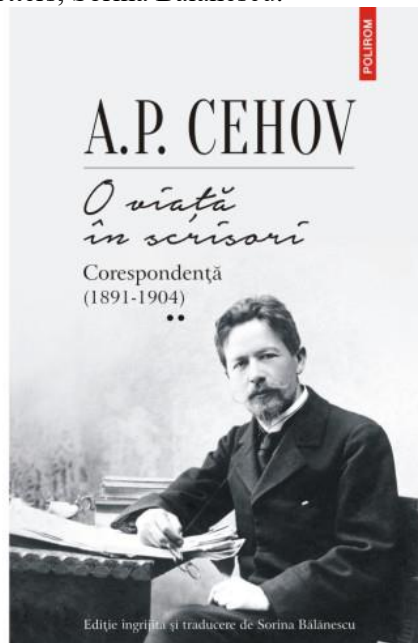


A.P. Chekhov *A life in letters* – Correspondence (1891 – 1904)

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Abstract: "A. P. Chekhov *A life in letters* - Correspondence (1891 - 1904)" (volume II), neat edition, selection, translation from Russian and notes by Sorina Bălănescu, is not just a book - it represents a gesture of intellectual nobility by Mrs. Sorina Bălănescu, theater critic, literary historian, university professor who left her mark on many generations of students of UAIC (where she taught Russian language and literature for 42 years) and UNAGE Iași, member of the founding team of the Doctoral School of theater, translator of esteemed professional status to these we will add a membership that she proudly declares: member of the "Dostoevsky Society of Academic Studies" - an international, elitist club with only (about) 120 members. In a world of truncated, short and (mostly) formal messages; the epistolary genre reminds us of the need for confession, the sharing of joy and sadness, and (especially) of the word needing meaning and emotion. 74 themes, 317 texts - 317 fragments of life, which we can understand better thanks to the translator's care to give us her work and spirit.

Keywords: A. P. Chekhov, Letters, Sorina Bălănescu.



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THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

I hold in my hands the volume "A. P. Chekhov A life in letters – Correspondence (1891 – 1904)", neat edition, selection, translation from Russian and notes by Sorina Bălănescu; it is not just a book - it represents a gesture of intellectual nobility by Mrs. Sorina Bălănescu, theater critic, literary historian, university professor who left her mark on many generations of UAIC students (where she taught Russian language and literature for 42 years) and of UNAGE Iași, member of the team of founders of the Doctoral Theater School, translator of esteemed professional status; to these we will add a membership that she proudly declares: member of the "Dostoevsky Society of Academic Studies" - an international, elitist club with only (about) 120 members.

I open the book thinking of the meeting in which I received it as a gift, with a priceless autograph; I am accompanied, however, by the testimony of the lady; stuck in my mind - it carries in it a cry of liberation and a testamentary message: "I was afraid that I would not fulfill my duty". How many intellectuals live (today) to ... fulfill their duty? The invoked duty brings up time...the chilling time. I also remember the answers contained in the dialogue with Călin Ciobotari, occasioned by the appearance of this volume, entitled - inspired - "Sorina Bălănescu, our teacher", i.e. the man from whom, all of us who knew her, had the chance to learn (everyone used the gift as they saw fit). His answers give us, between the lines, an additional key to the perception of the unseen threads that connect the translator to the author. The phrase "neat edition" has, in this case, the meaning of a living act, in which the translator has put a part of her life into each translated line. Her dedication and erudition are hard to match; the website of the Writers' Union presents us with a synthesis of her contributions, so that we can understand much more easily the deep relationship with the Chekhovian universe; we extract: "Critical edited editions: A.P. Chekhov, Opere, vol. 1-5 (Critical edition of translations), (Edition edited, Introductory study, Chronology, Landmarks of literary history and Notes), Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986 - 1999 ; A. P. Chekhov, The Steppe and other stories; The Fiancee and other stories (Introductory study, notes and care of the volume) Polirom Iași Publishing House, 2001-2002"

This volume is a continuation of the one that included a selection of correspondence from the period 1879 - 1890, published by the same publishing house, in 2018. In an interview granted to TVR Iași (in March, 2020), Sorina Bălănescu confessed that she had to choose the texts, contained in the two volumes, from a "inheritance of 4500 letters", making an essential clarification: "his correspondence takes the place of a writer's diary, an intimate diary and daily notes". Critical notes help the reader understand a world and make correlations; a gate opens through which we step into Chekhov's world, which connects two centuries and ... people. Each piece of information gives us nuances of a world we only have the illusion of knowing; places, facts, aphorisms, subtle allusions would have been inaccessible to us, had we not had the benefit of these footnotes - where meanings take root. The Chekhovian universe calls for connection to that inner vibration of the man who loved the fragility of people, "life, with its enigmas", who burned for the idea of ... human/humanity.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

It would be good to accompany our reading of Chekhov's classic writings with that of the Letters; this is how we would approach the mysterious connection between the real and the imaginary, between life and myth. I invite you to start this exercise by reading the texts in the chapter dedicated to "The Seagull"; in a letter addressed to A. S. Suvorin (Russian publisher and journalist, with a strong influence in the era), dated "October 21, 1895, Moscow" he makes, for the first time (as specified in footnote no. 2), a mention, on this play: "Secondly, imagine, I'm writing a play, which I also don't think I can finish before the end of November. I confess: I write this piece with pleasure, even though I terribly violate the conditions of the stage. A comedy, three roles for women, six for men, four acts, one landscape (lake view); lots of talk about literature, little action, five puffs of love." Exactly one month later (November 21, 1895), he sent another letter, this time from Melihovo: "Well, I have finished writing the play. I began it in forte and finished it in pianissimo, in spite of all the rules of dramatic art." The play's odyssey can be deciphered through the letters-confession contained in this volume, but, more than that, the lecturer has the opportunity to get closer to the anxieties of the playwright Chekhov: "(...) when I write a play, I feel an anxiety, as if someone were clutching my neck."

The actuality of the lessons we can draw is also revealed by the information regarding what we might call "the Sahalin project" (and not only). The hard and exhausting involvement in the construction of schools and hospitals, in the treatment of the sick and poor, and the cultural development of his nation reveals to us the turmoil of the author who overcame his anxieties to be the change he wanted in the world. I have given only two possible examples, but each reader will find, through a reflective reading, an answer in the direction sought. Chekhov's letters are also a kaleidoscope from which we reconstruct a living world, in motion, in a permanent reformulation of love, creativity, censorship, searches and wanderings, culture and care for tomorrow, illness and spirituality.

In a world of truncated, short and (mostly) formal messages; the epistolary genre reminds us of the need for confession, the sharing of joy and sadness, and (especially) of the word needing meaning and emotion. 74 themes, 317 texts - 317 fragments of life, which we can understand better thanks to the translator's care to give us their letter and spirit. Beyond the emotional dimension, which accompanies my reading, the concrete fact remains: "A. P. Chekhov A life in letters – Correspondence (1891 – 1904)" - a necessary and enriching appearance, in which content and form meet harmoniously, under the sacrificial signature of Sorina Bălănescu.