

**The Evolution of Irony in the Short
Stories of Chekhov**

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by

Martha Lemieux

Department of Russian and Slavic Studies

M^CGill University

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Abstract

In the corpus of Chekhov's prose there is a perceptible evolution in his use of irony. This study involves an examination of the use of irony in the initial, middle and final phases of his artistic career. It will demonstrate that in the initial phase, Chekhov's use of irony was direct and overt; in the middle phase, it was more deliberate and covert; and in the final phase, it was subdued, more transparent and transcendent. Selected stories taken from all three periods will illustrate this evolution.

Résumé

Dans l'œuvre en prose de Tchekhov, il y a une évolution marquée dans l'usage de l'ironie. Cette dissertation examinera comment Tchekhov a utilisé l'ironie au cours des différentes phases de sa carrière artistique: le début, le milieu et la période finale. Ce travail montrera que pendant la phase initiale, l'ironie de Tchekhov était simple et directe; pendant la période intermédiaire, son ironie était plutôt délibérée et déguisée; pendant la dernière période, elle était plus délicate, à la fois transparente et transcendente. Afin d'illustrer cette évolution, quelques récits ont été choisis pour chaque période.

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INTRODUCTION

In most of literary criticism dealing with Chekhov, little attention has been accorded to the use of irony. Ironically, irony is perhaps one of the key factors in properly interpreting Chekhov's work. Irony like literature has gone through a lengthy process of evolution and growth. It has evolved from a rhetorical to a metaphysical function and has become an extremely complex and effective mode of literary expression. Chekhov is perhaps one of the first exponents of what might be termed a 20th century variety of irony since his irony is grounded in the metaphysical position of relativism. Irony in the 20th century has evolved far beyond its early origins in Greek comedy, beyond the Sophoclean irony of fate, to encompass a variety of meanings and techniques and to become a very elusive and difficult term to define. First and foremost the development of irony is intimately related to the shifts and trends in the intellectual history of Europe. The modern writer's irony embodies an existential contradiction, not to be reconciled by the casuistry of reason, between the human longing for ultimate meaning and the lack of meaning, between the force of intellectual passion that motivates the quest for truth and the countervailing realization that there is no truth to be found. He rejects the idea of universal justice or of moral laws, of the supernatural, or of a hope of

redemption. In short the modern ironist sees life in terms of the absurd rather than in terms of good and evil. It is a type of irony that allows contradictions to co-exist and entertains a multiplicity of perspectives

In order to properly demonstrate how Chekhov uses irony in a modern way, it is first necessary to define irony and to show where it is found. The origin of the word comes from the Greek word eironeia which means dissimulation or affected ignorance. Irony was for the Greeks the art of saying something without really saying it. The eiron of early Greek comedy regularly triumphed over his antagonist, the alazon, a boastful character who was always trying to achieve his ends by deception through exaggeration. The eiron was always portrayed as being weak but clever and resourceful. Joseph Shipley in "irony" in the *Dictionary of World Literature* states that:

"...the term 'irony' always preserves the essence of its original meaning. The Socrates of Platonic dialogues, in his modesty, his profession of ignorance, his readiness to concede points of view at variance with his own in order to demonstrate their absurdity by assuming his opponents' very premises, shows his kinship to this comic figure. The originality of the Socratic irony consists in the adaptation to dialectical ends in the search for truth of the eiron's technique of self-effacement, understatement, and encouragement of an opponent's excessive self-confidence."¹

Irony in Greek tragedy does not deviate from its original roots, but it

¹ Shipley, J., "Types of Irony", *Dictionary of World Literature* (New York, 1943) pp 233-4.

shows the same elements only with a tremendous enrichment of the concept. This enrichment consisted of associating irony with tragic effects as well. Another literary school that is associated with irony is the Romantic school. The term 'Romantic irony' was first utilized by Frederick Schlegel to demonstrate the objectivity of romantic works, notably those written by Shakespeare.

"According to the Fichtean metaphysics which influenced Schlegel, every man creates the world in his own mind, and hence is sovereign over it, though restricted by it. The more objective he can be toward it, the greater his spiritual freedom. At the same time even the most objective artist is also within his work. To combine extreme objectivity and immanence, as Shakespeare did, is to resemble God Himself. And this state of godlike self-division and self-consciousness is Romantic irony."²

This is a complete Weltanschauung in itself. German romantic irony was a philosophy and school of literature in itself, but was given the name of romantic irony. Indeed, it is a way of looking at life which was based on understanding the irony of the universe. It ties in neatly with 20th century existentialism and modern irony as the modern hero realizes the hopelessness and absurdity of his plight, but knowing all this, or knowing that he does not know, he has the courage to bear up. He preserves his integrity by seeing all of existence through the perspective of irony.

² Thompson, A.R., *The Dry Mock, a Study of Irony in Drama* (University of California Press, U.S.A., 1948) pp 63-4

Irony is a term today that is constantly misconstrued and confused with other terms. The difficulty is to arrive at a clear definition of the concept and the various ways in which irony is achieved in order to analyze Chekhov's use of irony. There are many debates on the definitions of irony and the categories of irony as the same terms have different meanings for different authors. To illustrate this point I shall look at some of the definitions and systems of classification and try to create one which suits my purposes. A.R. Thompson in his *The Dry Mock: A Study of Irony in Drama* defines irony as:

"a discrepancy or incongruity between expression and meaning, appearance and reality, or expectation and event. What we notice and then call irony is a striking discrepancy one which is artfully arranged to draw attention to itself, or which, though occurring by chance, likewise compels our attention."³

He then classifies irony into three forms of ironic situations: irony of speech [verbal irony], irony of character [irony of manner] and irony of events [dramatic irony]. David Worcester in his *The Art of Satire* classifies four types of irony: verbal irony, irony of manner, irony of fact or dramatic irony, and cosmic irony. D.C. Muecke in his book *The Compass of Irony* defines irony as:

"ways of speaking, writing, acting, behaving, painting, etc., in which the real or intended meaning presented or evoked is intentionally quite other than, and incompatible with, the

³ Thompson, A.R., *The Dry Mock; a Study of Irony in Drama* (University of California Press, U S A, 1948) p.10.

ostensible or pretended meaning. "⁴

It is an art that gets its effects from below the surface and as such gives the effect of saying so much more. Muecke goes on to state that in all instances of irony there are usually three essential elements, besides its subjective and aesthetic requirements.

"In the first place irony is a double-layered or two-storey phenomenon. At the lower level is the situation either as it appears to the victim of irony or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist. In the second place there is always some kind of opposition between the two levels, an opposition that may take the form of contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility. What is said may be contradicted by what is meant; what the victim thinks may be contradicted by what the observer knows. In the third place there is in irony an element of innocence, either the victim is confidently unaware of the very possibility of there being an upper level or point of view that invalidates his own, or an ironist pretends not to be aware of it."⁵

He then goes on to qualify that in simple irony there are only two layers, but in double irony there is "a double opposition and sometimes a double unawareness"⁶ This last point is extremely important as regards the work of Chekhov as he had a tendency to use simple irony more frequently in his earlier works when he was writing for humorous magazines than in his later more mature work. This will be a point I shall be including in my

⁴ Muecke, D C , *The Compasses of Irony*, (Methuen & Co Ltd , London, 1969) p.53

⁵ IBID., p 53

⁶ IBID., p 20

arguments about Chekhov's work.

Muecke resolves the problem of classification by grading irony into three classes according to the degree of subtlety: "overt, covert or private irony."⁷ He then distinguishes four modes of irony: impersonal, self-disparaging, ingenu, and dramatized irony. The three grades of irony roughly parallel and span the development of irony in the short stories of Chekhov. Overt irony is blatant. It is immediately perceptible to the reader and what makes irony overt is the obviousness of the ironic contradiction.

"The tone in overt irony may be either congruous with the real meaning, and it is then we have sarcasm or bitter irony, or an exaggeration of the tone appropriate to the ostensible meaning, in which case we speak of heavy irony."⁸

The distinction between overt irony and covert irony is a question of subtlety. Overt irony is grasped immediately whereas covert irony requires greater sensitivity to the text. It is a process of discovery as it must be detected. The covert ironist avoids showing his cards; he doesn't use any tone, manner or stylistic means which would instantly uncover his intentions. Finally private irony is an irony that is not intended to be perceived by anyone. Muecke gives a wonderful example from *Pride and Prejudice* to illustrate his point. He states that Mr. Bennet is a private

⁷ Muecke, D C , *The Compasses of Irony*, (Methuen & Co Ltd , London, 1969), p.21.

⁸ *IBID.*, p.53

ironist; he enjoys seeing his wife and Mr. Collins construe what he says literally, that is, he enjoys the irony of their being impervious to his irony.

In discussing his four modes of irony, Muecke enumerates twenty basic techniques which can be used under mode of impersonal irony. All four of his modes are dependent on the ironist's method of presenting the irony. In an overall view, Muecke distinguishes between what he terms general irony as opposed to specific irony. General irony he defines as :

"life itself or any general aspect of life seen as fundamentally and inescapably an ironic state of affairs. No longer is it a case of isolated victims; as we are all victims of impossible situations."⁹

Specific irony deals with the victim only and in instances of specific irony the victim is isolated.

At this juncture it is necessary to synthesize the above information into a framework of analysis. I shall use the following definition of irony. Irony is the deliberate attempt to portray something that is really intended by indicating something quite different. My definition is a distillation of the various definitions I have discussed and it is broad and loose enough to encompass the various shades of the term.

⁹ Muecke, D.C., *The Compasses of Irony* (Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1969), p.54.

I shall incorporate Muecke's grades of irony into my hypothesis about Chekhov's work. Once again the grades are overt, covert and private and they deal specifically with the subtlety of the author's artistic presentation of irony or the mood in which he presents it. I shall apply his grades to selected short stories of Chekhov, but I shall alter somewhat his final category. I shall argue that Chekhov's work can be roughly divided into three phases. In the first phase of his work, his use of irony is overt; in the second phase it is covert; and in the final phase it is what I shall label as a subdued, transcendent, and more transparent grade of irony.

I prefer to use A. R. Thompson's classification of three kinds of ironic situations: irony of speech, irony of character, and irony of events as they are applicable to ironic situations in all literary mediums. This includes the novel, poetry, drama, and short stories. Furthermore, the emotional tone of the irony, whether it is tragic, serious, comic or a mixture of these fits into all these categories. Finally, the complexity or subtlety of the irony, whether it be a complex multilayered variety or a more simple double-layered variety, falls into all these types of ironic situations.

I shall also use Muecke's twenty techniques which he lists and explains under his mode of impersonal irony as the main ways in which situations are put together to result in irony. They are the following:

praising in order to blame, blaming in order to praise, pretended agreement with the victim, pretended advice or encouragement to the victim, rhetorical question, pretended doubt, innuendo and insinuation, irony by analogy, ambiguity, pretended omission of censure, pretended attack upon the victim's opponent, pretended defence of the victim, misrepresentation or false statement, internal contradiction, fallacious reasoning, understatement, overstatement, irony displaced, and stylistically signalled irony. The final category of stylistically signalled irony includes parody, burlesque, travesty, mock-heroic and stylistic placing.

I shall now turn to a brief exposition of Chekhov's career in order to assess his artistic growth and how his irony evolved along with it. Chekhov began his writing career when he was a student in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Moscow. The circumstances which surrounded his entry into this career were inauspicious. He wrote his first short stories to earn a quick rouble to support his impoverished family. He contributed to low-brow humorous magazines which included *Осколки*, *Стрекоза*, *Зритель*, *Будильник*, among others as opposed to the renowned Russian literary journals where Tolstoy, Turgenev, and others were first published. Most of these stories were written under the pseudonym of Антоша Чехонте, a comic name given to him by a schoolmaster in Taganrog. Chekhov wrote most of these early stories in

haste and under difficult circumstances. In a letter to Nikolas Leykin, he writes:

Пишу при самых гнусных условиях. Передо мной моя не литературная работа, хлопающая немилосердно по совести, в соседней комнате крутит детиныш приехавшего погостить родича, в другой комнате отец читает матери вслух 'запечатленного ангела'. Для пишущего человека гнусней этой обстановки и придумать трудно что-либо другое.¹⁰

Throughout his medical studies, Chekhov continued writing hastily and yet it was during this period that he started to refine his art. The size and limitations imposed by these humorous magazines were an important factor in Chekhov's literary apprenticeship. They imposed upon him a certain rigour in ordering concisely his stories which he maintained to the end of his artistic career.

The period from 1880 to 1887 is considered by most critics to be Chekhov's early period or period of apprenticeship. It was in March of 1886 that he received the famous letter from D. Grigorovich which implored him to respect his talent and to cease writing in haste. This was a benchmark in Chekhov's career and his response to that letter was joyous, but he openly admits his lack of respect for his work. In his reply

¹⁰ Чехов, А., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1956) Том 11, ст.31
For translation, see Appendix (I).

to Grigorovich, he says:

Пишу все это для того только, чтобы хотя немного оправдаться перед Вами в своем тяжком грехе. Доселе относился я к своей литературной работе крайне легкомысленно, небрежно, Зря Не помню я ни одного своего рассказа, над которым я работал бы более суток, а 'Егеря', который Вам понравился, я писал в купальне! Как репортеры пишут свои заметки о пожарах, так я писал свои рассказы, машинально, полубессознательно, нимало не заботясь не о читателе, ни о себе самом .¹¹

However even during this period, there are marked signs of a sophisticated artist who was emerging. This is particularly true in terms of his use of irony. His early work is essentially journalistic as he had to write with certain considerations in mind. He had to be concise for the editor, offer light material for the reader, and adhere to the dictums of the censor. Consequently, the pieces of this period are comparatively subjective; that is we are aware of an author-narrator controlling both the characters and the events. The irony is very obvious in them and it is a irony which is mostly used with a satiric or sarcastic intent and very infrequently reveals the compassion and tolerance which is a hallmark of his more mature work. The themes of the early stories usually dealt with the civil service or чиновник, vaudeville satires on love and marriage, and melodramatic stories of degeneracy. The main techniques to achieve irony

¹¹ Чехов, А., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1956) Том 11, ст 80. For translation, see Appendix (II).

were parody, burlesque, overstatement and understatement. In these very early stages the comedy is crude, but towards 1885-6, one begins to notice several stories of serious merit. If they are comic and ironical, they are not crude; they have a core of serious moral insight. В Ермилов supports this rather strongly «Уже тогда, как видим, для Чехова его сотрудничество в юмористических журналах было полем сражения против лжи и пошлости.»¹² (Even then it was apparent that for Chekhov his collaboration in these humorous magazines was a forum to protest against lies and vulgarity). One story that falls into this category is *Анюта* which appeared in 1886. This is one of the three stories I shall deal with in greater length when I discuss the role of irony in Chekhov's early work. In this story a literary allusion plays an important role. The use of literary allusions starts to become a frequent device of Chekhov's which contributes irony by an implied contrast between the meaning of the literary reference and that of the theme of the story. The irony of these early stories starts to move from the surface of the stories into the interior regions of the stories. *Anyuta* could be considered a transitional piece which signals a change in the quality of his irony.

The year 1887 marks the beginning of Chekhov's middle period of writing. It was not only the recognition of his talent by Grigorovich,

¹² Ермилов, Б., А.П. Чехов, (Издательство ЦК ВЛКС «МОЛОДАЯ ГВАРДИЯ» Москва, 1949) ст 95.

but the beginning of his affiliation with A. Suvorin. As Simon Karlinsky points out:

"It was Suvorin's publication of Chekhov's stories in his newspaper 'New Times' and his subsequent securing of Chekhov's nomination for the Pushkin Prize that gained Chekhov entry into serious literary journals and brought him to the attention of important editors, of Lev Tolstoy, and of the literate reading public."¹³

This association freed him from previous literary constraints and to a greater degree from financial constraints. He was now able to reduce his literary output and devote more attention to refining his art. In 1888 he was awarded the Pushkin Prize which brought him further recognition.

The middle period of his artistic career could be said to span from 1887 to 1896. Philosophical themes seem to play a more dominant role in these years. It was during this period that Chekhov flirted openly with Tolstoy's philosophy of the non-resistance to evil, examined other philosophies of life, and looked to science for certain solutions. Thomas Winner has the following to say about this time:

"In these stories, Chekhov treats some of the problems related to the scientific view, which concerned also Dostoevsky and, after him, Nietzsche: the relationship of science to man, the problem of the reification of science and thus the already emerging conflict between the new science and traditional humanistic values."¹⁴

¹³ Karlinsky, S., *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary*, (University of California Press) p.54.

¹⁴ Winner, T., "Chekhov and Scientifism: Observations on the Searching Stories". *Anton Chekhov 1860-1960, Some Essays*, (Leichen, 1960) p.362.

The critics often refer to this period as his searching years. During this time most of his stories which have a marked philosophical underpinning, appeared. Prominent among stories in this category are "*A Boring Story*", "*Gusev*", "*Ward VI*", "*The Duel*", "*The Black Monk*", and "*My Life*". The stories written during these years also exhibit a great interest in psychological probing. All of these types of stories tend to lend themselves sui generis to more complicated and subtle forms of irony. The irony is usually intricate and multi-layered and often wraps itself around the entire framework of the story or is even embedded in the structure. The use of parallelism, a technique reflecting perhaps Tolstoy's influence, is utilized frequently by Chekhov as a structural device for ironic purposes. Whereas Tolstoy used the device mainly for moral purposes, Chekhov uses it to effect an existential contradiction. In the psychological stories, where he uses his medical background to a full advantage, irony plays a role of paramount importance as it dovetails naturally with the obvious contradictions that exist in the human mind.

In this period the role of the narrator is usually suppressed and the main protagonist usually dominates the stories with his personality, language, mannerisms and attitudes. The presence of contrapuntal themes of irony, in the form of diametrically opposed characters, adapts itself nicely to this type of narration. Irony by analogy seems to play a more important role in the middle years and perhaps

reflects Chekhov's own personal quest in coming to terms with life. His main themes and his tone at this time suggest this also. His tone is more sombre, but the tone of the irony is invariably kind and compassionate rather than cruel or bitter; Chekhov does not wish to hurt or deride.

V. Korolenko in his reminiscences of Chekhov discusses his moods in the three periods of his career:

Палата No. 6 — произведение поразительное по захватывающей силе и глубине, с каким выражено в нем новое настроение Чехова, которое я назвал бы настроением второго периода. Оно совершенно определилось, и всем стала ясна неожиданная перемена: человек, еще так недавно подходивший к жизни с радостным смехом и шуткой, беззаботно веселый и остроумный, при более пристальном взгляде в глубину жизни неожиданно почувствовал себя пессимистом. К третьему я бы отнес рассказы, а пожалуй, и драмы последних годов, в которых звучит и стремление к лучшему, и вера в него, и надежда.¹⁵

It must be pointed out that in his middle years Chekhov does not treat psycho-philosophical themes exclusively. He never abandons the themes of love and marriage, creativity and *пошлость*, and the decaying upper classes. After his trip to the penal colony of Sakhalin in 1890, he became even more sensitive to social problems. As Thomas Winner sees it:

"He became increasingly concerned with a search for a more clearly defined world view and for an answer to the question of the moral responsibility of the writer. His writings began

¹⁵ Короленко, В. Г., А. П. Чехов в воспоминаниях современников, (Художественная Литература, Москва, 1986) ст. 42. For translation, see Appendix (III).

to voice a degree of social criticism previously unknown in his work."¹⁶

The irony in the middle stories seems more deliberate than in the first and final periods of his career. Around about 1895-6, his interest in examining philosophical questions wanes although he never completely abandons this interest. In his later works he no longer poses philosophical questions overtly, but instead they are suggested by the inner action of the piece. At this juncture, I would like to state that there are no clear-cut demarcation lines in any artist's career as each phase blends into the other. There usually are certain distinct features that are more evident in certain time spans.

The final period of his artistic life may be said to commence around 1895-6. The tone of the irony of this period is more gentle and subdued, perhaps reflecting a philosophical change on the part of Chekhov. He seems to have come to terms with life. The in-depth probing of the middle period gives way to an acceptance of life. He no longer pits pessimism against optimism: "all isms are delusions, and good and evil exist only in courageous action or cowardly acquiescence."¹⁷ He moves solutions of life's problems away from the present into the future and most of his final stories end on a note of optimism and faith in the future. The irony in this final phase seems more concentrated on one aspect of

¹⁶ Winner, T., *Chekhov and his Prose*, (New York, 1966) p.87.

¹⁷ Winner, T., *Chekhov and his Prose*, (New York, 1966) p.158.

life: It is usually focused on people trying to find some sort of happiness. This period probably reflects more optimism about achieving happiness because of Chekhov's own personal experiences at the time. He married Olga Knipper in a quiet ceremony on May 25, 1901. Irony in the final period is of a more general nature, the irony of life. Whereas the irony of the middle stories focuses around characters, irony in the late period focuses more on irony of events. In the final stories irony of character pivots upon life's irony of events. In purely philosophical terms it is a move away from the particular to the general. The stories in this final period also tend to be more descriptive than analytical which greatly affects the role of irony. Irony in the final phase becomes an outgrowth of the circumstances and situations presented.

Chapter One

Chapter one treats the stories *Толстый и Тонкий*, *Анюта* and *Тоска*, three relatively short stories written between the years 1880-1886. The irony in all three stories is fairly overt and is easily grasped by the reader. They also cover a range of ironic tones. In *The Thin Man and the Fat Man* the tone of the irony is basically comic and satiric; in *Anyuta* the tone is a mixture of comic and the tragic; in *Misery* the tone of the irony is tragic. All three stories treat two kinds of ironic situations: irony of speech and irony of character. There is, however, a perceptible development in the subtlety of the irony. The very early piece *The Thin Man and the Fat Man* differs in both substance and quality of irony from the later piece *Anyuta* where a knowledge of Greek mythology is required for a proper interpretation of the piece. All three stories contain elements which foreshadow the artistic mastery of the mature Chekhov.

The story *The Thin Man and the Fat Man* first appeared in the journal *Осколки* in October 1883, under the pseudonym, А Чехонте. It treats the theme of the чиновник, (civil servant) a favourite among the reading public which harks back to Gogol's *The Overcoat*. Akaky Akakyevich is the prototype of the pathetic, obsequious civil servant. It is a mentality which is induced by чиновпочитание (rank reverence). In Russia

at the time there various ranks in the Civil Service which readily identified your position in the bureaucracy and also your social position. In this story Chekhov uses irony for satiric purposes. He is lampooning the mentality associated with the bureaucracy and its preoccupation with rank. This story is extremely important because of its artistic merits. Chekhov was only twenty-three when he wrote this story, and given the restrictions under which he laboured, he managed to produce in two pages an artistically perfect short story.

The story *The Thin Man and the Fat Man* concerns the unexpected encounter of two former school chums at a railway station. A sudden awareness of the difference in their rank destroys the blissful reunion of these former schoolmates. The story is structured on a series of contrasts which is suggested by the title. As Serena Vitale states:

"Chehov si mostra abilissimo nel manovrare i congegni del racconto ad effetto, e dimostra che la sua rinuncia a questo genere è il frutto di una scelta precisa, volta a rinnovare, se non a rimuovere, le situazioni conflittuali canoniche della tradizione narrativa. Sin dai primissimi racconti comincia il suo costante lavoro di ricerca strutturale e inventariale: si legga, per esempio, *Il Grasso e Il Magro*, dove il tradizionale motivo dell'agnizione (incontrarsi, non riconoscersi, infine riconoscersi) viene letteralmente sconvolto (incontrarsi, riconoscersi è infine non volersi più riconoscere perché il "grado" lo impedisce) è dove un numero ridottissimo di dettagli significanti si ripete ossessivamente, via via aumentato di un'unità, rafforzando la drastica opposizione binaria del titolo, che si pone già come "tema".¹

¹ Chehov, A.P., *Racconti* (Aldo Garzanti Editore, Milano, 1975.) Quotation taken from the introduction by Serena Vitale. pp.xiv-xv.

The contrast in the title suggests both ambiguity and the possibility of ironic overtones. In the opening paragraph, Chekhov extends the contrast suggested in the title and he does so in an ironic way. In a few short sentences he establishes the social and economic differences between the fat man and the thin man:

Толстый только что пообедал на вокзале, и губы его, подернутые маслом, лоснились, как спелые вишни. Пахло от него хересом и флер-д'оранжем. Тонкий же только что вышел из вагона и был навьючен чемоданами, узлами и картонками. Пахло от него ветчиной и кофейной гущей.²

There is also an implied contrast of character in this description which lays the groundwork for the future development of the piece. The stout man is a hedonist who loves the sybaritic life; the thin man is a small-minded petit bourgeois whose vision of life is narrow and limited.

Chekhov proceeds to a description of the thin man's wife and son. The adjective phrases *с длинным подбородком* и *с прищуренным глазом* (with a long chin and with squinting eyes) signal irony by insinuation. Henceforth irony is made apparent through the channel of direct speech in the story. The thin man addresses his old school chum by his first name, then *ты* (familiar form of the pronoun you) and finally *голубчик мой*. The fat man replies in a similar fashion addressing the

² Чехов, А. П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 2, ст. 193. For translation, see Appendix (IV).

thin man as Батюшки, друг детства (my dear fellow, my childhood friend), and also with ты (you). It suggests their spontaneous joy at seeing one another again. However, when the thin man suddenly discovers that his old friend is a privy councillor with two stars he immediately addresses him as ваше превосходительство (your excellency) and with the second person polite form, вы. After greeting each other, the two friends embrace, приятели троекратно облобызались и устремили друг на друга глаза, полные слез (they kissed one another three times, gazed at one another with tears in their eyes), and the reverse takes place at the end of the story, тонкий попал три пальца, поклонился всем туловищем (the thin man squeezed three fingers of the fat man and bowed with his entire body). Три пальца (three fingers) indicates that the thin man is so stupefied and irrationally impressed by the situation that he is unable to act in a normal way. Instead of shaking the stout man's hand with his whole hand, he squeezes only three fingers of the fat man. This suggests irony of overstatement. The repetition of certain verbs carrying different emotional overtones signal stylistically the use of irony. When the two men greet one another: Оба были приятно ошеломлены.³ (Both men were pleasantly stunned) Приятно (pleasantly) qualifies their emotions. However, at the end of the piece the wife, the son, and the thin

³ Чехов, А. П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 2, ст.193,

man are stunned: "Все трое были ошеломлены" (All three were stunned.) There is no qualifying adjective here, but the scene is shrouded instead by heavy silence.

Chekhov introduces another type of irony in this story, irony by analogy. When the thin man reminisces about their schooldays together, he talks about the nicknames they had. He was called "Эфиальтом за то, что я ябедничать любил."⁵ (He was called Ephialt because he used to tattletale.) Ephialt was a Greek traitor who showed the Persians the path around the Spartan defence at Thermopylae in 480 B.C. The analogy here is comical and ironic as the thin man received this nickname because he was a tattletale at school. This detail supports his obsequious behaviour in the second half of the piece. The fat man's nickname is also used for ironic purposes. He was nicknamed Herostratus, a pyromaniac who burned down the Temple of Artemis in ancient Ephesus in order to get into the history books. Both references are an example of irony by analogy and enhance the irony of their characters.

The dialogue is dominated for the most part by the thin man. He keeps repeating that his wife is a Lutheran and her maiden name was Ванценбах (Wanzenbach). This is a name of German origin. After the suppression of the Decembrist revolt in 1825, the Russian administration

⁴ Чехов, А.П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 2, ст 195.

⁵ *IBID.*, p.194.

turned to the ethnic German minority, who were for the most part Lutherans, for their capabilities in government and their relative loyalty. Obviously, the thin man considers this to be a mark of distinction, worthy of repeating over and over again in order to impress in a pathetic way upon the fat man that he has moved up in the world. Another pretended mark of distinction is the son's name, Нафанаил (Nathaniel). This name was a highly unusual name in Russia in the 19th century and signals an ironic affectation. The wife and the son of the thin man are an extension of his obsequiousness and they attenuate the impact of the irony. Their gestures betray a life of subservience similar to the subservient behaviour that the thin accords to the stout man in the second part of the story. When the thin man discovers the stout man's rank, his attitude changes radically:

тонкий вдруг победнил ... Сам он съежился, сгорбился, сузился... Его чемоданы, узлы и картонки съежились, поморщились... Длинный подбородок жены стал ещё длиннее; Нафанаил вытянулся во фронте и застегнул все пуговицы своего мундира...⁶

The use of alliteration, personification and the repetition of the verb съежить contribute to a irony of overstatement (exaggeration or a reductio ad absurdum). Chekhov does this for a comic effect, but at the same time there is a biting undertone.

The sound of laughter throughout the piece is achieved by the

⁶ Чехов, А. П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 2, ст.194, For translation, see Appendix (V).

use of onomatopoeia. The repetition of the consonant x in the verb захихкал, Хо-хо , and in the thin man's affected nervous laughter (Хи-хи-с) after he discovers the stout man's rank attenuates the comic tone of the irony. The xo-xo of the laughter with the open vowel o in the first part of the story is reduced to хи-хи in the later part of the story. This corresponds in effect to all the verbs of contraction: съежился, сгорбился, сузился, поморщились (to huddle up, to bend, to contract, and to wrinkle) and ultimately reflects the reduced dignity of the thin man.

This story is representative of Chekhov's very early work. It is anecdotal in nature and the irony here is overt and is contained in the radical change in the thin man's behaviour when he learns of the fat man's rank. The irony is stylistically signalled and is grasped immediately by the reader. The contrapunctal technique is used for comic and ironic effects. Chekhov uses and expands this technique in his middle period where it becomes a vehicle of sophisticated irony.

However, by 1886, the year he wrote *Anyuta*, the quality of his irony was changing and maturing. The story was first published in the magazine *Осколки* on February 22, 1886. In this story, Chekhov's irony begins to be expressed in more subtle forms. In *Anyuta*, irony by analogy plays an extremely important role. Mythic and literary references start to become more frequent in Chekhov's stories and serve as devices for achieving multi-leveled meanings, satire and irony and also pathos and

emotional depth. As Thomas Winner states:

"Chekhov's use of archetypal patterns may be direct and obvious. Some heroes clearly reflect mythological archetypes. Frequently, however, Chekhov's use of archetypal patterns is more complex. They may allude to only indirectly or they may be inverted. Implied archetypal parallels may encourage certain expectations which are not always fulfilled in the development of the *fabula*. The tensions thereby engendered serve to contribute to a tone of irony and to what has been called the curve of Chekhov's stories. The Chekhovian hero who echoes an archetypal hero is often only a weakened version, a pathetic echo, a satire or parody, of his prototype."⁷

The mythic allusion in *Anyuta* is to the Greek myth of *Cupid and Psyche* and it is used by Chekhov for ironic purposes.

Briefly, the myth concerns Psyche, daughter of a king who is beloved by Cupid, who visits her nightly, but remains invisible, forbidding her to attempt to see him. One night she takes a lamp and looks at him secretly as he sleeps, and overwhelmed by his beauty, she accidentally lets a drop of hot oil fall on his shoulder. He departs in anger, leaving her alone and unhappy. The etymology of the word 'psyche' derives its meaning from the Greek word for 'soul'.

Anyuta, according to Renato Poggioli "seems to have been conceived in a mixed mood, half pathetic, half morbid; and it lies halfway, so to speak, between Murger's *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* and the most

⁷ Winner, Thomas G., 'Myth as a Device in the Work of Chekhov', in *Myth and Symbol*, critical approaches and applications, edited by Bernice Slotte, (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln NB, 1963) pp.71-2.

sordid tales of the early Dostoevski."⁸ The tone of the irony here is more serious than comic. The story concerns Anyuta, a young seamstress who is living with an impoverished medical student named Klochkov. Klochkov receives a small monthly allowance from his father, but is constantly living in an impecunious situation. Anyuta supplements their income by doing some embroidery work. They live together in furnished quarters and in typical student squalor. The story opens with Klochkov cramming for an examination in anatomy. He becomes frustrated and in order to clarify everything in his own mind, he asks Anyuta to remove her blouse so he can count her ribs. A while later his artist friend Fetisov comes in and asks Klochkov if he can borrow Anyuta as a model for a painting he is doing about Psyche. While he is there he berates his friend for the slovenly conditions in which he is living. He then returns to his studio with Anyuta. After his departure, Klochkov ponders the remarks of his friend and ironically interprets this as a criticism of his co-habitation with Anyuta. He decides that he is going to terminate his relationship with Anyuta. When Anyuta returns bringing with her some sugar that she has bought for him, he blurts out in a confused way that she knows one day that they must part and that they had better do it now. Anyuta puts on her coat and hands him sugar with tears in her eyes. He capitulates and tells her that she can stay and then begins his comic anatomy lesson over

⁸ Poggioli, Renato, *The Phoenix and the Spider*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1957) p.122.

again. The story ends as it began and perhaps it could be considered to be a precursor of something like Ionesco's La Leçon.

Anyuta does not have the grand proportions of Psyche in the myth *Cupid and Psyche*, but her capacity to love and her spirituality surpass Psyche's and underscores the spiritual and emotional impoverishment of Klochkov and Fetisov. Chekhov uses irony by analogy, but he inverts certain aspects of the myth. Psyche puts conditions on her love for her curiosity causes her to glance surreptitiously at her lover while he sleeps. Anyuta does not put any conditions on her devotion and love; she does not demand anything in return. Her love is blind. Throughout the entire piece, there is a subtle play with the connotations of the word blindness. All three protagonists are blind in various ways. Chekhov channels his irony through internal contradictions. On the surface of the story, the action and dialogue of Klochkov suggest that he considers himself superior to Anyuta. He treats her as an object to use for his anatomical lesson and also as an object to loan to his artist friend as a model for his painting of Psyche. Fetisov ironically considers himself superior to both Klochkov and Anyuta. He also uses her as an object to be disposed of when she no longer proves useful. However he also berates Klochkov for his slovenly ways, thus implying his own superiority. Anyuta, on the other hand, considers herself inferior to both of them. She indicates this by the fact that she follows all the commands of Klochkov

without any questions and she addresses Klochkov with the polite *вы* while he addresses her with the familiar *ты*. On a lower level the reader sees another layer of irony. *Psyche* means *soul* and by both their words and actions Klochkov and Fetisov betray their lack of emotional depth and spirituality. The supreme irony of the story is that Fetisov wishes to portray *Psyche* without any true comprehension of the subject. Furthermore, all of the three main protagonists are oblivious to the fact that the real *Psyche* here is Anyuta. The irony here is double-layered and overt. However it requires a knowledge of the Greek myth in order to penetrate the two layers.

Another parallel and source of irony that is drawn from the myth is the physical image of *Psyche*. *Psyche* was reputed to be an extraordinary beauty whereas Chekhov's Anyuta is "маленькая, худенькая брюнетка лет двадцати пяти, очень бледная, с короткими серыми глазами"⁹ (a small thin pale brunette of twenty five years with mild grey eyes). Chekhov wants to take the emphasis away from the external aspects of Anyuta where both Klochkov and Fetisov place them, and redirect them to her *душа* or *psyche*. This is irony of pretended omission of censure. It must be pointed out that *Psyche*'s lover came to her in the evening and abandoned her in the daytime. All five of the former students with whom Anyuta has lived, and certainly the pattern will be

⁹ Чехов, А.П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 4, ст 78,

repeated with Klochkov, have abandoned her when they were on the threshold of their careers and the beginning of their public lives. «Теперь все они уже покончили курсы, вышли в люди и, конечно, как порядочные люди, давно уже забыли ее»¹⁰ (Now they had all finished their courses, had gone into the world as educated people, and, of course, had already forgotten her.). Chekhov attenuates the irony of this situation with a play on the word порядочный. He has Klochkov use this same word in indirect thought disguised as narrative just as Anyuta does, but only in a different context. After Фетисов has scolded him for living in such slovenly conditions, he mulls this over in his mind:

Он точно бы провидел умственным оком то свое будущее, когда он будет принимать своих больных в кабинете, пить чай в просторной столовой, в обществе жены, порядочной женщины, -и теперь этот таз с помоями, в котором плавали окупки, имел вид до невероятия гадкий.¹¹

The real порядочная (correct or proper) human being is Anyuta which both Klochkov and Fetisov fail to comprehend. As Renato Poggioli puts it: "In reality, she serves, with her body and soul, the blind selfishness of two human beings who consider her an inferior creature, while she is far superior morally to them."¹²

¹⁰Чехов, А.П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 4, ст.79.

¹¹ *IBID.*, Volume 4, p.81. For translation, see Appendix (VI).

¹² Poggioli, Renato, *The Phoenix and the Spider*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1957) p.123.

The tone of the irony in *Anyuta* is both comic and tragic. In the opening scene we see Klochkov reciting aloud his comic anatomy lesson:

Правое легкое состоит из трех долей зубрил Ключков -
Границы! Верхняя доля на передней стенке груди
достигает до 4-5 ребер, на боковой поверхности до
четвертого ребра . назади до spina scapulae...¹³

The story ends with Klochkov repeating this same comic phrase after he has a change of heart and allows Anyuta to stay with him. The tragic overtones of the irony are softened by this comic phrase and also by the manner in which Chekhov ends the story. He changes the reader's frame of mind by placing the action of the story back into the stream of life: «А в коридоре кто-то кричал во все горло -Грригорий, самовар!»¹⁴ (In the corridor some one shouted at the top of his voice: "Gregory! The samovar!")

In another story published the same year, 1886, but in the *Петербургская Газета* (The Petersburg Journal), the tone of the irony is unrelieved and tragic. The story is called *Misery*. This story is important not only for its artistic merits, but also for its theme. It is a theme which is recurrent thought the entire corpus of Chekhov's work and is perhaps his major theme. It is the theme of individual isolation and the

¹³ Чехов, А.П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 4, ст 78 For translation, see Appendix (VII).

¹⁴ *IBID.*, p.78.

lack of communication and understanding among human beings. In *Misery* the main theme is unhappiness and loneliness caused by the death of a loved one and the emotions which must be accommodated by the death process. Chekhov chooses for his title the abstract noun *тоска* and in doing so he emphasizes a certain immediacy of the moment, but he also generalizes the emotion. He then subtitles the story with the following line, "Кому повем печаль мою? ." (to whom can I tell my sorrow?) taken from a 16th century religious poem Плач Иосифа (The Sorrow of Joseph) based on the captivity of Joseph in Genesis, chapter 4. This subtitle intensifies and personalizes the title and suggest a certain ambiguity. The expected response to this rhetorical question in the subtitle would be for another human being to reply. This question is posed for ironical purposes for the expected response to the question does not materialize. The main protagonist receives no human response to his anguish, only the tacit sympathy of his horse.

The opening paragraph sets the tone and atmosphere. Chekhov paints a winter scene:

Вечерние сумерки. Крупный мокрый снег лениво кружится около только что зажженных фонарей и тонким мягким пластом ложится на крыши, лошадиные спины, плечи, шапки. Извозчик Иона Потапов весь бел, как привидение. Он согнулся, насколько только возможно согнуться живому телу, сидит на козлах и не шевельнется. Упав на него целый сугроб, то и тогда бы, кажется, он не нашел нужным стряхивать с себя снег . Его лошаденка тоже бела и

неподвижна. Своею неподвижностью, угловатостью форм и палкообразной прямизною ног она даже вблизи похожа на копеечную пряничную лошадку. Она, по всей вероятности, погружена в мысль. Кого оторвали от плуга, от привычных серых картин и бросили сюда, в этот омут, полный чудовищных огней, неугомонного треска и беруших людей, тому нельзя не думать.¹⁵

By association, Potapov's emotions are linked to this barren, cold winter scene. The story is narrated in the third person by the detached omniscient narrator. The structuring is linear and the transitions hinge on external incidental events. This movement is connected with the various people who hail the cabby for his services during the evening. In *Misery* the emotional state of Potopov is intensified by each encounter. He tries desperately to strike up a conversation and at each instance he lowers his dignity to gain some human compassion, but he meets only with indifference or cruelty. The irony of the situation further intensifies his misery by the fact that he starts out by addressing the officer as barin, "А у меня, барин, тово. сын на этой неделе помер" (Ah I have, barin ... my son died this week). He addresses the two men and the hump-back as gentlemen, the hall-porter as friend, and finally the other cabby as mate, "А у меня, брат, сын

¹⁵ Чехов, А.П., *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 4, ст.38 For translation, see Appendix (VIII).

помер" (But my son died, brother). Ironically, he receives the least amount of attention from the people whose station in life approximate his own. There is a cumulative emotional build up until Potopov is finally able to release his emotions by talking to his horse. There is a wonderful pasacaglian rhythm achieved in the building up of the emotional tension of Potopov. The ultimate irony is that man with all his powers seems incapable of listening and showing compassion to his fellow human beings. He only shows blatant indifference. Frank O'Connor in the *The Lonely Voice* interprets the story as "not only his perception of human loneliness as an element in the submerged population, but also as a profound moral probing into the nature of guilt itself."¹⁶ He points out that "the old cabby's customers in *Misery* are people very like ourselves, busy, wrapped up in their own concerns, and if they break the old man's heart with loneliness it is as we ourselves might do it."¹⁷ This is one of the ironies of life.

Chekhov increases the impact of the irony by using aspects of nature-snow and wind-metonymically to intensify the sense of isolation of the main protagonist from the social world and human communication. Chekhov's dialogue is disconnected and fragmented in order to indicate his protagonist's inability to communicate his lot to his various fares and

¹⁶ O'Connor, Frank, *The Lonely Voice*, (Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1963) p.85.

¹⁷ IBID., p.84.

their utter lack of sensitivity to his emotional state. Chekhov also signals irony by stylistic means in *Misery*. Potopov at one point addresses the other cabby as брат (brother) and receives no sympathy, but at the end of the story he addresses his horse : "-Так-то, брат, кобылочка..."¹⁸ (That's how things go, old girl) and "Лошаденка жуёт, слушает и дышит на руки своего хозяина ." ¹⁹ (The little mare chews, listens, and breathes on the hands of her master.)

Another stylistically signalled use of irony is the placement and the play on the word лошадь. The first reference to the main protagonist's horse is лошаденка. Лошаденка is rather pejorative as it means nag or a miserable horse. As the story progresses the horse gradually becomes humanized whereas the responses Potopov receives from the various people he encounters during the evening are the reverse.

These three stories, *The Thin Man and the Fat Man*, *Anyuta* and *Misery* demonstrate a marked artistic progression in Chekhov's work. The overt irony manifested in the early anecdotal *The Thin Man and the Fat Man* starts to become more refined and controlled in the *Misery* and *Anyuta*. Chekhov introduces elements of irony towards 1885-86 (irony by analogy, irony displaced and internal contradictions) which he will use with more subtlety in the middle part of his career. As

¹⁸ Чехов, А.П., Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 2, ст 43

¹⁹ IBID., volume 2, p.43.

Quentin Ritzen so aptly states it:

"Ces courtes nouvelles précoces manifestent une évolution. Il faut se rappeler qu'initialement, les journaux humoristiques sollicitaient Tchekhov, dont les textes cotoyaient des caricatures. Son souci était de faire rire, de railler, de croquer ces chefs de bureau, ces adjudants et ces pions qui commençaient à fournir au naturalisme russe son pain quotidien. Et ce n'est que peu à peu que, dans le tissage hétérogène et bariole des premières nouvelles, le grotesque devient triste, la critique plus grave, la vision du monde plus profonde; et que le trait, le coup de crayon font place à des plongées plus profondes et au désir d'arrêter la vie dans l'épaisseur de l'instant. C'est de 83 à 87 qu'on saisit le sens de cette métamorphose."²⁰

²⁰ Ritzen, Quentin, *Anton Tchekhov, Classiques du XXe siècle*, (Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1961) pp.33-4.

Chapter Two

Chapter two will treat the following stories: *Гусев* and *Попрыгунья*. Both were written in the middle period of Chekhov's career and they demonstrate his increasing sophistication in the use of irony. The themes of these two stories are quite different. *The Grasshopper* treats the narcissus theme, in this case a superficial and morally bankrupt woman who deceives herself as well as others. *Гусев* treats the theme of human isolation and death and indirectly the search for the meaning of life. The tone of the irony in the two stories is diametrically opposed, but both of these stories demonstrate a marked development in the subtlety and increasing complexity of Chekhov's irony.

After being awarded the Pushkin prize in 1888 for his story, *The Steppe*, Chekhov was able to refine his art in greater leisure and he became less prolific in his output. From 1888-1890, until his departure to the Island of Sakhalin, he wrote only eleven stories. These eleven stories which include *Lights*, *The Name-Day Party*, *An Attack of Nerves* and the masterful *A Boring Story* portray in the main forms of spiritual malaise. Chekhov's brother had passed away in June, 1889 of tuberculosis and this death seems to have triggered a certain philosophical examination of the meaning of life on the part of Chekhov. His attempts at a novel, *Рассказы из Жизни Моих Друзей*, proved to be fruitless; his

play, *Леший*, seemed to him to be unsuccessful; and he himself seemed to be suffering from a certain malaise.

His letter to A. Suvorin in May, 1889 seems to sum up his spiritual state of being:

Страсти мало, прибавьте к этому и такого рода психопатию: ни с того ни с сего, вот уже два года, я разлюбил видеть свои произведения в печати, оравнодушел] к рецензиям, к разговорам о литературе, к сплетням, успехам, неудачам, к большому гонорару-одним словом, стал дурак дураком. В душе какой-то застой. Объясняю это застоєм в своей личной жизни. Я не разочарован, не утомился, не хандрю, а просто стало вдруг все как-то менее интересно. Надо подсыпать под себя похору¹

A Boring Story appeared in the *Северный Вестник* in November 1889. The story portrays a cri de coeur of an aged professor and lays bare the existential absurdity of life. It suggests perhaps Chekhov's mood after the death of his brother and foreshadows his somewhat intense preoccupation with philosophical themes. It also suggests his search for a cohesive vision of life. In any event, Chekhov decided to 'подсыпать под себя похору', and he started to make plans and do research for a trip to the penal island of Sakhalin. He departed in April of 1890.

On his return from the penal colony of Sakhalin, there is a noticeable shift in his approach to his art. Philosophical analysis and

¹ Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 11, ст 354-5. For translation, see Appendix (IX).

psychological probing supplant to a certain degree the satirical and lyrical qualities of his earlier work. These types of stories with a philosophical underpinning lend themselves sui generis to more complex forms of irony. Nature's role is more limited and tightly controlled as a result of his philosophical preoccupations. The theme of death seems to saturate his prose and this is coupled with nature playing an indifferent role in the background of many of his pieces. Chekhov began writing *Gusev* on his return voyage from Sakhalin. The immediate inspiration for the piece probably stems from an event he witnessed on board the ship returning from the Far East. He mentions this in a letter to A. Suvorin just after he returned to Moscow:

Морской болезни я не подвержил – это открытие меня приятно поразило. По пути к Сингапуру бросили в море двух покойников. Когда глядишь, как мертвый человек, завороченный в парусину, летит, кувыркаясь, в воду и когда вспоминаешь, что до дна несколько верст, то становится страшно и почему-то начинает казаться, что сам умрешь и будешь брошен в море.²

Gusev was first published in *Новое Время* (New Times) on December 25, 1990. Chekhov asked Suvorin to put the date, Colombo, 12 November, to indicate that the piece was begun in Ceylon. The story is replete with imagery intimately connected with Chekhov's experiences on

² Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 11, ст.483. For translation, see Appendix (X).

his return voyage to Russia. Even the rhythm and movement of the story are closely related to the rocking of the ship at sea interspersed with the static moments at port.

The irony here in this story is more complex and is embedded in the structure of the story. The presence of contrapuntal themes of irony, portrayed in *Gusev* in the form of diametrically opposed characters, is the chief structural device of the story. The story briefly concerns the return of Gusev, a soldier dying from tuberculosis from the Far East where he has served as a batman for the past five years. His cabin-mate in the ship's infirmary is Pavel Ivanych, a priest's son who has served as a minor official on the island of Sakhalin. Pavel Ivanych, who is also dying from tuberculosis, considers himself to be a superior human being because he believes that he lives as a rational, thinking person. He assumes an air of intellectual superiority with regard to Gusev and his cabin-mates. He feels that he is capable of surmounting most situations because of his acute intelligence. He is the prototype of a series of Chekhov's fictional intellectuals which culminate with the nervous, exhausted megalomaniac Kovrin in *The Black Monk*. In all cases, this type of character usually succumbs to the supreme irony of self-deception. In *Gusev*, there is a dramatic confrontation between the two major protagonists: the instinctive, intuitive man is pitted against the rational man. The narrative consists mainly of dialogue which heightens the sense of drama.

Furthermore, the story is structured in five short sections like a play. The dialogue consists of Pavel Ivanich's diatribes against stupidity and injustices in the world and Gusev's humble, though unthinking acceptance of his fate in life. Death and burial at sea for both *Gusev* and *Pavel Ivanych* are the final culmination of the story with the evocation of nature in the final lines which closes the cycle of life with the promise of renewal.

Death frames the story. As the opening sentence is isolated, it carries with it more weight and forcefulness : "Уже потемнело, скоро НОЧЬ."³ (It was already dark, soon it will be night.) This sentence sets the tone of the story and by association the sombre and tragic tone of the irony. The reader is placed immediately in media res. We are introduced to the two main protagonists and their irrevocable differences are defined by the opening dialogue. Also the irony in this story is wrapped around this antithetic structure. When the ship starts to rock and something falls clanging to the floor, Gusev says: "Ветер с цепи сорвался .."⁴ (The wind has broken away from its chain.) To this explanation Pavel Ivanych replies irritably: "Ветер зверь, что ли, что с цепи срывается?"⁵ (Is the wind a beast that can break away from its chain?) To this Gusev responds:

³ Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст 345.

⁴ IBID., p.345.

⁵ IBID., p.346.

"-Так крещенные говорят."⁶ (That's what the Christians say.) And Pavel Ivanych replies: "И крещенные такие же невежды, как ты... Мало ли чего они говорят? Надо свою голову иметь на плечах и рассуждать. Бессмысленный человек "⁷ (The Christians are as ignorant as you are... They talk about many things. You must have a head on your shoulders and reason things out. You make no sense.) These remarks made by the two main protagonists in the opening section set up structure of the story and also the structure of the irony. Gusev is portrayed as a passive man of somewhat limited sensibilities who is shown to have acted coarsely in certain situations. His name taken from the Russian word for 'goose' which suggests his limitations. Pavel Ivanych considers him to be an ignorant peasant susceptible to religious superstitions and incapable of understanding what life is about. He considers himself to be an intellectual giant capable of controlling and understanding most aspects of his life. Irony of character, of speech and of events all harmonize in this particular story to undermine and contradict Pavel Ivanych's preconceptions about himself and about life.

Immediately after the opening exchange of words between the two main protagonists, Gusev falls into a reverie and in his imagination he

⁶ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст.346.

⁷ *IBID.*, p.346.

is able to return to his native village in Russia:

Рисуется ему громадный пруд, занесенный снегом... На одной стороне пруда фарфоровый завод кирпичного цвета, с высокой трубой и с облаками черного дыма, на другой стороне — деревня.. Из двора, пятого с краю, едет в санях брат Алексей, позади него сидят сынишка Ванька, в больших валенках, и девчонка Акулька, тоже в валенках "

Gusev is capable of escape and relief from his present situation, but Pavel Ivanych is incapable of this as he has locked himself into a 'rational' impasse. Gusev also vicariously gets relief from the torrid heat and the stifling conditions in the infirmary by conjuring up the cold Russian winter in his imagination: "Радость захватывает у него дыхание, бегают мурашками по телу, дрожит в пальцах."⁹ (Happiness took away his breath, and a shiver ran through his body, right to the tips of his fingers.) Pavel Ivanych, on the other hand, gets absolutely no physical or spiritual relief and he actually must "спит сидя, так как в лежащем положении он задыхается."¹⁰ (He sleeps sitting up, because he can not breathe lying down.) Furthermore, he deceives himself continuously about the state of his health:

Как сравнишь себя с вами, жалко мне вас... бедняг. Легкие у меня здоровые, а кашель это желудочный.. Я могу

⁸ Чехов, А.П. Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст.346. For translation, see Appendix (XI).

⁹ IBID., p.347.

¹⁰ IBID., p.347.

перенести ад, не то что Красное море! К тому же я отношусь критически и к болезни своей и к лекарствам. А вы.. вы темные... Тяжело вам, очень, очень тяжело!¹¹

This is an excellent example irony of speech and fallacious reasoning. The word темный (ignorant or dark) takes on many nuances of irony here. Gusev may be considered темный because he lives his life in an unconscious manner, but Pavel Ivanych himself is темный as he can no longer at this point even sit up in bed and he still refuses to accept his fate believing that he is less susceptible to the vagaries of life than most other mortals.

Chekhov compounds the irony of character and speech with each successive talk he has with Gusev. After giving a long diatribe on the differences between his intellectual superiority and intellectual inferiority of his cabin-mates, he goes on to say:

Парии вы, жалкие люди... Я же другое дело. Я живу сознательно, я всё вижу, как видит орел или ястреб, когда летает над землей, и всё понимаю. Я воплощенный протест. Вижу произвол-протестую, вижу ханжу и лицемера-протестую, вижу торжествующую свинью-протестую.¹²

He then goes on to elaborate about his insufferable character and he finally ends on the note that his 'friends' asked him not to return to

¹¹ Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст.353. For translation, see Appendix (XII).

¹² IBID., p.352. For translation, see Appendix (XIII).

Russia. The repetition of the word вижу (I see) compounds the irony and signals stylistically placed irony. In reality Pavel Ivanych sees absolutely nothing beyond his own field of vision. He is oblivious to the fact that he is just as темный as his cabin-mates but only in a different way. He declares that when he sees tyranny he protests, but he can not even see the tyranny of death approaching. Chekhov further underscores the irony of the situation by making his remarks incomprehensible to Gusev. In fact while he rages on, Gusev is looking out the porthole for a moment of respite when he sees some Chinese men holding up cages with canaries in them and shouting out: "Поёт! Поёт!"¹³ (It sings! It sings!) The juxtaposition of these two scenes provides an ironic tertium quid. By association Pavel Ivanych is the caged canary who sings without comprehension and not the hawk or the eagle soaring above the earth in complete freedom which he considers himself to be. The irony of this scene is attenuated because as Pavel Ivanych's life becomes more and more constricted, his physical appearance actually takes on a hawkish look. In an earlier description, he is depicted as having a long, sharp nose and as he becomes more emaciated, it grows sharper and sharper. The above scene also functions as an ironic comment on the limits of rationalization. Their mutual incomprehension has resulted from this

¹³ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст.352.

along with the great cultural gap that separates them.

There is a cumulative buildup with regard to Pavel Ivanych's self deception. With each successive diatribe, he deceives himself even more until finally he is deceived by death. The irony here is strengthened by the fact that Chekhov describes his death in very understated terms: "Слышно, как будто кто вошел в лазарет, раздаются голоса, но проходит минут пять и все смолкает."¹⁴ In contrast to Pavel Ivanych's death, Gusev's death is described in detail:

Спит он два дня, а на третий в полдень приходят сверху два матроса и выносят его из лазарета. Его зашивают в парусину и, чтобы он стал тяжелее, кладут вместе с ним два железных колосника. Зашитый в парусину, он становится похожим на марковь или редьку: у головы широко, к ногам узко...¹⁵

After the sailors throw his body into the sea and his corpse begins to fall to the bottom of the sea, he is viciously attacked by a shark:

Поигравши телом, акула нехотя подставляет под него пасть, осторожно касается зубами, и парусина разрывается во всю длину телу, от головы до ног; один колосник выпадает и, испугавши лоцманов, ударавши акулу по боку, быстро идёт ко дну¹⁶

Gusev, who has accepted his fate in life humbly and benignly

¹⁴Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы[, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст.354 For translation, see Appendix (XIV).

¹⁵ *IBID.*, p.357. For translation, see Appendix (XV).

¹⁶ *IBID.*, p.358. For translation, see Appendix (XVI)

unlike the rebellious Pavel Ivanych, is ironically devoured by a shark. The contrasts in the description of these two deaths underlines the general irony of the entire story: nobody is isolated from the inevitability of death. Nature in resplendent colours has the final moment in the story, relieving the oppressive atmosphere of the heat, the claustrophobia in the infirmary, the sickness and death. The evocation of nature extends the general irony of life by suggesting that in death there is beauty. It also shifts the focus from the temporal to the eternal with the promise that everything is integrated into a renewal in nature:

Небо становится нежно-сиреневым. Глядя на это великолепное, очаровательное небо, океан сначала хмурится, но скоро сам приобретает цвета ласковые, радостные, страстные, какие на человеческом языке и назвать трудно.¹⁷

Nature's role in the story is structured in the same antithetic fashion as are the two protagonists. Nature plays an ambiguous and ironic role throughout the entire piece. She is both indifferent and cruel, but also she offers moments of respite and tranquillity to the protagonists. This is depicted most vividly in the reveries of Gusev. His dream is bifurcated. At one moment he is enjoying a scene from his native village in the winter; the next moment the dream is shattered by the

¹⁷ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст 358. For translation, see Appendix (XVII).

image of a huge bull's head without eyes enveloped in black smoke. The latter is a symbol of his impending death and by extension the hostile and menacing universe. Ironically just before he dies, he asks the soldier with the bandage on to carry him up to the deck for a breath of fresh air. On the deck he notices steers with drooping heads standing at the ship's rail. This re-echoes the image of the bull without eyes.

Another touch of irony in Gusev's reveries is that with each succeeding dream there is a more elaborate description of his village and the various people who live there. However, the closer he gets to his village in his imagination, the further away he gets to it in reality. In the final reverie he imagines flying out of a sleigh and falling with his face into the snow with people laughing. His dreams prove to be the ironic inverse of what happens to his corpse in the end:

Вахтенный приподнимает конец доски, Гусев сползает с неё, летит вниз головой, потом перевортывается в воздухе и-бултых! Пена покрывает его, мгновение кажется он окутанным в кружеба, но прошло это мгновение-и он исчезает в волнах¹⁸

Irony is even embedded into the imagery of the entire piece. In short, every aspect of the story is in some way touched by irony.

The Grasshopper first appeared in the magazine *Север* in the

¹⁸ Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 6, ст.357. For translation, see Appendix (XVIII).

editions of the 5th and 12th of April, 1892. Chekhov seems to have had great difficulty in giving the story a title. In a letter to В А Тихонов he states: "Рассказ я пришлю . но сказать, как он будет называться, я не могу."¹⁹ (The story I sent...but I am not able to tell you, what it will be called.) He first titled it *Обыватели* (Philistines) which directly describes Olga Ivanovna and her group of artist friends, but does not allow for any ambiguity or irony which are important features of his work. He then changed the title to *Великий человек*, (A Great Man), but he changed his mind and finally settled on *Попрыгунья*. This change is extremely important in terms of the irony of the story. By calling the story *Великий человек* he would have weakened the effect of the ironic structure of the story. He would have overplayed his cards

"Such a title would inform the reader too soon who the great man really is, and not allow him to discover for himself the truth behind what initially seems to be. The leitmotif irony of the *ВЕЛИКИЙ ЧЕЛОВЕК* at first leads the reader's attention away from Dymov. Chekhov's final choice of a title focuses on Olga Ivanovna and not on the 'great man' of the story."²⁰

Furthermore, he would have lost all the ironic possibilities contained in his final choice. *Попрыгунья* (grasshopper or flutterer) is a metaphor for Olga Ivanovna and there is an accumulation of ironic detail associated

¹⁹ Чехов, А П *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том7, ст.504.

²⁰ Narin, S.D., *The Use of Irony in Chekhov's Stories*, Ph.D. Thesis, (University of Pennsylvania, 1973) pp.129-130.

with the meaning of попрыгунья which parallels the life of Olga Ivanovna. Also the movement of the piece pivots on the flitting motions of Olga Ivanovna. The tone of the irony in this story is satiric although as Donald Rayfield states:

"Chekhov wrote *The Grasshopper* very quickly; the doctor, the grasshopper herself and the artist were modelled — perhaps unconsciously — on real people. The scheme of the story is as ill-digested as the raw material; only in an obituary, not in a short story, can the hero be so idealized and the villains so blackened. The result is a renunciation of woman's irrelevance and destructiveness as crude as *The Kreutzer Sonata*." ²¹

Chekhov obviously had some misgivings about the subject matter for he for he bothers to mention it in a letter to L.A. Avilova:

Вчера я был в Москве, но едва не заходнулся там от скуки и всяких напастей. Можете себя представить, знакомая моя, 42-летняя дама, узнала себя в двадцатилетней героине моей 'Попрыгунья', и меня вся Москва обвиняет в пасквиле. Главная улика-внешнее сходство: дома пишет красками, муж у неё доктор, и живет она с художником. ²²

Nevertheless, Chekhov's use of irony is masterful and all pervasive in this story. It is complex and multi-layered.

The Grasshopper is structured in eight short sections. The

²¹ Rayfield, D., *Chekhov: The Evolution of his Art*, (Elk Books Ltd., London, 1975) pp.118-9.

²² Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 11, ст.570. For translation, see Appendix (XIX).

opening section describes the protagonists' wedding day and the reader becomes acquainted with Olga Ivanovna, Dymov, and Olga Ivanovna's artistic friends. Dymov is portrayed through Olga Ivanovna's perspective and this technique is one of the chief sources of irony in the piece. Olga Ivanovna's conceptions about her husband are gradually deflated throughout the entire piece. Ironic misrepresentation precipitates the final reversal of events. The second portion gives a veritable catalogue of the events which fill up Olga Ivanovna's day and outlines the subservient role that Dymov plays in her entourage. It also sets the stage for her adulterous relationship with Ryabovsky and pits the character of Ryabovsky against Dymov. Chekhov sets up a polarity here which he uses as another source of irony. The third scene takes place in the country. Dymov goes to the country with a picnic basket with the expectation of dining with his wife. His plans are completely thwarted. Instead he returns to the city that very evening to fetch a dress for Olga Ivanovna so that she can attend a wedding the following day. Dymov's snacks and sweets are consumed readily by Olga Ivanovna, Ryabovsky, two dark men and a fat actor. Scene four takes place in the month of July on a steamer on the Volga. It describes the easy seduction of Olga Ivanovna by Ryabovsky. Scene five takes place in a hut near the Volga. It is now the middle of September and Ryabovsky has tired of Olga Ivanovna. She protests in vain and when she realizes the impossibility of the situation,

she hastily returns to Dymov who accepts her without hesitation. The next scene is set in the middle of winter. Dymov realizes that he has been deceived by Olga Ivanovna. Although he feels uncomfortable around her, he says nothing and organizes his life to avoid any unpleasant moments. Olga Ivanovna continues to make futile attempts to recapture Ryabovsky's affections. Life continues as usual in their household with the Wednesday evening gatherings and Olga Ivanovna's sorties to the dressmaker and Ryabovsky's studio. Dymov successfully defends his thesis that year, but Olga Ivanovna is too busy with her own engagements to share in his joy. Section seven injects an ominous note in to the state of the affairs. Dymov is ill and stays home from the hospital. However, this does not deter Olga Ivanovna from going to Ryabovsky's studio with her sketch. Dymov as it turns out has contracted diphtheria from a heroic effort to save a young patient and asks her to send for Doctor Korostelev. Section eight centres around Dymov's gradual demise and Olga Ivanovna's belated realization of his great human qualities.

The opening section sets the tone of the irony. The technique of contrasting objective narration with Olga Ivanovna's point of view heightens the impact of the irony. The opening sentence is neutral, but it is immediately followed by a description of Dymov from Olga Ivanovna's point of view in understated but affected terms:

Посмотрите на него: не правда ли, в нем что-то есть?— говорила она своим друзьям, кибая на мужа и как бы желая объяснить, почему это она вышла за простого, очень обыкновенного и ничем не замечательного человека²³

Immediately after this there is an objectively narrated section which gives some basic facts about Dymov's life. At the end of this section Olga Ivanovna's voice intrudes when she says: Вот и все. Что еще можно про него сказать?"²⁴ (And that is all. What more can I say about him?) Then the next section contrasts Olga Ivanovna friends with Dymov.

А между тем Ольга Ивановна и ее друзья и добрые знакомые были не совсем обыкновенные люди. Каждый из них был чем-нибудь замечателен и немножко известен, имел уже имя и считался знаменитостью или же хотя и не был еще знаменит, но зато подавал блестящие надежды. Артист из драматического театра, большой, давно признанный талант, изящный, умный и скромный человек и отличный чтец, учивший Ольгу Ивановну читать, певец из оперы, добродушный толстяк, со вздохом уверявший Ольгу Ивановну, что она губит себя, если бы она не ленилась и взяла себя в руки, то из нее вышла бы замечательная певица; затем несколько художников и во главе их жанрист, анималист и пейзажист Рябовский, очень красивый белокурый молодой человек, лет двадцати пяти, имевший успех на выставках и продавший свою последнюю картину за пятьсот рублей, он поправлял Ольге Ивановне её этюды и говорил, что из нее, быть может, выйдет толк, затем виолончелист, у которого инструмент плакал и который откровенно сознавался, что из всех знакомых ему

²³ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 7, ст 51. For translation, see Appendix (XX).

²⁴ *IBID.*, p.51.

женщин умеет аккомпанировать одна только Ольга Ивановна, затем литератор, молодой, но уже известный, писавший повести, пьесы и рассказы. Еще кто? Ну, ещё Василии Васильич, барин, помещик, дилетант-иллюстратор и виньетист, сильно чувствовавший старый русский стиль, былину и эпос, на бумаге, на фарфоре и на закопченных тарелках он производил буквально чудеса.²⁵

The narrative of these opening sections outlines the contours of the irony and the stage for the ironic reversal that takes place throughout the story. The speech patterns of Olga Ivanovna and her friends are set in place. The phrases 'подавал блестящие надежды; что из неё, быть может, выйдет толк; у которого инструмент плакал и он производил буквально чудеса' are but a few examples in the opening section of irony of overstatement and irony of insinuation as they hint at the vacuousness that accompanies these phrases. Chekhov further underscores these phrases with ironic authorial intrusions. After a description of Dymov's physical appearance where Olga Ivanovna considers that his frock-coat seems to have been made for someone else, and that he has a beard like a tradesman's, the narrator comments: "Впрочем, если бы он был писателем или художником, то сказали бы, что своей бородкой он напоминает Зола."²⁶ (Of course, if he had been a writer or an artist, everyone would have said that his beard made him resemble Zola.)

²⁵ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 7, ст.52. For translation, see Appendix (XXI).

²⁶ *IBID.*, p.52

Chekhov continues to build and strengthen the irony by juxtaposing certain details. Throughout the entire story there are certain expressions that act as a leitmotifs. Their meaning undergoes a subtle ironic transformation as the story progresses. First and foremost is the ironic play on the word великий. The adjective is first used in reference to Olga Ivanovna's friends, in particular Ryabovsky. By contrast the pedestrian adjectives, commonplace and ordinary, are applied to Dymov. As the story unfolds there is gradual transfer of the adjective's meaning both human and social terms from Ryabovsky and entourage to Dymov. In the final section Doctor Korostelev actually refers to him as "великий, необыкновенный человек"²⁷ (a great extraordinary man). This example of irony displaced is further buttressed by the fact that it takes Doctor Korostelev's pronunciations and admonitions even to make Olga Ivanovna consider the worth of her husband as he is dying. It is only then that she recalls what her father and his colleagues had to say about Dymov even though it was Dymov who cared for her father when he was dying. Her knowledge of her husband's worth comes from secondhand sources, as does all her information in life. One is inclined to agree with Lev Tolstoy when he said after reading the story: "One gets the impression that after his

²⁷ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 7, стр. 52.

death she will remain exactly the same person"²⁸

The superficiality and vulgarity of Olga Ivanovna's life is portrayed artfully by a type of irony of analogy. The title, *The Grasshopper* is reflected in many of the details throughout the piece. The material used by the dressmaker to finish "не платье, а мечта"²⁹ (not a dress but a dream) for the main protagonist was usually some odd bits of tulle and lace. Both types of material are diaphanous and flimsy and flutter about in motion. The analogy is attenuated further to encompass the transparency and vapidness of Olga Ivanovna's character. In the scene where she is sending Dymov home to fetch her dress, she tells him to look into a certain box where he will see "так там все тюль, тюль, тюль и разные лоскутки"³⁰ (There is nothing but tulle, tulle, tulle and different types of scraps) This compounds the irony even further. Her concern for the superficialities of life starts in the opening scene with the remarks of the superficial traits of her husband, passes to the superficial and cluttered rooms in her house where she tries to create an 'artistic ambience' or 'La vie Bohème,' then on in a desultory manner to her various artistic endeavours and her daily round of social activities which fill up

²⁸ Hulanicki, L. and Savignac, D., Editors, *Anton Cechov as a Master of Storywriting*, Essays in Modern Soviet Criticism, (Mouton, The Hague, 1976) p.145.

²⁹ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 7, ст 54.

³⁰ *IBID.*, volume 7, p59.

her empty life.

This frivolous, flitting action of Olga Ivanovna extends to her clichés and stereotyped comments she makes about everything. In the opening she refers to her husband as having "в нем есть что-то сильное, могучее, медвежье"³¹ (There is something strong, powerful, and bearish about him). When Dymov comes to the country, she tells him that she is going to the wedding of the telegraph-operator at the station and she refers to him in the same terms: "есть в лице, что-то сильное, медвежье..."³² (There was something strong and bearish about his face.) The desultory fashion in which she transfers these superficial descriptions from one person to another signals a type of displaced irony. Her powers of discrimination and judgement are constantly throw into question by this type of irony. This is strengthened by an earlier description where it is stated in the narration that:

старые уходили забывались, приходили на смену им новые, но и как этим она скоро привыкала или разочаровывалась в них и начинала жадко искать новых и новых великих людей, находила и опять искала³³

The manner in which time is handled is another source of irony. The story begins in the winter, and progresses through spring, summer,

³¹ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 7, ст.53

³² *IBID.*, p.58.

³³ *IBID.*, p.54-5. For translation, see Appendix (XXII).

autumn and winter. When Olga Ivanovna is caught up in her whirlwind of activities time passes imperceptibly for her. In the spring she is at her dacha with her entourage; in the summer she commences her illicit affair with Ryabovsky on a steamer on the Volga; in the fall her romance fades and she returns to cuckolded Dymov. However, when her husband lies dying she hears the ticking of the clock for the first time and "время тянулось ужасно долго."³⁴ (Time dragged with agonizing slowness.) This phrase is repeated several times in the final section and forcefully underlines her total lack of an interior life. Chekhov caps the scene with another ironic reversal. As Olga Ivanovna lies in a somnolent state she is tortured by the nonsensical rhyming words she once found amusing when they were uttered by Ryabovsky.

The story is sketched like a painting with a well delineated foreground and a sketchy background which proves to be another source of irony displaced and a satiric comment on the artistic abilities of Olga Ivanovna and her 'artistic' friends. The foreground of the story is dominated by Ryabovsky, 'an artist,' and in the background is Dymov, a doctor. As the piece progresses the ability of Ryabovsky is called into question and Dymov proves to be more of an artist in his field than the 'artist' Ryabovsky could ever hope to be. He is at best a second-rate artist and a poseur while Dymov demonstrates talent both as a physician

³⁴Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 7, ст.74.

and as a scientist.

Irony by analogy is also another source to interpreting the story. The story alludes to Krylov's fable *The Grasshopper and the Ant* or possibly La Fontaine's *La Cigale et la Fourmis*. The humour and the irony arise out of three sources. Castex and Surer describe them as "l'équivoque, le mélange des tons, et l'intervention narquoise"³⁵ They state that "La Fontaine s'amuse avec l'équivoque établie par la fable entre l'animal et l'homme; il s'amuse aussi à mêler les tons selon l'usage du burlesque et souvent il interrompt le récit par une remarque narquoise."³⁶ All three of these elements play an active role in *The Grasshopper*. Both fables portray two different types of insects: the grasshopper and the cigale live for the moment while the ant spends his life toiling and storing food for the winter. Olga Ivanovna is clearly the grasshopper who hops from one thing to another and lives only in the present and Dymov is the diligent ant. The implied parallels to the fable end with this identification. In the story there is an ironic inversion of the outcome of the fables. In the fable the ant has stored sufficient food for the winter, but in the story the ant (Dymov) dies. Olga Ivanovna has indirectly been the cause of his demise with her behaviour, but she has also been deprived of her 'великий человек'. She is incapable of finding

³⁵ Castex, P. et Surer, P., *XXVIIe Siècle, Manuel des Etudes Littéraires Françaises*, (Hachette, Paris, 1947) p.146.

³⁶ IBID., p.146.

необыкновенное в обыкновенном (the ordinary in the extraordinary).

The intricacy of the irony in *The Grasshopper* is all encompassing. It touches every aspect of the story: structure, dialogue, events, and characters right down to the smallest details. However, after the completion of *The Black Monk* in 1894, Chekhov abandons his intense psychological probing and his search for solutions in life. His mood becomes quieter as he seems to have come to terms with life. As a consequence, his irony is no longer as deliberate and artfully construed as it was in *Gusev* and *The Grasshopper*. It tends to be more subdued and gentle.

Chapter Three

The later part of Chekhov's artistic career could be said to commence around 1895. There is a shift in his mood. His interest in philosophical problems wanes and themes of love and marriage and personal happiness start to predominate in his short stories. Chekhov turns from solutions to life in science and art to living life itself. Irony in this later period is no longer deliberate, but seems to be a natural outgrowth of situations and circumstances. Consequently, irony of events plays a dominate role in his final period. The irony tends to be more focused than diffuse. General irony (irony of life) as opposed to specific irony rules more frequently in his final stories. The tone of the irony is subdued and gentle in contrast to the sharper, more satiric tone of the previous periods. Chapter three will treat *Дама с Собачкой* and *Невеста*. Both stories were written in the last five years of Chekhov's life and illustrate nicely how his irony has evolved. While the stories "are concerned with man's isolation, a qualified hope is expressed concerning man's ability to find a certain happiness"

The Lady with the Dog was first published in the magazine *Русская Мысль* (Russian Thought) in 1899. The story concerns Dimitri Gurov, a middle-aged Moscow banker who is vacationing alone in Yalta.

¹ Winner, T., *Chekhov and his Prose*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966) pp.209-10.

There he meets Anna Sergeyevna Von Dideritz from the provincial town of S., who is also alone on vacation. Both Anna and Gurov are unhappily married. Anna, unlike Gurov, is inexperienced, naive and unworldly. They have an affair after which she berates herself a great deal. This has little effect on Gurov who is essentially an ordinary sensual man without any discrimination. However, back in Moscow faced with his sterile routine of office, club and his unhappy marriage, he realizes that he has fallen in love with Anna after the event. He then seeks her out in the town of S. and they conduct a relationship sporadically seeing each other several times a year over a period of several years. The story is narrated from Gurov's point of view and it essentially concerns Gurov's moral and psychological transformation from a cynical egotistic roué to a man of greater sensitivity and feeling. His love for Anna releases in him a greater appreciation of the beauty of life and an inner personal freedom. The story ends on a note of ambiguity and none of the external constraints are resolved:

И казалось, что еще немного —и решение будет найдено, и тогда начнется новая, прекрасная жизнь; и обоим было ясно, что до конца еще далеко-далеко и что самое сложное и трудное только ещё начинается²

The story suggests that Chekhov recognizes the value of human love even

² Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 410. For translation, see Appendix (XXIII).

in the most complicated circumstances.

Chekhov introduces us immediately to Anna and Gurov in the opening section. He paints a summer scene in a balneal setting and captures the leisurely, gossipy and somewhat boring social life of Yalta.

Говорили, что на набережной появилось новое лицо дама с собачкой. Дмитрий Дмитрич Гуров, проживший в Ялте уже две недели и привыкший тут, тоже стал интересоваться новыми лицами ³

The sexual instincts of the experienced Gurov have been aroused in the opening few paragraphs. He sees Anna several times a day and he muses to himself that if she is in Yalta without her husband and friends "то было бы не лишнее познакомиться с ней"⁴ (It wouldn't be bad idea to make her acquaintance). His background, outlined in section one sets the stage for his future behaviour. When Anna comes into the restaurant and sits down at a neighbouring table, we see his character in his banal opening manoeuvres to catch Anna's attention. He does this by beckoning her dog. The tone of voice is an important source of irony as it undergoes subtle changes throughout the story. After he has seduced her, he addresses her with the familiar ты while she continues to address him with the formal вы. However, when he sees her in the theatre the whole

³ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 394. For translation, see Appendix (XXIV).

⁴ *IBID.*, p.394.

tone of his voice has changed. In the final scene, when Anna comes to visit him in Moscow and she is somewhat agitated, he says to her:

Перестань, моя хорошая,- говорил он,- поплакала- и будет..
Теперь давай поговорим, что-нибудь придумаем.⁵

The use of the 1st. person plural signals the change in Gurov and shows his greater sensitivity to Anna.

The reader's information is dependent throughout this story on Gurov. The story is narrated from his point of view and this is the chief source of the irony. The ironic discrepancy between Gurov's expectation of yet another surreptitious affair and his actual experience gradually becomes clear as Gurov discovers himself and his mistaken preconceptions. There is also a careful selection and distribution of detail to buttress the main irony of the story. We see Gurov's social pretensions and his genuine lack of true feeling for Anna when he is first kissing her as he looks around anxiously to see if anyone has seen them. We are also shown his blatant indifference and lack of compassion for Anna's agitated state by the leisurely manner in which he proceeds to eat a watermelon after he has made love to her. Chekhov masterfully re-echoes certain scenes to show the transformation which has taken place

⁵ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 410. For translation, see Appendix (XXV).

in Gurov. When he and Anna are standing on the stairwell of the theatre, Gurov no longer looks around when he is kissing Anna. His attention is focused on Anna and her emotions.

Chekhov uses images of nature to convey not only atmosphere, mood and colour, but also certain psychological states. We see Anna and Gurov walking together and sitting by the sea together:

Они гуляли и говорили о том, как странно освещено море, вода была сиреневого цвета, такого мягкого и теплого, и по ней от луны шла золотая полоса "

The soft lights reflect a growing inner warmth in Anna and Gurov and the golden band of moonlight foreshadows their strong emotional attachment to one another. As Gurov gradually undergoes a spiritual transformation, even his perceptions of nature are transformed. When he is sitting beside Anna at Oreanda and looking at the sea, the mountains and the sky, he comments on the beauty of everything in the world and how we lose sight of the higher aims in life.

The colour grey also undergoes an ironic transformation in the course of the story. The colour grey usually symbolizes 'пошлость' for Chekhov and carries with it a negative connotation. In the initial stages of the story it does symbolize the banality of their affair, the dreary town

⁶ Чехов, А.П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 396. For translation, see Appendix (XXVI).

of S., and the circumscribed circumstances of Anna's life depicted by the grey fence around her house. However, it is the colour of Anna's eyes, her dress and other details in her life which become increasingly important for Gurov. When he arrives in the town of S., he sees practically everything around him in terms of grey. The negative qualities associated with the colour have been transformed as a result of his feelings for Anna. In the final analysis the colour becomes a symbol of the mystery of love and life which cannot be reduced to black and white terms. The evolution of this colour suggests an irony of internal contradiction.

A pivotal point in Gurov's growing awareness of himself and his love for Anna occurs one evening when he is coming out of the Medical Club where he plays cards. He desperately wants to share his feelings for Anna with somebody. When he starts to tell his card partner about her, the partner totally misconstrues what he is saying and ironically replies that the sturgeon was a little off. Chekhov frequently uses references to food to portray пошлость. Gurov becomes infuriated at this remark. It is an indication of his rejection of the banality of his everyday life and of the changes transpiring in him.

Another source of irony is by analogy, in this case a literary illusion to the novel *Anna Karenina* by L.N. Tolstoy. References to this novel are sprinkled throughout Chekhov's letters and in his notebooks. Chekhov admired Tolstoy's works and at one point even referred to him as

a literary Jupiter. Parallels to this novel can undoubtedly be substantiated. On the surface both works treat the theme of adultery. The heroines are both called Anna and both are unhappily married to prosaic bureaucrats. The lovers of the two Annas are also of a similar nature: both are experienced men of the world. Chekhov uses the format of the short story and Tolstoy uses the novel as his vehicle. Chekhov's Anna is less grand and is less developed given the limitations of the short story. She is essentially a simple woman coming from a middle class milieu of the late nineteenth century in Russia. Her character is drawn in a few strokes and her love for Gurov is at a lower level of intensity as she is a more limited character than Tolstoy's Anna. Tolstoy's Anna is a tragic heroine whereas Chekhov's Anna is not. Since human affairs are relative for Chekhov, there is no great moral message underpinning the story. The moral message, if it can be so construed, is contained in the fact that both Anna and Gurov realize that they have experienced love for the first time in their lives. This consciousness of their love constitutes a moment of illumination and transcendence for both of them. It gives them a greater appreciation of the beauty of life and an inner personal liberation. Gurov ceases to be a cynical roué and Anna's inchoate internal beauty blossoms. For Chekhov this is more important than any moral consequences that may flow from their acts. There is no dénouement in the story, but only an awareness of joy mingled with pain of their difficult position. Chekhov

ends his story on a note of ambiguity and profound compassion for their dilemma.

Tolstoy's Anna, on the other hand, is a highly developed character. She is drawn from the aristocratic upper classes of mid-19th century Russia. She is a woman of passion and she becomes the progressive victim of neurosis and despair. The development of her character follows a definite moral patterning linked to Tolstoy's moral position on the nature of love. Anna and Vronsky's love is carnal and therefore is destructive. Tolstoy makes this point artistically by placing their love on a parallel structure with other relationships depicted in the novel.

By examining certain key scenes in both works it can be shown that Chekhov's work functions as a literary parody. The most important difference between the two pieces is the narrative point of view. Tolstoy's novel is narrated in the third person by an omniscient narrator whereas Chekhov's story is narrated by Gurov. By filtering the events through Gurov's point of view, Chekhov has effected an ironic reversal from Tolstoy's novel. The story in *Lady with the Dog* is Gurov's and this is an extremely important distinction. It is a major displacement in the traditional treatment of the adultery theme. In Tolstoy's novel both Anna and Vronsky fall in love and then consummate their relationship, but in Chekhov's story Anna and Gurov have a carnal affair and then fall in love

after the fact. There is no great attempt made on the part of Anna Sergeyevna to avoid the affair whereas Anna Arkadevna consciously tries to avoid it. She decides to return as quickly as possible to Moscow. The railway scenes in both pieces are ironically indicative of Tolstoy's and Chekhov's attitudes to progress. Tolstoy views the railway in a negative way as all the patterns of rural life will irrevocably be changed. Chekhov, on the other hand, welcomed the advent of the railway for it ushered in a richer life. The scene at the train station in Sebastopol ironically underscores the scene at the Moscow train station. Anna Sergeyevna says:

Я буду о вас думать .. вспоминать, – говорила она – Господь с вами, оставайтесь Не поминайте лихом Мы навсегда прощаемся, это так нужно, потому что не следовало бы вовсе встречаться Ну, господь с вами ⁷

When Anna Karenina boards the train, she muses to herself:

Чего же мне стыдно? – спросила она себя с оскорбленным удивлением Стыдного ничего не было Она перебрала все свои московские воспоминания Все были хорошие, приятные – что же это значит? Разве я боюсь взглянуть прямо на это? Ну что же? Нежели между мной и этим офицером-мальчиком существуют и могут существовать какие-нибудь другие отношения, кроме тех, что бывают с каждым знакомым?⁸

⁷ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 401 For translation, see Appendix (XXVII).

⁸ Толстой, Л. Н., *Анна Каренина*, (Прапор, Харьков, 1988) ст 103 For translation, see Appendix (XXVIII).

With Tolstoy's Anna, her conscience immediately begins to prick her. She is running away from the situation because subconsciously she knows that she is extremely attracted to Vronsky. When she boards the train and subsequently encounters Vronsky her fate is sealed. Chekhov's Anna, on the other hand, is also returning home to her husband, but her fleeting affair has already ended. She has no expectations for a future encounter with Gurov. Chekhov has reversed the order of events in order to pave the way to ironically underscore Tolstoy's attitudes to the power of love. For Tolstoy, carnal love has absolutely no redeeming qualities either morally or socially and is thoroughly destructive. For Chekhov, the expression of love even in its most base form has the potential to be a liberating force. In *The Lady with the Dog*, what started as cheap affair slowly changes into a deeper and more beautiful relationship. Whereas what began as a passionate, powerful affair in *Anna Karenina* deteriorates into a jealous, petty liaison. As Simon Karlinsky has aptly pointed out:

"For Chekhov, sex, like religion, is also a morally neutral quality, whose moral and ethical implications depend on the circumstances and attitudes of the people involved. Had Chekhov stated such a view openly and militantly in the midst of the Victorian age in which he was living, he would have been dismissed as a crackpot by almost everyone. Because of his usual gentle and subdued mode of presentation, he was able to make his point without shocking too many people — but it was at the cost of having his views in this area almost overlooked."⁹

⁹ Karlinsky, S., *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought*, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973) taken from the introduction by S. Karlinsky, p.15.

One perhaps could say that Chekhov reached one of the highest states of spirituality in the annals of literature for what could be more spiritual than absolute forgiveness and an absolute refusal to condemn which he demonstrates so well in *The Lady with the Dog*.

Another scene which effects an ironic displacement of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is the theatre scene. Anna Karenina goes to the theatre to defy society and she goes alone. Chekhov's Anna goes to the theatre with her husband and nobody is aware or cares about her previous liaison with Gurov. Gurov is in the theatre when she arrives and he anxiously seeks her out. When he sees her he realizes how much he loves her.

Вошла и Анна Сергеевна. Она села в третьем ряду, и когда Гуров взглянул на неё, то сердце у него сжалось, и он понял ясно, что для него теперь на всем свете нет ближе, дороже и важнее человека, она, затерявшаяся в провинциальной толпе эта маленькая женщина, ничем не замечательная, с вульгарною лорнеткой в руках, наполняла теперь всю его жизнь, была его горем, радостью, единственным счастьем, какого он теперь желал для себя, и под звуки плохого оркестра, дрянных обывательских скрипок, он думал о том, как она хорошая. Думал и мечтал.¹⁰

However, when Vronsky arrives at the theatre to seek out Anna, his emotions are mixed. He watches her and then proceeds to take a

¹⁰ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах* (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст. 406. For translation, see Appendix (XXIX).

circuitous route before he joins her. Anna has been insulted for her liaison with Vronsky and is suffering in silence.

Вронский вдруг увидел голову Анны, гордую, поразительно красивую и улыбающуюся в рамке кружев. Она была в пятом бенуаре, в двадцати шагах от него. Сидела она спереди и, слегка оборотившись, говорила что-то Яшвину. Постанов ее головы на красивых и широких плечах и сдержанно-возбужденное сияние ее глаз и всего лица напомнили ему ее такую совершенно, какую он увидел её на бале в Москве. Но он совсем иначе теперь ощущал эту красоту. В чувстве его к ней теперь не было ничего таинственного, и потому красота её, хотя и сильнее, чем прежде, привлекала его, вместе с тем теперь оскорбляла его. "

Vronsky and Anna are already living together and yet there is something about her appearance that offends him. He is restrained in his conduct at the theatre. Gurov and Anna, on the other hand, are conducting a surreptitious affair, but there is no restraint in his emotions. Chekhov has re-echoed certain key scenes taken from *Anna Karenina* in *The Lady with the Dog* in order to ironically reverse the details and effect a literary parody.

Невеста is the last short story that Chekhov wrote. It first appeared in the December edition of *Журнал Для Всех* (Everyman's Magazine) in 1903. Chekhov started to write the story on October 20, 1902. Chekhov made many changes on the story before it was actually

" Толстой, Л Н , *Анна Каренина*, (Прапор, Харьков, 1988) ст.543 For translation, see Appendix (XXX).

published. In the original version, the story leaves no doubt that Nadya's quest will end in a richer life. The revised edition of the story, which contains major changes in the character of Sasha and which ends the story on an ambiguous note, allows general irony to have a more dominant role. The ambiguity in the final paragraph ironically underscores the progressive development of Nadya throughout the story.

Она пошла к себе наверх укладываться, и на другой день утром простилась со своими и, живая, веселая, покинула город,- как полагала, навсегда ¹²

Chekhov teases the reader with the phrase 'как полагала' and hints at the irony that can exist between one's consciousness of life and actuality of it.

The story deals with a young girl's escape from a confining family structure, a provincial backwater, class limitations, rigid doctrinaire thinking and ultimately an unhappy marriage to a dull, vulgar son of a local priest. As Thomas Winner has pointed out:

"The structural principle of the story might be likened to a musical discourse in which rhythmic interplay between the motifs of пошлость and beauty develops with increasing intensity."¹³

¹² Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 506. For translation, see Appendix (XXXI).

¹³ Winner, T., *Chekhov and his Prose*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966) p.226.

In the final version, the story is structured in six short sections. The opening two sections introduce the main protagonist, Nadya, her mother, her grandmother, and her fiancé. Nadya is approaching womanhood. Her rebellion against her limited milieu and her increasing consciousness of the banality around her is expressed from the very beginning through her changing perceptions of the external world. Irony of self-deception and delayed reaction become paramount in Nadya's metamorphosis. Chapters one and two outline the beginnings of her dissatisfaction towards her environment, her gradual emotional estrangement from her mother and they also introduce Sasha, a sickly, dishevelled distant relative who encourages her nascent rebellious feelings. In the opening sections Chekhov pits the constant changing and renewing qualities of nature with the staleness and banality of the interior life within the house. In Chapter three, Sasha has tired of the environment and decides to return to Moscow. Nadya goes with Andrey, her fiancé to visit the house that has been prepared for them and she revolts against the vulgarity of the furnishings and interior of the home. The climax of the story is reached when she realizes that these external features are but a reflection of the character of Andrey and the vulgar environment in which she lives:

Для неё уже ясно было, что она разлюбила Андрея
Андрейча или, быть может, не любила его никогда; а она
видела во всем одну только пошлость, глупую, наивную,

невыносимую пошлость, и его рука, обнимавшая ее талию, казалась ей жесткой и холодной, как обруч ¹⁴

Nadya decides to flee and she seeks Sasha's help to escape. In Chapter four, Nadya attempts to communicate with her mother and she realizes that this is impossible. She goes to Sasha's room and they plan her escape. Chapter five describes her secret departure to St. Petersburg and her happiness about her decision. In Chapter six, autumn and winter have passed and Nadya is returning home after studying a year in St. Petersburg. Nadya stops off in Moscow to visit Sasha and finds him living in dirty quarters which reek of smoke and are littered with cigarette butts. When she returns home, she realizes that she has moved beyond her former life:

Она ясно сознавала, что жизнь ее перевернута, как хотел того Саша, что она здесь одинокая, чужая, ненужная и что все ей тут ненужно, все прежнее оторвано от нее и исчезло, точно сгорело, и пепел разнесся по ветру ¹⁵

Irony of self-deception is involved in the depiction of the protagonist. Chekhov suggest this in the opening paragraph. It is ten o'clock in the evening and Nadya is in the garden and is looking in at her family through a window. Her vision of the family is slightly blurred by

¹⁴ Чехов, А П *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 497 For translation, see Appendix (XXXII).

¹⁵ *IBID.*, p.507. For translation, see Appendix (XXXIII).

the window and by the light of the moon. Her mother appears to her to be very young. By association this suggests that her vision of everything in her life is slightly blurred as she has not yet developed her judgmental powers sufficiently. However, Chekhov places her in the garden looking in at a family scene which foreshadows a developing sense of detachment. The opening paragraph is juxtaposed with a lyrical passage depicting the beauty of nature.

В саду было тихо, прохладно, и темные, покойные тени лежали на земле. Слышно было, как где-то далеко, очень далеко, должно быть за городом, кричали лягушки. Чувствовался май, милый май! Дышалось глубоко и хотелось думать, что не здесь, а где-то под небом, над деревьями, далеко за городом, в полях и лесах развернулась теперь своя весенняя жизнь, таинственная, прекрасная, богатая и святая, недоступная пониманию слабого, грешного человека. И хотелось почему-то плакать.¹⁶

This paragraph sets an emotional tone which is linked to Nadya's inchoate feelings. The suggestion that a vernal, mysterious and beautiful life is unfolding is prophetic and the final line represents a subconscious cri de coeur on the part of Nadya. This cry reaches a conscious level as the story progresses and is related to Nadya's rejection of Andrey and ultimately her detachment from her confining, stagnant

¹⁶ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах* (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст. 488. For translation, see Appendix (XXXIV).

environment. The response to this cri de coeur represents an important change in Chekhov's mood and a greater sense of optimism on his part. In the earlier story, *A Boring Story*, this cry uttered by Katya went unanswered as Professor Nikolai Stepanovich had no answers. However, in *Betrothed*, the ineffectual Sasha does propose some solutions. This passage depicting nature is immediately followed by a prosaic, static, almost stagnant description of her feelings about Andrey, the bustling of servants preparing a meal and the smell of a turkey roasting and marinated cherries. Пошлость for Chekhov is always associated with eating and food. These descriptions of food are all linked to the characters whose lives are truncated. The increasing abundance of details related to the preparation of food and eating parallels Nadya's growing consciousness of her vulgar background. The paragraph ends with the statement that it seemed as if things would go on like this, without changing, for ever and ever. The staleness of the interior of the house and by association those who inhabit it, is contrasted with the changing world of nature: the croaking of frogs, the dew, the singing of the birds, the rain and the smell of lilacs. As the story progresses, these elements remain constant whereas Nadya's feelings and thoughts evolve and change. Furthermore, these lyrical descriptions of nature are almost always associated with a recognition of a higher order of being on the part of the character. As Chekhov stated in a letter to A.S. Suvorin:

Природа очень хорошее успокоительное средство. Она мерит, т.е. делает человека равнодушным. А на этом свете необходимо быть равнодушным. Только равнодушные люди способны ясно смотреть на вещи, быть справедливыми и работать — конечно, это относится только к умным и благородным людям, эгоисты же и пустые люди и без того достаточно равнодушны.¹⁷

Gurov, in *The Lady with the Dog*, when he sitting with Anna contemplating the sea, begins to recognize this. Similarly, at crucial moments in the story when Nadya becomes more conscious of herself and her needs, descriptive passages of nature accompany these moments.

Irony of delayed reaction plays an important role in the depiction of the character not only for Nadya, but also for the reader. Sasha at the beginning of the story is portrayed as a rebellious romantic. He is another prototype in a series of Chekhovian characters who all transfer their inability to live in the present to grandiose aspirations in the future. They are noted for their high-sounding rhetoric which masks their ineffectuality. Most notable in this collection of characters are Trofimov in *The Cherry Orchard*, and Vershinin in *The Three Sisters*. Certain aspects in Sasha's physical appearance hint at the flaws in his character. "Когда Саша говорил, то вытягивал перед слушателем два длинных, тощих пальца." (When Sasha spoke, he had the habit of holding

¹⁷ Чехов. А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 11, ст. 354. For translation, see Appendix (XXXV).

up two long bony fingers to his listener). Chekhov frequently uses a recurrent motif to subtly suggest an inadequacy of character. In this case it is the physical detail of his bony fingers which ultimately indicates not only his illness, but also the shallow ring of his own words. He criticizes the sordid conditions in which the servants live in Nadya's house, but when Nadya stops off to visit him on her way back home, he is living in the same slovenly condition as the servants

Потом пошли в его комнату, где было накурено, наплевано, на столе возле остывшего самовара лежала разбитая тарелка с темной бумажкой, и на столе и на полу было множество мертвых мух. И тут было видно по всему, что личную жизнь свою Саша устроил неряшливо, жил как придется, с полным презрением к удобствам, и если бы кто-нибудь заговорил с ним об его личном счастье, об его личной жизни, о любви к нему, то он бы ничего не понял и только бы засмеялся.¹⁹

The irony is further compounded by the fact that Sasha was constantly prodding her to turn her life topsy-turvy and yet when she visits him she realizes the hollowness of his arguments for he himself has done nothing to turn his life topsy-turvy. He is leaving on a trip with a woman whom he is trying to persuade to turn her life topsy-turvy. His words are mere clichés as he has never backed them up with concrete actions. Nadya ultimately realizes that she is the only person who

¹⁹ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 11, ст. 503. For translation, see Appendix (XXXVI).

"жизнь свою перевернула " Sasha's life has remained static whereas Nadya has expanded her horizons and has outgrown even his expectations of her.

Chekhov uses irony of speech to further emphasize the shallowness of life in Nadya's home. In the opening paragraph the table is being set for dinner after mass has been celebrated. In the second paragraph, nature is described using religious terms. Sasha's utopian vision of change for the future is couched in religious terms. He tells Nadya that:

Если бы вы поехали учиться! - Только просвещенные и святые люди интересны, только они нужны. Ведь чем больше будет таких людей, тем скорее настанет царствие божие на земле.²⁰

He goes on to say that each individual will know what he lives for and nobody will seek support from the crowd. He preaches a new credo for living life fully. In contrast to this are the religious characters of the story. There is Nadya's grandmother who prays every morning with tears in her eyes for the Lord to preserve her from ruin. There is the unctuous Father Andrey who performs his ecclesiastical functions in a perfunctory fashion, his specious, vulgar son and Nadya's mother who engages in pretentious conversations with Father Andrey about the mysteries of life.

²⁰ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст.494. For translation, see Appendix (XXXVII).

She subsequently becomes a religious zealot after the departure of her daughter and her social ostracism in the town. The irony in Sasha's words is compounded by the fact that these 'religious characters' live their lives by rote without a trace of spirituality and Sasha himself fails to follow his own credo. Chekhov ends the story on a delicious note of irony and teasing ambiguity. Sasha has died of consumption and Nadya's mother and grandmother are rushing to the church in to order a mass for the dead.

Irony of speech also plays an important role in a key scene with Nadya and her mother. Nadya begs her mother to let her go away, but her mother, who does not remotely understand what is happening to Nadya, replies:

Давно ли ты была ребенком, девочкой, а теперь уже невеста. В природе постоянный обмен веществ. И не заметишь, как сама станешь матерью и старухой, и будет у тебя такая же строптивая дочка, как у меня.²¹

Her mother's concept of change which she links to nature and the scale of succeeding generations only highlights the utter stagnation and unhappiness of her life. She, like Sasha, utters meaningless banal phrases which are betrayed by the way they conduct their lives.

Another source of irony is the play on certain words. When Nadya is visiting her future home with Andrey, he puts his arm around her

²¹ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 499. For translation, see Appendix (XXXVIII).

waist. The comparison of his arm to a hoop (обруч) conveys to her the constrictions of her life when she will have his wedding ring (обручальное кольцо). The title of the story is also linked indirectly to this as обручение is another word for betrothal. When Nadya returns home and finds everything even more stagnant and confining than ever, her only source of amusement is the little boys next door who have more audacity than her mother or grandmother and laugh at her as she strolls around the garden shouting 'Невеста! Невеста!' These taunting remarks call attention to the distance Nadya has travelled and attenuate the main irony of the story.

Невеста can also be interpreted as a parody of *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*. At one point in the story Marfa Mikhailovna, the grandmother innocently refers to Sasha as the Prodigal Son (Блудный сын), not realizing that in reality it will be Nadya who actually fulfills this role. Chekhov ironically turns the parable 'topsy-turvy'. The first major displacement of the 'Prodigal Son' is by the 'Prodigal Daughter'. In the parable the son goes away with his inheritance, leads a profligate life in a foreign country, becomes remorseful about his sordid life and returns home to a rejoicing father who kills a fatted calf to celebrate his return. In *Betrothed*, Nadya leaves home without any inheritance. While away in St. Petersburg she works hard at educating herself and returns home self-assured. She is greeted by her mother and grandmother who seem to her to

have aged greatly and whose lives have shrunk because of their fear of social ostracism. Nadya, on the contrary feels absolutely no remorse and has no regrets about her departure and after a few days at home anxiously wishes to return to her life in St. Petersburg. She muses to herself that:

Впереди ей рисовалась жизнь новая, широкая, просторная, и эта жизнь, еще неясная, полная тайн, увлекала и манила её²²

The allusion to a religious parable also ironically further underscores the vapidness of religion as it is practised by the 'religious characters' in the story. Chekhov has presented in his final story a vigorous, high-spirited young woman who actually takes control of her own destiny. She stands in counterbalance to so many of his previous heroines who were incapable for one reason of fulfilling their cherished dreams and longings. With this story Chekhov places full responsibility for happiness in the hand of the individual and Donald Rayfield states it so aptly:

"Chekhov evolves as an artist by withdrawing as a philosopher. He takes away the lies that are outside us and leaves us with the truth that is in us."²³

²² Чехов, А П Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1955) Том 8, ст 507 For translation, see Appendix (XXXIX).

²³ Rayfield, D., *Chekhov: The Evolution of his Art*, (Elk Books Ltd., London, 1975) p.243.

Conclusion

When one surveys the landscape of Chekhov's short stories, one perceives a noticeable evolution in the use of irony. Chekhov began his career to elevate the penurious conditions in which his family lived. He started to contribute to the weekly magazines before he was twenty years old. His first humouristic bits of writing were intended to amuse the average reader and were written with certain limitations. He wrote them swiftly and given the restrictions of the number of words imposed by the publishers, they were usually short. These earlier pieces he considered mere trifles and they most frequently ridiculed eccentricities of character and exposed various types of vulgarity, tyranny, servility and banality. The material he used to draw his characters was taken from ordinary daily experiences, and the speech and action of the characters were usually associated with a particular social types. The stories in the early phase are relatively subjective as the reader is aware of the author controlling the situations and the characters. They tend in general to be more satiric and the irony lies on the surface of the story. Their irony is overt and is most frequently expressed by overstatement or in the more serious stories by understatement or by irony of self-betrayal. One of his most famous pieces involving the theme of an authoritarian mentality and involving irony of overstatement is *Sergeant Prishibeyev*. A measure of

success of the story is that the name Sergeant Prishibeyev subsequently became a household word to denote tyranny. The same phenomena is in operation with regard to the story *The Fat Man and the Thin Man* where he satirizes the foolishness and obsequious behaviour of the thin man. Most of early satiric stories are a reductio ad absurdum, a burlesque or a parody. Overt irony was best suited for these short farcical stories because the irony would lose its force and become tedious if long continued.

In the more serious pieces of his earlier period Chekhov resorted to irony of self-betrayal or irony of understatement as his conduit of irony. In the story *Anyuta*, both Klochkov and Fetisov fall victim to a irony of self-betrayal. The irony used in the more serious stories of the early period becomes more developed and sophisticated in the middle phase where Chekhov tends to tone down the satirical elements. The tone of irony in the earlier stories tends in general to be humorous and at times cynical, but it is very infrequently sombre. The story *Misery* written in 1886 is more an exception to the rule and gives an indication of Chekhov's growing maturity as a writer. The irony of the early serious stories also tends to be more subtle than in the humorous ones and in these stories there seems to be a connection between the subtlety with which he uses his irony and the delicacy in which he treats his subject matter.

In all the phases of his artistic career there are definite links to his own personal growth. In this early period Chekhov was only in his twenties and did not take his creative work very seriously. as he stated in a letter to D. Grigorovich:

Если у меня есть дар, который следует уважать, то, какую перед чистотой Вашего сердца, я доселе не уважал его... От срочной работы избавлюсь, но не скоро . Выбиться из колен, в короткую я попал, нет возможности . Вся надежда на будущее . Может быть, успею что-нибудь сделать, хотя время бежит быстро ¹

His use of irony is direct and there is no deliberate attempts to make the irony subtle or complex which is certainly the case in the middle part of his career.

In this period of literary apprenticeship, there is usually one of the three kinds of ironic situations present and it is usually irony of character. Due to the restrictions of length imposed upon Chekhov by the publishers there is little development of character in the early stories and consequently most of the characters are unaware that they are victims of irony. This situation changes after Chekhov begins to receive recognition and he is no longer subject to restrictions. In the middle phase of his career he is able to place the characters against a background and the reader becomes privy to the internal thoughts of the central

¹ Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1956) Том 11, ст.80. For translation, see Appendix (XL).

characters. This is particularly evident in the philosophical stories of the middle period. As Chekhov became more known and appreciated, his attitude to his art also began to change. After he was exhorted by Grigorovich and others to respect his talent, he began recognize his ability and to take a more critical look at his works. This assessment of his work also coincided with a personal philosophical inquiry into many of the great questions of life. This probing is reflected in the middle phase of his work which commences around 1888-9.

The middle period is marked by a more deliberate and controlled type of irony. In this period irony moves from the surface and becomes entwined around the story. Irony by analogy plays a prominent role during this period. Two diametrically opposed characters are pitted against one another in order to illuminate the irony inherent in their characters. In *Gusev*, the character of the intellectual, Pavel Ivanych is paralleled with the peasant, Gusev which reflects more clearly the irony inherent in both characters. By juxtaposing these two characters Chekhov shows the weaknesses of rationalization by demonstrating that the rational method can be used to cast doubt on Pavel Ivanych arguments. The same contrapunctual technique is used in *The Grasshopper*, where Olga's character is contrasted with Dymov's. In both these stories irony

is embedded in the parallel structuring of the story and as a result irony of character seems to stand out like a bas-relief.

In this period all the three kinds of ironic situations as depicted by A.R. Thompson are present. However, irony of speech and irony of character are more dominant than irony of events which plays a greater role in his final period. In both the stories analyzed from the middle period and in most of the 'searching stories', the characters are frequently victims of irony of self-deception. Olga Ivanovna in *The Grasshopper* sincerely believes that her way of life and her actions are justified and is oblivious to her own selfishness and virtues of her husband until the very end of the story. Chekhov also leads the reader along the path of self-deception also in order to more fully enhance the impact of the irony. Another device for affecting irony in the middle period is that of delayed reaction. In *The Grasshopper*, the technique of presenting Olga Ivanovna point of view in the first part of the story and then shifting the point of view deceives the reader at the same time as Olga Ivanovna is deceiving herself. This of course only heightens the sense of irony of delayed reaction. In the middle period the use of imagery supports and enhances the irony more than any other period. The imagery in the dream sequences of Gusev in *Gusev* ironically underscores his

imminent death. In *The Grasshopper*, Chekhov piles up detail that is intimately connected with the movements of a grasshopper.

Irony of speech frequently foreshadows what eventually happens in a story. At one point in *The Grasshopper*, Olga Ivanovna breezily declares to Ryabovsky that Dymov oppresses her with his magnanimity. She is oblivious to the fact at this point in the story that Dymov's traits will eventually effect an irony of self-betrayal. Irony in this middle period is multi-layered and all inclusive and is artfully constructed.

Towards 1895-6 Chekhov's interest in philosophical questions abated and his interest turns to art of living life as fully as possible. This probably reflects the fact that he, as a physician, realized that he was suffering from an incurable disease and that his time was limited. It also reflects the fact that he had come to terms with life. His use of irony in this period becomes more muted and subdued. The tone of his irony is softer and it lacks the sharpness and biting quality which is prevalent in the early and middle periods. One major distinction that perhaps can be made in order to distinguish this period from his earlier periods is Chekhov's role as a ironist. In this phase he appears to be more of a dramatizing ironist. He simply presents ironic situation or events as they occur in life. The characters are usually victims of situational irony. There is no authorial intrusions or comment during this period as was not the case during the earlier phases. In this phase his technique as ironist

has evolved. In his earlier part of his career he uses irony consciously to satirize, say, hypocrisy, rationalizing or vanity whereas in the latter part of his work he considers these foibles as instances of irony in themselves and presents them as such. In other words, irony is an integral part in the way he views the world and is not treated as an isolated phenomenon. Consequently, the tone of his irony is more subdued and gentle. This evolution in his use of irony also follows along with his personal human growth as it suggests that he has realized and accepted limitations and weaknesses inherent in the human condition.

In *The Lady with the Dog*, the circumstances of life or fate determines the irony of character. A chance encounter at a summer resort changes the entire course of Gurov's life. In the initial stages he considers his affair as yet another in a series of many. Gradually he realizes that this is not the case and he undergoes a spiritual and emotional transformation. The same situation exists in Chekhov's final story, *The Betrothed* although the story does end on a note of optimism. The initial catalyst for the heroine's transformation are discussions with her cousin. These discussions gradually penetrate to a subconscious level and begin to influence her judgments of reality. Ultimately she makes changes which affect the course of her life. Both protagonists at the beginning of both stories were confident that life would continue as usual and in both cases some subsequent unforeseen turn of events (an irony of

life or fate) reverses and frustrates their expectations.

In summation one may say that the evolution of Chekhov's irony is intimately related to his development as an artist and as a human being. When he was a budding artist in his early twenties with no cohesive vision of life, his irony tended to be simple, jejeune, and overt. As he matured, gained personal experience, and grappled with life's great philosophical questions, his irony became intricate, deliberate all encompassing and covert. With maturity, Chekhov became extremely aware of the force of circumstances and the role that they play in everyone's life and he built his irony around this principle. He himself fell in love fairly late in life at a time when he also realized that he had precious little time left in life, an ironic situation which he surely appreciated. Irony became for him an integral part of life itself. Irony for Chekhov was an integral part of his creative process and vision of life. Ultimately it became his vehicle for properly posing questions which trigger the imaginative process. As he states in a letter to A. Suvorin:

Художник же должен судить только о том, что он понимает, его круг так же ограничен, как и у всякого другого специалиста, — это я повторяю и на этом всегда настаиваю. Что в его сфере нет вопросов, а сплошную один только ответы, может говорить только тот, кто никогда не писал и не имел дела с образами. Художник наблюдает, выбирает, догадывается, komponует — уж один эти действия предполагают в своем начале вопрос, если с самого начала не задал себе вопроса, то не о чем догадываться и нечего выбирать. Чтобы быть покороче,

закончу психиатрией: если отрицать в творчестве вопрос и намерение, то нужно признать, что художник творит непреднамеренно, без умысла, под влиянием аффекта ²

² Чехов, А. П. *Собрание сочинений в двенадцати томах*, (Государственное Издательство Художественной Литературы, Москва, 1956) Том 11, ст 287
For translation, see Appendix (XLI).

Appendix

Translations of Russian Citations

(Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.)

- (I) I'm writing under abominable conditions. Before me my nonliterary work pricks mercilessly at my conscience; in the room next door the offspring of a visiting relative is screaming; in another room my father is reading aloud to my mother 'The Sealed Angel'... It would be difficult to imagine more terrible setting for a writer.

- (II) The only reason I am writing all this is to justify my grievous sin in your eyes to some small degree. Until now I treated my literary work extremely frivolously, casually and nonchalantly. I can't remember working on a story for more than a single day and 'The Huntsman' which you so enjoyed, I wrote while I was out swimming. I wrote my stories the way reporters wrote up fires: mechanically, only half-consciously, without concern for the reader or myself.
 -from *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* translated by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with S. Karlinsky. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975.)

- (III) 'Ward no. 6' , a startling work by virtue of its gripping power and depth shows in it the new mood of Chekhov which I would call his mood of the second period. It had completely formed and the sudden change had become clear to everybody. This carefree gay witty man who yet not long ago approached life with joy, laughter and jokes, took a deeper look into the depth of life and suddenly felt himself to be a pessimist. I would refer to the third period the stories and if you like the plays of his final years in which both a striving for the better, faith in it and hope are heard.

- (IV) The fat man had just finished dining in the train station and his lips coated with butter, shone like ripe cherries. He smelled of sherry (Xeres, a Spanish sherry) and fleur d'orange. The thin man had just got off the train and was loaded down with suitcases, bundles and

He smelled of ham and coffee grounds.

(V) The thin man suddenly turned pale.. He huddled up, bent and contracted himself... His suitcases, bundles and boxes contracted and wrinkled . The long chin of his wife became even longer, Nathaniel snapped to attention and buttoned up his uniform.

(VI) He saw, as it were in his mind's eye, his own future, when he would see patients in his consulting-room, drink tea in a large dining-room in the company of his wife, a real lady. And now that slop-pail in which the cigarette ends were swimming looked incredibly disgusting.

- from *Anton Chekhov's Short Stories* selected and edited by Ralph Maitlaw (W.W. Norton &co. Ltd., N.Y., 1979.)

(VII) "The right lung is made up of three parts"... Klochkov repeated. "The boundaries!" "The upper segment on the anterior wall of the thorax reaches to the 4-5th rib, on the lateral surface to the fourth rib... behind to the spina scapulae..."

(VIII) Twilight. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lie in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs, shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the sleigh- driver, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular snowdrift fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off... His mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is probably lost in thought. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the familiar grey landscapes, and cast into this slough, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing uproar and hurrying people is bound to think.

-taken from *Anton Chekhov's Short Stories* selected and edited by Ralph Maitlaw (W.W. Norton & co. Ltd., N.Y., 1979.)

(IX) I have very little passion. Add to that the following psychopathic trait: for two years now, seeing my works in print has for some

reason given me no pleasure. I've grown indifferent to reviews, conversations about literature, gossip, successes, failures, high royalties — in short, I've become a dam fool. My soul seems to be stagnating. I explain this by the stagnation in my personal life. It's not that I'm disappointed or exhausted or cranky; it's just that everything has somehow grown less interesting. I'll have to light a fire underneath myself.

- taken from *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* translated by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with S. Karlinsky. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975.)

- (X) The discovery that I am not susceptible to sea sickness was a pleasant surprise. On the way to Singapore we threw overboard two men who had died. When you see a dead man wrapped in sailcloth flying head over heels into the water and when you think that there are several versts down to the bottom, you grow frightened and somehow start thinking that you are going to die too and that you too will be thrown into the sea.

-taken from *Anton' Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* translated by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with S. Karlinsky. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975.)

- (XI) He pictures in his mind an immense pond covered with snow... On one side of the pond is a brick-coloured pottery factory with a tall chimney and clouds of black smoke; on the other side is the village... from the end of the fifth yard, his brother Alexey is driving out in a sleigh; behind him is sitting his tiny son Vanka in large felt boots, and his little girl Akulka, also in felt boots.

- (XII) When I compare myself to you, I feel sorry for you... poor fellows. I have healthy lungs, and the cough, it is a stomach cough... I can endure hell let alone the Red Sea! In any event I take a critical attitude to my illness and the drugs. But you...you are ignorant... It is difficult for you, very, very difficult!

- (XIII) You are outcasts, you poor people. I am a different sort. I live consciously, I see everything like a hawk or an eagle as it soars over the earth, and I understand everything. I am protest personified. I

see tyranny — I protest, I see a hypocrite and a dissembler — I protest, I see a gloating swine — I protest.

- (XIV) It sounded as though someone had come into the infirmary, voices are heard, but five minutes pass and all is quiet.
- (XV) He sleeps for two days, but on the third day at noon two sailors come down below and carry him out of the infirmary. They sew him into some sailcloth, and in order to make him heavier, they attach together with him two steel gridirons. Sewn into the sailcloth, he looks like a carrot or a radish. broad at the head, narrow at the feet...
- (XVI) After he has played with the body, the shark inadvertently puts his jaws under it, carefully it with his teeth, and tears the sailcloth the entire length of the body, from head to toe; one of the gridirons falls out, frightening the pilot-fish, striking the shark on the side, it sinks quickly to the bottom.
- (XVII) The sky changed into a soft lilac tone. Glancing at this magnificent enchanting sky, the ocean at first frowned, but soon it also acquired the tender, joyous colours which are difficult to describe with words.
- (XVIII) The officer on the watch raises the end of the plank, Gusev slides off it, he flies head first, then he turns over in the air and plop! The foam covers him, for a moment he seems to be wrapped in lace, but this moment passes- and he disappears in the wave.
- (XIX) I was in Moscow yesterday, but scarcely there and I was overwhelmed with boredom and all kinds of disasters. Can you imagine that one of my acquaintances, a 42 year old woman recognized herself as the 20-year old heroine in my Grasshopper, and all of Moscow is accusing me of slander. The major piece of evidence is an outward resemblance: she paints at home, her husband is a doctor, and she lives with an artist.
- (XX) "Look at him: isn't it true that there is something about him?" — she said to her friends, nodding towards her husband as if she wished to

explain how it was that she had married a simple, very ordinary and in no way remarkable man

- (XXI) Whereas Olga Ivanovna and her friends and acquaintances were by no means ordinary people. Each of them was distinguished in some way or another, and not altogether unknown, having already made a name and gained a certain celebrity, or, if not exactly celebrated yet, all gave promise of a brilliant future. One was an actor, whose genuine dramatic talents had already found recognition; he was elegant, clever and discreet, recited beautifully, and gave Olga Ivanovna lessons in elocution; another was an opera singer, fat and good-humoured, who assured Olga Ivanovna with a sigh that she was ruining herself — if she were not so lazy, if she would only take herself in hand, she would make a fine singer; besides these there were several artists, chief among them Ryabovsky, who went in for painting problem pictures, animals, and landscapes, and was an extremely handsome fair young man of about twenty-five, whose pictures made a hit at exhibitions — his latest had fetched five hundred rubles. He used to finish off Olga Ivanovna's sketches for her, and always said that something might come of her painting. Then there was a cellist who could make his cello "weep", and who declared openly that of all the women he knew, the only one capable of accompanying him was Olga Ivanovna. And the writer, young, but already well known, who had produced short novels, plays and stories. Who else? Oh, yes, there was Vasili Vasilievich, a genteel landowner, amateur book-illustrator and creator of vignettes; he had a true feeling for the old Russian style, and for the legendary epic. He could produce veritable miracles on paper, on china, and on smoked plates.

-taken from *Anton Chekhov's Short Stories* selected and edited by Ralph Matlaw (W.W. Norton & co. Ltd., N.Y., 1979)

- (XXII) Old friends disappeared and were forgotten, new ones arrived to replace them, but she soon grew accustomed to them or she became disappointed in them and she began eagerly to look for new friends and new important people, and finding them, she continued looking for others.

(XXIII) And it seemed to them that they were within a inch of arriving at a decision, and that then a new, beautiful life would begin. And they both realized that the end was still far, far away, and that the hardest, the most complicated part was only just beginning
-taken from Anton Chekhov's Short Stories selected and edited by Ralph Matlaw (W.W. Norton & co. Ltd, N.Y., 1979)

(XXIV) People were saying that a new person had appeared on the promenade: a lady with a dog. Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov, who had spent already two weeks in Yalta, and had grown accustomed to the place, had begun to take an interest in new arrivals.

(XXV) "Stop, my dear," he said, "You have had your cry, stop... Now let's talk, we will think of something.

(XXVI) They strolled and talked about the strange light over the sea; the water was a soft warm lilac colour, and there was a golden band of moonlight upon it.

(XXVII) "I shall think of you... I shall think of you all the time," she said "God bless you! Think kindly of me. We are parting forever, it must be so, because we ought never to have met. Good-bye — God bless you."

-Taken from Anton Chekhov's Short Stories selected and edited by Ralph Matlaw (W.W. Norton & co. Ltd., N.Y. 1979.)

(XXVIII) "What have I to be ashamed of?" she asked herself in offended surprise. There was nothing to be ashamed of. She went over all her Moscow memories. All of them were good and pleasant... "What does this mean? Am I afraid to look at this straight in the face? What does this mean? Is it possible that between me and this officer-boy there exists or can exist any other relations than the relations one is accustomed to with every acquaintance?"

(XXIX) Anna Sergeyevna came in also. She sat down in the third row, and when Gurov glanced at her, his heart contracted, and he understood clearly that in the whole world there was no one nearer, dearer or more important to him. She, this tiny woman, in no way remarkable,

lost in the provincial crowd, with a stupid lorgnette in her hand, now filled his whole life, was his grief, his joy, his only happiness and all that he desired; and to the sounds emitted by the terrible orchestra and the miserable, feeble violins, he thought how lovely she was. He thought and he dreamed.

(XXX) Vronsky suddenly caught sight of Anna's head, proud, strikingly beautiful, and smiling in a frame of lace. She was in the fifth box, twenty-five feet from him. She was sitting in front and turning slightly, she was saying something to Yashvin. The position of her head on her attractive, broad shoulders and the restrained excitement and sparkle in her eyes and her whole face reminded him of her just as he had seen her at the ball in Moscow. But now he felt otherwise. There was no longer any mystery in his feelings, and so her beauty although it attracted him more powerfully than before, it now gave him a sense of injury.

(XXXI) She went upstairs to pack, and on the next day in the morning she left town, happy and full of life — as she supposed forever.

(XXXII) She now realized clearly that she had ceased loving Andrey Andreyich, perhaps she had never loved him; and all she saw was vulgarity, stupid, naive, rigid vulgarity, and his arm around her waist seemed to her cruel and cold, like a hoop.

(XXXIII) She clearly understood that her life had been turned topsy-turvy as Sasha had wished, that she was alone, different and unwanted here, and that there was nothing she needed here; the past had been torn away and had vanished, as if burned by fire and the ashes thrown to the winds.

(XXXIV) It was cool and still in the garden, and dark shadows lay peacefully on the ground. From a long way off, probably outside town, came the distant croaking of frogs. There was the feeling of May, in the air. One could draw deep breaths, and imagine that somewhere, far beyond the town, beneath the sky, above the treetops, in the fields and woods, the spring was beginning its own life. that mysterious, exquisite life, rich and sacred, from which

sinful mortals are shut out. It almost made one want to cry.

- taken from Anton Chekhov's *Short Stories* selected and edited by Ralph Matlaw (W.W.Norton & co Ltd., N.Y 1979)

(XXXV) Nature is a very good sedative. It makes you reconciled, that is, it gives a person equanimity. Only people with equanimity can see things clearly, be fair and work. This, of course, applies only to intelligent and honourable people; selfish and shallow people have enough equanimity as it is.

- taken from *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought Selected letters and Commentary* translated by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with S. Karlinsky (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975)

(XXXVI) Then they went to his room, which reeked of smoke, too, and was littered and filthy. On the table, beside the cold samovar, was a broken plate with a bit of dark paper on it, and both floor and table were strewn with dead flies. Everything here showed that Sasha took no thought for his private life, lived in a continual mess, with utter contempt for comfort. If anyone had spoken to him about his personal happiness and private life, had asked him if there was anyone who loved him, he would have been at a loss to know what was meant, and would only have laughed.

-taken from *Anton Chekhov's Short Stories* selected and edited by Ralph Matlaw (W.W.Norton & co ltd , N.Y. 1979)

(XXXVII) "If you would go away to study," he said. "Only enlightened and saintly people are interesting, they are the only ones needed. And the more there are of such people, the sooner the kingdom of heaven will be on earth.

(XXXVIII) "Only yesterday you were a small girl and now you are almost a bride. Nature is in a constant state of metabolism. And before you notice it, you will be a mother and then an old woman, and you will have a troublesome daughter like I have."

(XXXIX) Before her, a new, wide vast life stretched out, and this life, still vague, full of mystery fascinated her and drew her onwards.

- (XL) If I do have a gift that warrants respect, I must confess before the purity of your heart that I have as yet failed to respect it... I will try to stop writing for a deadline, but this cannot be done at once. There is no way for me to get myself out of the rut I've fallen into... All my hope lies in the future. I may still manage to accomplish something yet, though time is flying.

-taken from *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* translated by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with S. Karlinsky (University of California press, Berkeley, 1975)

- (XLI) The artist must pass judgment only on what he understands; his range is as limited as that of any other specialist- that's what I keep repeating and insisting upon. Anyone who says the artist's field is all answers and no questions has never done any writing or had any dealings with imagery. The artist observes, selects, guesses and synthesizes. The very fact of these actions supposes a question; if he hadn't asked himself a question at the start, he would have nothing to guess and nothing to select. To put it briefly, I will conclude with some psychiatry: if you deny that creativity involves questions and intent, you have to admit that the artist creates without premeditation or purpose. in a state of unthinking emotionality.

-taken from *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* translated by Michael Henry Heim in collaboration with S. Karlinsky (University of California press, Berkeley, 1975)

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