya* is just as relevant today, if not more so than when it premiered in 1899. It still poses the same question Chekhov had Dr. Astrov wonder: what is stronger, man's desire to create or destroy?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Russian Revolution took place in 1917, approximately 20 years after this play is set. Do you think the discontent on the farm was intended as an example of what was going on in Russia at the time?
2. Is anybody in the play happy with their life? Who? Why?
3. What character do you most admire? What character makes you feel the most sympathy? Which character do you admire the least?
4. Is Vanya more upset with A) himself, B) with his situation, or C) with the people around him?
5. Did Vanya really intend to murder the professor? Or did he deliberately botch the attempt – either consciously or subconsciously? Do you think Vanya's next step might be suicide? What makes you think it is – or it isn't?
6. Why does Vanya's mother side with the professor and against her own son?

## MOSCOW ART THEATER or Two Russians Walk Into a Bar

Upset with the dreadful state of Russian theater, playwright and theater critic Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko arranged a meeting at a bar with a director he had admired, Konstantin Stanislavsky, to discuss how they could change theater. Both were upset with Russian theater at the turn of the century and wanted to create a new genre of theater and acting technique.



(Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky)

Though it was their first time meeting, the two immediately hit it off, ordering lunch, then dinner, and when the bar finally closed, Stanislavsky invited Nemirovich-Danchenko back to his house to further the discussion. Seventeen hours later, they had decided to create their own company. Nemirovich would control the repertory focusing on producing shows and the company itself, while Stanislavsky was in charge of directing. Thus the Moscow Art Theater was born.

The theater opened to great success on October 14, 1898 with Aleksey Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*; however the next shows staged were considered spectacular failures. Not wanting to compromise their principles, the two knew they needed to do something drastic in order to make the theater a success. Nemirovich-Danchenko arranged a meeting with Anton Chekhov to ask for permission to stage his play *The Seagull*. Though both Stanislavsky and Chekhov were hesitant, they both eventually agreed and it opened in Moscow on December 17, 1898. It was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm and critical praise and brought overnight success for the theater and all those involved in the production.

It was the beginning of a beautiful partnership between the Moscow Art Theater and Chekhov. They would go on to premiere all of Chekhov's major plays: *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. The obvious success of Chekhov's revolutionary new style and the masterful way the Moscow Art Theater realized his vision became the envy of the theater world, leading the theater world into a more natural style of production and acting.

Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, the theater was supported by the new government, allowing the theater to do an unprecedented two year tour of Europe and the US between the years of 1922-1924. During this time the theater gained international acclaim and revolutionized the art of play production and particularly acting, when Stanislavsky introduced his 'method acting' to US actors. It is a technique still used today by famous actors like Christian Bale, Daniel Day Lewis and Robert De Niro.

As a way of acknowledging the importance of Chekhov to their success, the Moscow Art Theater adopted the seagull as their official emblem- it remains so to this day.



## THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF *Uncle Vanya*

After Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky successfully staged Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in 1896, they knew they wanted to continue their partnership with the playwright and begged him for a new play. Chekhov though had already made a commitment to the Maly Theater to stage his next show the re-written *Wood Demon*, now called *Uncle Vanya*.

Soon into the process, the Maly Theater demanded cuts of the show. They were upset with the scene when Vanya fires a gun at the Professor, which they believed was an insult to intellectuals. Chekhov refused to make cuts and backed out of his deal with the Maly Theater and went back to the Moscow Art Theater.

Stanislavsky originally cast himself in the title role, but his partner Nemirovich-Danchenko suggested that the handsome Stanislavsky play Astrov instead (*pictured*). Chekhov was upset at the casting change as he was not a fan of Stanislavsky the actor. He famously quipped "Inject some testosterone into him," to Nemirovich-Danchenko. Olga Knipper was the other famous cast member, playing Yelena. She would eventually go on to marry Chekhov. Other cast members included Aleksandr Artiom as Waffles and Stanislavsky's wife, Lilina as Sonya.



Things did not run smoothly through rehearsals. The two directors started having disagreements as evidenced in this letter sent from Nemirovich-Danchenko to Stanislavsky:

*"We are both aware that it is awkward to disagree during rehearsals. It is embarrassing in front of the actors, don't you think? . . . I feel obliged to ask you for a few concessions. Obligated by my conscience as a writer..."*

Stanislavsky must have listened because by opening night in October 1899 the show got decent reviews and was considered a mild success, though some still had issues with it. The audience's initial reaction was not overly enthusiastic, nor did it receive rave reviews from newspapers. Some professors also shared the same feeling of the Maly Theater and boycotted the production.



*(The Original Production of Uncle Vanya at Moscow Art Theater)*

Chekhov was not upset with the lukewarm response. On the contrary he was rather pleased with it. In a letter he wrote to a friend he said:

*"[The MXAT Company] expected a furor, and after all there is only an ordinary success, and this irritates the young artists. I have worked for twenty-one years, and I know that an average success is, for the writer and the actor, the best kind of success. After a triumph a reaction always sets in, expressing itself in heightened expectation, followed eventually by certain disappointment and cooling . . ."*

Chekhov, who had been exiled in Yalta by his doctors due to his tuberculosis, did not get to see the show until the spring of 1900, when the touring company finally came to his city. He was pleased with the



production and even complemented Stanislavsky, the actor he was most worried about his portrayal. Chekhov even gave him advice on the character saying, "[Astrov] whistles. Listen, he whistles! Uncle Vanya is crying, but Astrov whistles!" Stanislavsky immediately worked it into the production.

While only considered a mild success the show went on to run 323 times over the first quarter of the twentieth century.

## SAMPLE SCENES

### Yelena and Sonya – Act II

Yelena: *Sophie . . .*

Sonya: What?

Yelena: How long are you going to stay mad at me? We haven't done anything to hurt each other; it doesn't make sense, being angry like this. Let's stop it, shall we?

Sonya: Oh, I've wanted to . . . (Hugs Yelena) I'm tired of being angry all the time.

Yelena: Oh, I'm so glad! (Both women are genuinely moved)

Sonya: Is Papa asleep?

Yelena: No; he's sitting up in the living room. It's been weeks now that you and I haven't been speaking – God only knows why. (Notices the sideboard is open) What's all this?

Sonya: I fixed the doctor something to eat.

Yelena: There's some wine left. Let's drink to friendship – you want to?

Sonya: All right, let's.

Yelena: Out of the same glass. (Pours a glass of wine) That's the best way. Friends?

Sonya: Friends. (They drink and kiss) I've wanted to make up for a long time, but I was ashamed, I don't know why . . . (Starts to cry)

Yelena: What are you crying for?

Sonya: I don't know . . . it's just me.

Yelena: There, there . . . (*Begins crying herself*) You silly, now you've gotten me started.

(*Pause*)

You were mad at me because you thought I took advantage of your father when I married him. I swear to you, Sonya, I married him out of love. Won't you believe me? I was dazzled by him; he was so famous and so intelligent. It wasn't real love, it was all a fantasy, but at the time I thought it was real. And I'm not sorry I married him. But ever since the wedding you've been looking at me with those intelligent, accusing eyes of your.

Sonya: Oh, don't. Friends, friends – remember?

Yelena: You mustn't look at people like that. It's not really like you. If you can't trust people, what's the point of living?

(*Pause*)

Sonya: Tell me something truly, as a friend . . . Are you happy?

Yelena: No.

Sonya: I knew you weren't. Let me ask another question. Be honest, now . . . Wouldn't you rather have a younger husband?

Yelena: What a child you are! Of course I would. (Laughs) Well, go on – ask me something else.

Sonya: Do you like the doctor?

Yelena: Yes, very much.

Sonya: I must seem stupid, don't I? He just left, and I can still hear his voice and his footsteps, and I look at the darkened window and I think I see his face – no, let me finish. Only I really can't say it out loud; I'm too embarrassed. Come on up to my room; we can talk there. Do you think I'm being stupid? Do you?

#### **Astrov and Vanya – Act IV**

*Dr. Astrov is accusing Vanya of having stolen morphine from his bag*

Vanya: Leave me alone!

Astrov: I'd be happy to, nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I won't go, I repeat, I will not go until you give back what you took.

Vanya: I didn't take anything.

Astrov: I'm serious, Vanya. Give it back. I have to go.

Vanya: I told you, I didn't take anything!

*(Both men sit down)*

Astrov: Really? Look, I'm giving you just a minute longer, then I use force. We'll tie you up and search you. I mean that in all seriousness.

Vanya: Do whatever you want. *(Pause)* God, how stupid can you get! I shot twice and missed him both times! I'll never forgive myself.

Astrov: You felt like shooting somebody, you should have put a bullet in your own head.

Vanya: *(With a shrug)* Funny, isn't it? I try to kill someone, nobody calls the police, nobody tries to arrest me. Which means you all think I'm crazy. *(A mean laugh)* I'm crazy? What about someone who pretends to be a professor so we won't find out he's a stupid, sadistic no-talent? What about someone who marries an old man and then

proceeds to cheat on him in front of everybody? I saw you! I saw you – I saw you kissing her!

Astrov: You're right, I was, I was kissing her! So what? Go to hell, will you! (*Gives him the finger*)

Vanya: (*Looks toward the door*) What's really crazy is a world like this one, that let you all exist!

Astrov: Look, you're being really stupid.

Vanya: What do you expect? I'm crazy, right? I'm out of my mind, I have the right to say stupid things.

Astrov: Oh, come off it, Vanya, will you? You're not crazy; you're just the comic relief around here. You're a freak, you know that? (*Beat*) I used to think freaks were sick, but I've changed my mind. Now I think being a freak is the normal human condition. I think you're completely normal.

Vanya: (*Covers his face with his hands*) I'm so ashamed! It's like a knife, the shame I feel, worse than any pain! (*Anguished*) I can't stand it! (*Lays his head on the table*) What am I going to do? What am I going to do?

Astrov: You're going to do nothing.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

**WRITTEN:** Do some web research on Russian life in the 1890's. Write an essay of what you think life might have been like on Vanya's farm at that time.

**WRITTEN & PERFORMATIVE:** We don't get the opportunity to hear the Workman's point of view on the estate and its inhabitants. Write a monologue from the Workman's point of view and share it with the class.

**CREATIVE:** Take the character descriptions and lines at the beginning of this study guide and discuss who you think could play these roles. What would your ideal casting be for a character of this kind? Let your imagination run wild. What celebrities would you like to see in these roles?

**PERFORMATIVE:** Take one of the Sample Scenes and read it aloud with a partner. Oftentimes, characters in *Uncle Vanya* say one thing, but mean something very different. Look at the Sample Scene again and decide what your character is really thinking but not saying. Write down this 'subtext.' Now read the scene again while allowing your written subtext to influence how you speak to your scene partner.

### THEN

Share your written subtext with another student. Get on your feet and read the scene aloud while inviting those two other students to shadow you and your scene partner, adding in the subtext after you say the written line.

Does the meaning of the scene change with these additions of subtext?