

1977

Chekhov Variation

John Morgan

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Recommended Citation

Morgan, John. "Chekhov Variation." *The Iowa Review* 8.4 (1977): 83-84. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2293>

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All the Pretty Little Horses /
Chris MacCormick

In the field where I slept
last night, the hushabye lamb was mewling.
It didn't want to be dead, its black
underlip moved up and down
in the dew, wasp slow,
and the breeze in the cotton said
oh yes, yes.

All morning under honeysuckle
bees picked over a beached carp
and duckweed rolled
slow as smoke.
Hurry home.
Bright bones know a place
by blue water.

A wind fresh as mint will
shine your shoes when you
cakewalk to heaven.
They will light your cigar,
wrap you in a kimono and beat you
supple as kidskin.
Hurry home.

Chekhov Variation / John Morgan

Chekhov, here's a story you
didn't write: on a banker's

estate, locked
in one room without
company, a man
reads
while outside
the peasants grumble and debauch,
the master gambles his fortune away,
and so much blood is spilled
the snow falls pink
all over Eastern Europe.

For years
this continues: he reads
the systematic philosophers, popular
novelists of other centuries,
lyric poets. Now the man
is reading about beautiful women.
He undresses and strides naked
about the room, and as we watch
he seems to age. His neat goatee
lengthens, grizzles, his broad chest
narrows, his face wrinkles,
and his eyes grow round and hollow.
Is this the parable:
a man alone in a cell
reading, while outside
history
chalks up another debacle?

Fifteen years later
bitter with what he's foreseen
he renounces all claim
and climbs out the window.
Peasants are lined against the wall
of the estate, and just as he hits the ground
he notes a squad of soldiers aiming their guns.
Crouching, he scrambles for cover.
Now he staggers and falls, now
he is crawling into the earth. I assume
he had something else in mind.
So many have died, are dying
there are not enough stories to name them
and those who are left could care less about such tales.