THE INTUITIVE LANGUAGE OF CHEKHOV: WHY LIFE MUST REMAIN UNSPOKEN

by

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the work of Anton Chekhov and seeks to explain what Chekhov meant by "real life". By incorporating various philosophical themes from the work of the philosopher Henri Bergson, as well as other sources in the Russian philosophical and religious tradition, this study shows how Chekhov's idea of "life" is manifest consistently, though implicitly, by the combination of elements in his work. The elements of Chekhov's work specifically addressed is his manner of narration and characterization, his use of the visual and the symbolic, as well as his approach to language.

INDEX WORDS: Chekhov, Bergson, intuition, duration, literature, philosophy, epistemology, religious icon, experience, memory

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CHAPTER 1:

CHEKHOV AND BERGSON: WHAT IS "REAL LIFE?"

The main purpose of this study is to analyze what Anton Chekhov meant by "real life". In his letters, Chekhov often invoked "life" as the standard he was attempting to recreate through his works. By attempting to answer the question of what constitutes "life" for Chekhov, we may more clearly see the unified purpose towards which he strove, bringing together all aspects of Chekhov's work into our understanding of him. For Chekhov, "life" is inherently mobile and contradictory; it refuses to be a static object of study but is instead a process of living and change. Because of the multifaceted and ever-changing quality of "life", Chekhov refuses to categorically define what he meant by it. However, Chekhov's lack of a definition does not represent an oversight, but a conscientious artistic choice which preserves life's fundamental complexity and vitality. By leaving the explanation of "life" unspoken, while simultaneously providing suggestive images, situations, and descriptions, Chekhov draws closer to "real life" by acknowledging the limitations of language to ever fully capture what is a process of change. However, such a manner of writing requires a special relationship between the reader and the work itself, a relationship in which the reader must provide an explanation of those aspects of "life" which Chekhov passes by in silence.

If we look to the field of philosophy, we find an articulated vision of what Chekhov meant by "life" in the work of Henri Bergson, specifically in his philosophical description of

experience called "duration." According to Bergson, human experience takes place in a continuously-changing present, which is simultaneously at every moment influenced by the memory of past moments. The past indelibly influences the perception of the present in myriad ways, thus preserving its uniqueness. In this way, experience understood as duration can be seen as both a unity, in that all moments are connected through memory, yet also a flux, in that duration is always-continuously changing. No one metaphor can perfectly grasp what is meant by duration; only by inhabiting the internal world of the perceiver, be it in ourselves or in others, can duration be truly known. The Bergsonian ideal of preserving the unique, interior world of the individual, situated in a world of continuous change, which is an idea of experience that in some respects transcends the ability of language to fully describe, nonetheless informs both the form and content of Chekhov's stories. Virtually every element in a work of Chekhov, the events which occur as well as the way in which they are presented, all strive towards replicating human experience understood as duration.

Through his idea of duration, Bergson defines a lived experience that also incorporates those aspects of "life" which language cannot grasp. What makes Bergson so compatible with Chekhov is that, while he acknowledges the immense difficulty in communicating an experience of duration, he does not resort to a form of mysticism or spiritualism which would regard this communication as impossible. Bergson believes describing and communicating duration to be difficult, but not impossible, granted that the artist tailors his language in such a way as to preserve the uniqueness of duration. Chekhov accomplishes this task by allowing certain details or explanations to remain unspoken. This silence is what allows the reader of his work to grasp its meaning by way of his or her own individual feeling and empathy. Bergson, as a philosopher, seeks to *explain* what Chekhov, as an artist, intends his reader to *feel*. Although writing to

different audiences in different fields, never having once met or read each other's work, Henri Bergson's concept of duration, and the philosophical framework he builds around it, is the explicit expression of the implicit standard of "life" employed Chekhov. However, the works of both men unify so harmoniously around a specific set of assumptions that they may be thought of as instigating the same re-evaluation of experience concurrently, though in separate fields.

Although Chekhov and Bergson share the same fundamental idea as to what constitutes "life", the nature of respective fields requires Chekhov to impart this idea of life implicitly, whereas Bergson's task is to impart it explicitly. Since Chekhov was a writer of short stories, a wider sampling of his works is necessarily in order to perceive the continuous idea of "life" expressed in each, in comparison with the relatively compact and succinct definitions provided by Bergson. However, by incorporating the work of Bergson into our understanding of Chekhov, the unified nature of Chekhov's "life" present in each short story becomes more pronounced, as Bergson provides a philosophical vocabulary through which we may describe the underlying idea of "life" influencing Chekhov's idiosyncratic literary techniques.

Chekhov's particular style of narration and characterization is a specific kind of "objectivity" which seeks to preserve the uniqueness of duration. As Chekhov's matured as a writer, he increasingly adopted his "objective" style, in which the presence of the author is absent from the work. Instead, the language of the narration is inflected by the speech and personality of the character(s) in the story. Using the same "objective" style, Chekhov often relies upon physical descriptions of objects or characters in order for the reader to perceive the interior world of that character. In both instances, Chekhov's style of narration and characterization preserves the text's intimate relationship to its reader, in that the reader must supply from their own experience the meaning behind the suggestions provided by Chekhov

through their speech or description, as the authorial presence refuses to present such explanations explicitly.

Through the dichotomy between immediate, visual insight and insight mediated through the symbols of language, Chekhov draws a distinction between these two forms of knowing. This distinction, running through many of Chekhov's works, parallels Bergson's two philosophical methods of knowing which he called "intuition" and "analysis", respectively. Chekhov does not champion one method of insight over the other, but instead chooses to explore the interaction between both. Such a dichotomy is highly reminiscent of Bergson, because for both men the immediate, intuitive insight instigates action, whereas the mediated, symbolic insight of language delays action indefinitely.

Finally, Chekhov's particular use of language as a medium for communicating life understood as duration aligns almost exactly with that of Bergson. For Bergson, language is symbolic, useful in generalizing and categorizing, but through which the uniqueness of interior experience is lost. However, Bergson believed that by harnessing language towards a purpose it is not suited, namely art, an experience of duration could be communicated. The belief that language can be repurposed in order to adequately capture that which is most resistant to language, that being duration, is ultimately expressed by Chekhov in his favorite short story, "The Student."

I am not the first to note the striking similarity in the approaches of Bergson and Chekhov. As Bill Tschebotairioff has noted, the way in which Chekhov incorporates Bergson makes his literary output resemble that of a music, a composition in which the feelings of the characters, the flow of time, and the power of individual will are all harmonious brought together without explicit comment:

> But when Chekhov speaks of the continuity and ceaseless temporal flux of the inner world of his characters, all tangible measurements and causal motivations are removed. *Chekhov's treatment of man's consciousness and the domain of his free will is singularly suggestive of Henri Bergson's thoughts on the evolution of the inner life of the self*, the belief that all changes and movements in the realm of personal consciousness, including arriving at decisions, permeated and penetrate on another, blending into an organic, indivisible whole like a musical composition in which every separate note merges into the next to produce a continuous melody (Tschebotairioff 119).

In Anton Chekhov's short story "About Love," the character Alyokhin says, "The explanation which would seem to fit one case [of love] does not apply in a dozen others, and the very best thing, to my mind, would be to explain every case individually without attempting to generalize. We ought, as the doctors say, to individualize each case" (Chekhov 371). Chekhov's evolution as a writer is defined by just such a rejection of the "general," *not only when contemplating love, but any human experience***.** In describing experience, one must reject the generalized categories of thought, as two experiences which fall under the same general concept (love) are always, upon closer examination, revealed to be radically different. Like his character Alyokhin, Chekhov seeks to "individualize" experience by prioritizing the individual perceiver, whose unique frame of reference must be brought to bear upon the text. As Robert Louis Jackson notes, Chekhov's refusal to rely upon generalizations forces his characters to confront their own, unique reality:

> ...It is certainly true that we may perceive in many of Chekhov's characterizations of his heros - in his rejection of religious, metaphysical, political or purely ethical teachings as

> foundations for a world view - a search for a philosophy to go with the harsh realities of their fate (Jackson 10).

For Chekhov, it is the perceiver whose experience instigates the need to narrate, just as it is the perceiver who decides the specific manner of the subsequent narration.

Chekhov is determined to preserve the unique, individual qualities of human experience, because without them, Chekhov believed, his art could not *accurately* depict of what he called "real life". For Chehov, the individualization of experience is not just a stylistic choice, but the only proper manner of describing reality; the difficulties involved in capturing and communicating what is unique and unrepeatable in life is the essential task of the artist, one which he must confront and master. In his letters, Chekhov consistently calls for art to capture life as it really happens, unadulterated by the opinions of the artist, without recourse to cliches or tropes, devoid of romantic exaggerations or fantastic situations. Chekhov states that, in his prose, "I should like to describe everyday love and family life, without villains and angels, without lawyers and female devils; I should take as a subject life as it is in fact - even, smooth, ordinary" (Grossman 40). And we see the same standard of "life" being invoked by Chekhov when defending his plays:

> They demand that the hero and heroine be theatrically effective. But really, in life people are not every minute shooting each other, hanging themselves, and making declarations of love...A play must be written in which people can come, go, dine, talk about the weather, and play cards, not because that's the way the author wants it, but because that's the way it happens in real life (Skaftymov 73).

By explicitly defending his work by appealing to a standard of "life", Chekhov's prioritization of the individual (at the expense of generalized concepts) should be situated as one key element in his overall program to recreate what he takes to be "life".

Linked to Chekhov's distaste for generalizations is his refusal to present his audience with tangible ethical, moral or political lessons in his work, a quality which sets him apart from his contemporary Russian literary tradition. Noting the gulf between the prevailing attitudes of the Russian literary critics of the 1880's and 1890's and Chekhov, Simon Karlinsky says:

> The circumstances of Chekhov's advent as a serious writer have almost no precedent in Russian or any other literature. His acclaim by the reading public of the 1880s and 90s, the recognition of his talent by the finest older writers of his time were accompanied by a steady stream of jeremiads by leading literary critics, lamenting Chekhov's lack of human concern and of moral principles, warning their reader that this writer was dangerous and that by writing the way he did he was betraying the humanitarian traditions of his native literature (Karlinsky 34).

However, the facts of Chekhov's biography refute any accusation that Chekhov was indifferent to suffering or nihilistic in his social outlook. In addition to his career as a writer, Chekhov also dedicated himself to his work as a doctor in the provincial hospitals of Russia, witnessing firsthand the poverty and disease ravaging the poorest segments of that society. "All biographical material on Chekhov reveals his meticulous attention to his patients, his unrelenting endeavors to alleviate suffering, and his persistent disregard of remunerative considerations" (Tschebotairioff 85). The influence of Chekhov's medical profession upon his writing has tended to be underemphasized by his critics. Through his close, working relationship with various members of society, Chekhov was supplied with a varied, rich array of source material for his writing,

empirical observations upon which to base his fictional characters. Chekhov's sympathy for those who suffer is therefore not based upon a romantic ideal of the peasants or the "people", taken in the abstract. Instead, he sympathizes so acutely with those who suffer because he maintained intimate contact with them throughout his life. As Karlinsky explains:

> There are two main reasons why Chekhov's social activism has not been sufficiently stressed by his commentators and biographers...One reason is that the genuinely modest Chekhov avoided personal publicity and would select causes not likely to attract sensation-seeking journalists. But the more important reason is that the basic outlook of the Russian liberal intelligentsia was derived from the field of the social sciences, humanities, and, in some important instances, religion, while Chekhov's continuous commitment to medicine and the biological sciences in general gave him an entirely different set of priorities, both in his life and in literature (Karlinsky 61).

Not only does Chekhov's social activism refute any accusation of indifference, but compassion can be seen as a central focus of his literary output, only a compassion which is expressed in a way particular to Chekhov. This particularity of Chekhov is, in part, founded upon his occupation as a doctor, which granted him an intimacy with people of various social classes, an intimacy lacking in the lives of other authors of his time.

In his literary work, Chekhov distinguishes himself from the attitudes and styles of two other profoundly-influential figures of Russian literature, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, through his reticence to proscribe answers to social questions or to speak directly through his works to the audience. However vast the differences between the two, both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky left inescapable traces of *themselves* in their works, such as the character Platonov's appearance in

War and Peace, or through the epilogue in *Crime and Punishment*, respectively. With immense talent and insight, both authors placed their own opinions in their works, seeking to give their audience solutions to vexing social issues like poverty, hypocrisy and war. In contrast, Chekhov never deems it necessary to explain or to answer the questions raised in his works, preferring to adapt a self-conscious "objective" style of narration. Jackson notes, "Chekhov was indeed not "living in" his works in the same way as Tolstoy or Dostoevsky; he reveals, unquestionably, a certain aloofness, a kind of principled objectivity, a deliberate restraint in setting forth his own point of view" (Jackson 4).

As A.P. Chudakov has shown in his book, *Chekhov's Poetics*, the "objective" style towards which Chekhov gravitated throughout his career consistently maintained the neutrality of the narrator, never departing from the subjective point of view of its characters, and only in this way can be described as "objective". Chudakov notes, "It is obvious that Chekhov understood objectivity first of all as depiction "in the tone" and "in the spirit" of his heroes. He contrasts this manner to "subjectivity"... when a story is presented from the hero's perspective, and excludes explicit authorial judgement, the narrative assumes a "non-authorial", extremely objective character" (Chudakov 50). Chekhov himself often counseled other authors to adopt a more "objective" tone when describing the feelings of their characters or when discussing social or ethical topics:

> You scold me for my objectivity... When I am describing horse thieves you would have me say: "Stealing horses is evil." But that has already been well-known for a long time even without my saying so. Let a jury judge them; my business is just to show what they are like. Of course it would be nice to combine art and preaching, but for me personally, that is extremely difficult and, from a technical standpoint, almost impossible. For to

> depict horse thieves, I must speak and think the whole time in their tone and feel in the same spirit as they. If I add a subjective element the images will dissolve… (Chudakov 51).

Chekhov admits that he must exert a self-conscious restraint when attempting to articulate life. When he acknowledges "it would be nice to combine art and preaching," he shows sympathy with the stated goals of other authors, yet he nonetheless rejects such didacticism on the grounds of his technique. The "technical standpoint" from which Chekhov is writing is his particular objective style, and he finds it "almost impossible" to reconcile his technique with the dogmatism required to "preach" solutions to social ills. For Chekhov, an unbiased, neutral narrator allows him to "speak and think the whole time" in the "tone and feel" of whomever he wishes to present. Simply repeating common moral tropes will fail to inspire any audience. By allowing space for the audience to determine their own opinions in regard to his characters, Chekhov believed he increased the ability of his prose to affect his audience. By completely inhabiting his characters, Chekhov allows the attachment his audience feels towards his characters free reign; the emotional effect of Chekhov's descriptions upon the audience will be determined by the text's accurate recreation of life.

In this way, we can see Chekhov's objective style as a more democratic form of literature, as the necessary indecisiveness of his narration leaves interpretation open to the individual. Throughout Chekhov's work, we find a sympathy with those who suffer, just as much as we find instances of selfish and grotesque acts of vengeance. However, Chekhov's believed that the individual reader should be allowed to discern for themselves the moral or ethical meaning of his work, by showing both the good and evil aspects of life as accurately as possible. In his refusal to employ dogmatic, political goals in his writing, Chekhov is fundamentally

opposed to his contemporary authors and critics from of the Russian intelligentsia, who insisted upon their political solutions to be ingrained in the narration, leaving no doubt as to the proper interpretation of their work:

> While the entire Russian intelligentsia, save for its most reactionary segment, worshipped these critics because of their opposition to the tsarist regime, Chekhov almost alone seemed to realize that men who fight tyranny and oppression using tyrannical methods and oppressive means and who pursue their goals with ruthless and single-minded fanaticism are not likely to further the cause of freedom and bring about democracy in literature or in any other area (Kalinsky 41).

Therefore, we can conclude Chekhov's idea of "life" was fundamentally opposed to the intrusion of the author into the work, as this would disrupt its realistic quality, in the same way generalizations also inhibit the genuine communication of "life", as the only way to present "life" is to preserve its uniqueness. As Karlinsky notes, "Instead of starting from a preconceived moral, sociological or religious position, Chekhov begins with scrupulously unbiased observations of the life around him, and he refrains from deriving sweeping social generalizations from an insufficient body of observable facts" (Karlinsky 62). For Chekhov, eliminating the presence of the author is like taking a filter from the lens of a camera; an unbiased presentation of life resembles the disharmony and contradictions inherent in it, just as he believed it is the folly of any author to presume to draw solutions to problems from "an insufficient body of observable facts," as many other instances can be shown from which opposing solutions could be drawn. Chekhov knows suffering firsthand by his medical practice, and honored this suffering by presenting it to his audience unadulterated by an authorial presence.

Chekhov's prioritization of individual experience, reflected in his objective narration, is the result of his wider idea of "life", and this idea of "life" operates at the core of each of his stories and plays. Yet difficulty arises in defining Chekhov's idea of "life", because he never explicitly states what constitutes it. For Chekhov, "The role of the artist is to ask questions, not answer them." (Chekhov 501). Just like Alyokhin and his inability to define love, to present any answer to a such a complex question as, "What is life?" would only *impede* the understanding of his audience, as each person will compare such a conception to their own living experience and find it unsatisfactory. Thus, Chekhov's refusal to conceptualize "life" becomes another vital element in his presentation of it; "life" necessarily defies static conceptualization, and must instead be registered by his audience *indirectly* through the combination of a diverse array of literary elements found in Chekhov's work. Although purposefully-indistinct and complex, Chekhov's conception of "life" nevertheless shines through all his work, as has been noted by several critics, such as Gorky, who wrote, "Chekhov has something more than a worldview - he has mastered his conception of life and thus stood above life...And although this point of view is elusive, resists definition - perhaps because it is high, it always can be sensed in his stories and pierces through them ever more vividly." (Eichenbaum 25). For Gorky, Chekhov's idea of life is "elusive, resists definition", yet nevertheless can be felt strongly throughout his entire work.

Like Chekhov, Bergson believes such an individualization of experience brings his philosophy closer to experience, to life. Similar to the way in which Chekhov attacks his fellow artists for adhering to unrealistic literary tropes, Bergson attacks philosophers such as Aristotle and Kant for relying on concepts and categories which, by dividing what is essentially one continuous experience into parts, fundamentally misunderstands life as duration, an undivided process of change colored at every moment by memory:

> My metaphysics at present is tending to become more simplified, to draw closer to life...the mind once brought back to real duration, instead of a discontinuity of moments replacing one another in an infinitely divided time, will perceive the continuous fluidity of real time which flows along, indivisible (Bergson 301).

The latter part of this quote explains why, for Bergson, conceptualization (which includes language) is insufficient in communicating an experience of duration in full, as is rooted in the perceiver's own unique relationship to time, and this time is characterized primarily by *change*, both external and internal. Externally, change is seen at every moment through the movement, growth, development, and finally death of any organism. Internally, change is noted by the constant flux of feelings and sensations; as soon as certain states of mind present themselves to the perceiver and can be put into words, this feeling has already changed, and time has moved beyond this static frame of reference, what Bergson calls "simple states". "Under this juxtaposition of simple states [of mind] an infinite permeation of a thousand different impressions have already ceased to exist the instant they are named"(Bergson 22). Bergson reinforces his idea of time as a constant flow or a flux by stating the complete impossibility of actual immobility; immobility is the way in which the mind rationalizes change and movement, but the latter is what must always characterize time lived as duration:

> To tell the truth, there never is a real immobility, if we understand by that an absence of movement. Movement is reality itself, and what we call immobility is a certain state of things analogous to that produced when two trains move at the same speed, in the same direction, on parallel tracks: each of the two trains is then immovable to the traveller's seated in the other (Bergson 314).

Bergson starts from the premise of duration as change. Because Bergson remains consistent in his approach to time, any description of it which fails to emphasize time's instability and relentless progress loses its basis in reality, if "life" is understood as duration.

Like Bergson, Chekhov was keen to emphasize the way in which the progress of time cannot be reduced to static, objective categories, always tying the experience of time passing to the perceiver. Although constrained in this sense by the medium in which he wrote (as all stories and plays must have a definite beginning, middle, and end, in a way in which "life" does not) he nonetheless bears witness to the intrinsic subjectivity of time experienced as duration by the way in which he relates the experience of his characters with his audience. Completely lacking in Chekhov are explicit reasons or causes which would explain the behaviors or statements of his characters. Such rationalization of his characters would only be possible by breaking what is a continuous experience into fragments. In Bergson's terms, Chekhov refuses to categorize life as a series of simple states, instead presenting his audience with a psychology as complex and spontaneous as life understood as duration. The explicit content of his character's words and actions are not as meaningful as other, less explicit modes of communication: "Reality and people are apprehended and characterized by apparently random and inessential traits. Thus, people are characterized by their odor...or by their manner of speech more than by the content of what they say...Finally, indeterminate sounds which above all fulfill a vital symbolic function as a feature of the author's presentation of reality" (Chizhevsky 60). Chekhov's reliance upon non-linguistic symbols posits a degree of indeterminacy in his description of real life, yet this indeterminacy should not be regarded as a defect. The continuously-changing quality of duration requires such a level of indeterminacy. Tschebotairioff goes further and claims that Chekhov anticipates Proust, in that his prioritization of the individual's has an immediate influence upon

the flow of time, as well as how this time-as-flux in turn affects the literary presentation of psychological states of mind:

> Anticipating Proust's convention that "the mighty dimension of Time is the dimension in which life is lived," Chekhov's characters are swept along in the endless stream of existence and integrated into the universal process of life moving ever forward, a life in which every living being is in a constant state of change and in which nothing endures but time, in which there is nothing to flee from and nowhere to go but forward - in time (Tschebotairioff 117).

However, in emphasizing that part of duration characterized by change, we must also bear in mind the influence of the past, which is the result of *memory*. In Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*, the memory of the past becomes a recurring motif, and how each character relates the memories of their past to the unfolding of the present becomes a central focus of the work. Characters such as Lopahin are attached to static conceptions of life, an attitude made known to the audience by his continuous checking of his watch. This relationship with time stands in contrast to characters such as Ranevskaya, who thinks and acts without consistency, but in such a way as to show how the passage of time is *always also affected by memory.* Hence, she returns to the nursery in which both she and her brother, Gayev, were born. The emotional turmoil caused by the past combines with the everyday life of the estate; this is the key element of life Chekhov presents us, and forms the central focus of the work. As noted by critic Aleksandr Skaftymov, the emotional turmoil of Ranevskaya's past is always situated in the present: "At the center of *The Cherry Orchard* stands the sale of the estate and Ranevskaya's emotional upheavals and sufferings connected with it. But throughout the play the drama of

Ranevskaya is absorbed into the flowing processes of common everyday life" (Skaftymov 77). Part of the reason duration is so resistant to static categorization, apart from its essentially-changing nature, is due to the equally important influence of the memory of the past. Since the memories of one individual must necessarily differ from another, their duration will be experienced uniquely.

In order to remain consistent with Bergson's prohibition against generalization when describing duration, we must be careful not to categorize characters like Lopahin and Ranevskaya as static representations of "the present" and "the past", respectively. Instead, they should be seen as representing opposite ends of a spectrum between which duration fluctuates, that is, the memory of the past, characterized by indeterminacy, and present, characterized by movement and which ultimately demands action. For Bergson, the human capacity for memory is what allows the past and present to be linked, forming what he often described as an "undivided unity" between them in the midst of continuous change. Duration pivots from the recollection of past moments to the unfolding experience of the present at every moment. Thus, the static boundary between past and present is blurred, because duration is always pivoting between the memory of past moments and the sensation of the present. As the philosopher Gilles Deleuze summarizes the relationship between past and present in Bergson, "The past and present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass" (Douglas 219).

Chekhov's characters often struggle to find an appropriate balance between the past and present, a reconciliation which would allow them to see their past and present as one continuous experience. For instance, Ranevskaya finds it impossible to act in the face of the sale of her

family estate because of the burden of past memories. However, this does not mean she is entirely dismissive to the demands of the present situation. Through Ranevskaya, Chekhov shows that even a character wholly absorbed in their past nonetheless must confront their own continuously-changing present. When forced into action, such as when Ranevskaya is asked by a beggar for money, she responds and acts. However, this act of charity only reinforces the lack of control Ranevskaya exerts over her present situation, as she is being forced to sell the estate due to her lack of money. Ranevskaya's preoccupation with her past explains the purposeless, disconnected nature of her actions.

Likewise, Lopahin is still affected by the memories of his past, such as his memory of his father punching him in the nose. Unlike Ranevskaya, Lopahin is able to dismiss these feelings by focusing his attention towards an increased awareness of the present, which enables him to act decisively and to acquire the estate. However, Lopahin's failure to declare his love for Varya at the end of the play indicates a failure to incorporate all of his past into his present. Throughout the play, Lopahin never completely dismisses the possibility of marriage between himself and Varya; the possibility of marriage is constantly discussed and encouraged by other characters. Yet in the final act, when left alone with Varya, Lopahin only makes small talk before excusing himself, leaving the matter unresolved, possibly forever. We see in Lopahin's dramatic speech after he acquires the estate that he now believes himself to have overcome his past as a lowly peasant. This creates a need within him to totally divorce his present from his past. Considering Varya to be a part of that past in which he was still a peasant, as she is of the same family as his former-masters, he rejects the possibility of marriage with her. Fundamentally, Lopahin is humiliated by his past. He does not seek to reconcile his humble upbringing with his current success. He works so diligently at his business so that his past can be *eliminated* from his

present. Lopahin's inability to incorporate his past with his present is the reason he cannot explain, to himself or to others, why he does not marry Varya. To admit his love of Varya would be to admit an aspect of his past into his present. In a total reversal of Ranevskaya's overemphasis on the past, Lopahin's overemphasis on the present leads to him to dismiss certain courses of action available to him. Notably, this course of action is not a conscious decision, but an outcome of his inability to reconcile his past with his present.

For Bergson, the indeterminacy before acting, a delay in the response towards the present, is due to the human faculty of memory. Unlike animals, who react purely on instinct, this indeterminacy granted by memory is the basis of free choice. The longer the delay in acting, the more memory is at work in the present, and can transform instinctual action into an action chosen by the individual. As Bergson says:

> The indetermination of acts to be accomplished requires, then, if it is not to be confounded with pure caprice, the preservation of past perceptions. It may be said that we have no grasp of the future without an equal and corresponding outlook over the past, that the onrush of our activity makes a void behind it into which memories flow, and that memory is thus the reverberation, in the sphere of consciousness, of the indetermination of our will (141).

The memory of past moments is what grants individuals the ability to decide upon one course of action among many, an ability which elevates human choice above purely instinctual response, what Bergson calls "pure present". Yet an overemphasis upon the past blocks free action as assuredly as instinctual response. Duration is movement between the past and present, and freedom is to be found when both can brought into harmony. If one end of the spectrum of

duration is overemphasized, either the past or present, this imbalance will assuredly result in a loss of freedom, either reclining into perpetual indolence, as is the case of Ranevskaya, or pure reaction to the present, as seen in Lopahin:

> There is more anger than one imagines in Bergson - not so much against social life as against ourselves, against our own "sluggishness or indolence" against this "strange reluctance to exercise our will" that makes us abdicate our freedom: " It will be found that the majority of our daily actions are performed in this way and that, owing to the solidification in memory of such and such sensation, feeling or ideas, impression from the outside call forth movements on our part, which though conscious and even intelligent, have many points of resemblance with reflex acts…" (Lapoujade 35).

Freedom is measured by the quantity of past experience incorporated into a consciously chosen act, as this widens the amount of possible outcomes in the future. If the past and present are no longer regarded as separate, the choices of the individual are more able to reflect the unique qualities of individual duration: "That is the fundamental proportion in Bergson: the opening up of the future is proportional to the quantity of the past that comes to be inserted into the present action (Lapoujade 46). Thus, Bergson would not think of Ranevskaya nor Lopahin as acting freely. By creating characters whose failures are caused by an overemphasis of the past or present, Chekhov tacitly endorses Bergson's definition of freedom. Chekhov's character's show the difficulty involved in finding such a harmony between one's past and present as proscribed by Bergson. Yet such a struggle is necessary if the mistakes of Ranevskaya and Lopahin are to be avoided.

Finally, through Bergson's theory of knowledge, which is the dichotomy formed between two conflicting methods of apprehension he labels "intuition" and "analysis", we may better understand Chekhov's relationship to language. Chekhov consistently shows his audience how language can become a barrier to communication, often shown by way of contrast between language and a more immediate, visual method of perception. Bergson's opposition between intuition and analysis reveals why Chekhov deliberately *withholds* information from his reader, in order to facilitate their use of intuition. As noted previously, no one metaphor or concept can grasp duration, which is essentially a process of change. Therefore, for Bergson, to communicate and to know, we are required to use a particular kind of sympathy with the object of our knowledge, inserting ourselves *directly inside* that person or thing. Such a way of gaining knowledge about the world, so fundamental to understanding Chekhov's relationship to language, is explained through the concept of "intuition". If duration helps to elucidate the idea of "life" at work in Chekhov, then intuition is the method by which the audience comes to understand the true intention behind Chekhov's particular artistic style.

In his 1904 essay *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson begins by boldly declaring there to be only two fundamentally-distinct ways of knowing a thing: either by way of "intuition" or "analysis". Bergson defines intuition as an "intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible" (*ItM* 1). This particular kind of sympathy requires an "effort of the imagination," as Bergson says, in order to align oneself with the object's "interior states of mind". As opposed to intuition, analysis is "the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common both to it and other objects" (*ItM* 2). To clarify the distinction between intuition and analysis, Bergson cites the example of a literary hero. He says that, if we

understand the character by way of intuition, "Out of that indivisible feeling, as from a spring, all the words, gestures, and actions of a man would appear to me to flow naturally. They would no longer be accidents which, added to the idea I had already formed of the character, continually enrich the idea, without ever completing it" (*ItM* 2). The use of intuition is to be in complete sympathy with an object, resulting in an appreciation which is unmediated by signs or symbols, that is, "the original and not its translation...perfect, by being perfectly what is is." Symbols, which for Bergson include concepts, metaphors, and even language itself, cannot fully inscribe the hero, because they hold true only by comparison and remain external to it.

To grasp the difference between the two concepts more clearly, Bergson compares the simplicity of intuitive knowledge to the multiple, indefinite and never-ending descriptions of analysis: "All the traits which describe him and which can make him known to me by so many comparisons with persons or things which I know already, are signs by which he is expressed more or less symbolically." Hence, analysis is problematic since it infringes upon the intrinsically-unique status of the hero. Bergson compares the absolute simplicity of interior experience with the various generalizations used to inscribe this sensation, which can only fail to capture its uniqueness:

> That which constitutes his essence cannot be perceived from without, being internal by definition, nor can it be expressed by symbols, being incommensurable with anything else. Description, history, and analysis leave me here in the relative. Coincidence with the person himself would alone give me the absolute (*ItM* 1).

Intuition is the method by which the unique qualities of duration can be preserved in the process of communication. Language falls under the same category as "symbols", and the use of language often leads communication away from intuition towards analysis. This makes the communication of an experience of duration difficult, but not impossible, for Bergson. The particular kind of difficulty placed by Bergson upon the act of communication is why Bergson prioritizes the ability of the *artist* to overcome the barriers put in place by language and analysis in general, but only if the artists primarily adheres to the idea of life as duration. Bergson describes how such an intuition may be generated by the artist when he says that, "No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized" (*ItM* 3). From Bergson's own numerous examples of intuition, one "image" alone is incapable of communicating an experience of duration; Bergson himself supplies several metaphors for the use in intuition, intentionally never settling upon only one. However, if we imagine Chekhov to be that artist who supplies "many diverse images", we see how it becomes possible for art to still communicate duration without reliance on conceptualization.

By invoking the Bergsonian idea of duration, we may more clearly see the parameters around which Chekov built his own idea of "life". This method is first employed by Chekhov by the way in which he created of his stories and plays. Several critics have noted Chekhov's supreme ability to first inhibit or "sympathize" with his characters and then, through his artistic ability, to discern those essential details or "images" which would allow his readers to also inhabit that experience *by utilizing their own intuition*. Chekhov's ability to inhabit the minds of multiple, fully developed perspectives was a trait admired in his own time and still appreciated

today. As a contemporary critic to Chekhov, V.L. Kign-Dedlov, writes, “Nature endowed him with a rare talent - present in only great artists - to be reincarnated, so to speak, in his characters...by some miracle - the miracle of true creativity - he is transformed body and soul into the character he is depicting.” And as James Wood more recently states, “More completely than any writer before him, Chekhov became his characters”(83). Chekhov’s direct, immediate relation to the experience of his own characters serves as a model for his readers to follow, and explains his particular style of narration and characterization. Just as intuition is employed by Chekhov in creating his characters, so must the reader grasp the meaning behind his words, the ineffable intuition of feeling implied, *though never explicitly stated*, by Chekhov or his characters. Chekhov relies upon this intuitive sense of communication, because he was a writer who nonetheless like Bergson recognized the barriers language often presents when attempting to communicate what is unique in duration.

In harmony with this recognition of the limits of language to capture uniqueness, there appears a strong dismissal of the “analytic” attitude by Chekhov, both in his work, as well as in his stated opinions towards other artists. By the way in which Chekhov’s compared his own work to that of a contemporary, Henrik Ibsen, we may begin to see the analytic attitude against which Chekhov fought, as well as the intuitive idea of experience he considered more realistic. Wood relates this anecdote about Chekhov: he is watching a Broadway production of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, and remarks to the actor Stanislavsky, “But listen! Ibsen is no playwright!...Ibsen just doesn’t know life. In life it simply isn’t like that” (Wood 74). Chekhov rejects Ibsen’s play because Ibsen molds his characters according to prearranged moral categories such as “good” or “bad”, (Nora being good, Torvald bad) which therefore allows the audience to settle into a predetermined relationship to the characters; there is no room for intuitive perception of them,

because they are already defined by abstract concepts, and these concepts play themselves out neatly and predictably in the course of the drama - not so in "life," insists Chekhov. Life for a human being seems to be more appropriately defined by its indeterminateness, its inability to be structured into moral or political categories, which is why Ibsen's plays are totally unlike Chekhov's. In Bergson's terms, Ibsen disregards the duration of living experience, which leads him to *describing* his characters instead of *inhabiting* them, leaving the reader external to their essence; they function as personified concepts and not living individuals.

When Chekhov brings characters into his stories, they each bear a new frame of experience through which the reader is asked to perceive directly. By allowing oneself to experience life from the point of view of another character allows the reader to interpret the implication of meaning which often remains ambiguous, if not entirely unspoken, beneath the surface of events or in the minds of the characters. Whatever meaning there is to be found in stories contrived in the manner of Chekhov relies heavily upon the reader to be able to supply, from their own experience, an image of the interior world of another person, or even several characters, a picture which would then give unity to their external words and actions. In this way, Chekhov employs language in such a way as to point towards a more fundamental, unspoken and intuitive sense of communication.

For Bergson, such intuitive sympathy is possible because if there is one object or person with which any individual sympathizes completely, it is *their own* person, *their own* experience. On the most basic level, intuition can be understood by our absolute and undivided sympathy with ourselves, our own bodies. "Yet there is one thing is distinct from all the others, in that I do not know it only from without by perceptions, but from within by affections: it is my body" (Bergson 103). Sympathy with ourselves, a trait Bergson considers to be universal, is considered

"absolute" and "perfect," in that this sympathy is so immediate and complete that it can only be *partially* transcribed by any intermediary, and thus does away with the need for metaphor, language and analysis. However, the very immediacy which ensures that all experience is unique is the very foundation upon which intuition is possible through a work of art. As Bergson says, "What is the aim of art if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our senses and our consciousness? The poet and the novelist who express a mood certainly do not create it out of nothing; they would not be understood by us if we did not observe within ourselves, up to a certain point, what they say about others" (Bergson 307). Therefore, the power of the artist resides in their ability to summon from within the minds of their audience those perceptions of real life which have remained hidden or unnoticed, yet nonetheless present. We are able to understand the artist or poet because we all intuitively understand our own experience, and can use intuition as a method to transfer our own unique experience onto the experience of another.

If duration is the basis by which life can be understood as a process of change, and intuition the method by which we remain inside duration during an act of communication, this places specific difficulties upon the artist, whose job it is to communicate those elements of duration that naturally resist communication. Thus, from the living example of one's own experience, the reader may then be able to inhabit the minds of others, but only through an "effort of imagination," a task which involves as much self-reflection as it does a close reading of the characters in the text. As Bergson says, "If a man is incapable of getting for himself the intuition of the constitutive duration of his own being, nothing will ever give it to him, concepts no more than images" (Bergson 19). Thus, it is because of the role intuition plays in the proper appreciation of his work, as well as his own, self-conscious standard of "life", that Chekhov

never sets out to definitively settle questions raised in them, nor does the moral status of his characters influence the outcome of his stories in a didactic, straightforward way - to do so would be to block intuitive sympathy, replacing a living feeling with pedantic, analytic prescriptions. The preservation of the use of intuition by the audience is the fundamental reason why judgement can never be passed by an authorial presence, and interpretation is instead left for the contemplation of the reader.

On similar grounds, Wood dismisses Ibsen's play because "his people are too comprehensible. We comprehend them as fictional entities. He is always tying the moral shoelaces of his characters, making everything neat, presentable, knowable. The secrets of his characters are knowable secrets, not the true privacies of Chekhov's people" (75). Wood, like Chekhov, makes the implicit comparison between mere descriptions of life, (which are unsatisfying) and the interior, incommunicable essence of that original experience.

Through a wide array of literary devices, Chekhov seeks to replicate life understood as duration. The specific elements of Chekhov's work to be considered will first be his narrative style and his method of characterization, as seen in his trilogy of stories "A Man in the Case," "Gooseberries", and "About Love". By analyzing "In Autumn" and "The Witch", we may understand his use of visual and the symbolic. Finally, "The Student" will explain his relationship to language.

CHAPTER 2:

CHEKHOV'S METHOD OF NARRATION AND CHARACTERIZATION

Let us begin by examining Chekhov's particular style of narration and characterization in the framed trilogy of stories: "A Man in a Case," "Gooseberries," and "About Love." While all three stories are framed by an unseen and unnamed narrator, which I will call the "framing" narrator, who intervenes at each story's beginning and end, the pieces themselves are named after the events related to us by Burkin, Ivan Ilych, and Alyokhin, respectively. Once each man starts to convey their story, the narrator disappears; we are told the stories directly in their own speech, without any intermediary. This allows the reader to attune themselves to their manner of speaking; any digressions in the narrative also allows the reader to see the attitude the storyteller has to his own story.

"A Man in a Case" is a story about Belikov, a man who is afraid of the external world, always projecting barriers around himself. Burkin tells us how, "the man displayed a constant and insurmountable impulse to wrap himself in a covering, to make himself...a case which would isolate him and protect him from external influences" (Chekhov 351). This is manifest physically by his "always wearing galoshes and a warm wadded coat….even in the finest weather" but also through his internal disposition - "Belikov tried to hide his thoughts also in a case" (351). Belikov's case is defined by a replacement of direct contact with the external world with a completely socialized code of conduct; "the only things that were clear to his mind were government circulars and newspaper articles in which something was forbidden" (351). Proper codes of conduct are, for Belikov, established by way of someone's position in society; they are

generalized, external to his personal experience. Later, we see Belikov become enraged at the brother of his betrothed, Mikhail Savvich, for just such a breach of decorum when he rides a bicycle. Belikov bases his sense of propriety upon Savvich's status as a teacher: "If the teacher rides a bicycle, what can you expect of the pupils?" (Chekhov 358)

Out of fear of the uncontrollable nature of his own feelings, Belikov attempts to replace the uniqueness of his person with a generalized formula of conduct, which he ironically must seek from the external world he wishes to escape. In this way, we see how an acceptance of generalizations must necessarily result in the destruction of the individual, precisely as Bergson feared. Belikov's yearning to retreat from personal experience into a world of socialization and generalization is most succinctly established by his love of the ancient Greek language. Burkin tells us that in "his aversion for the actual, he always praised the past and what had never existed, and even the classical languages which he taught were in reality for him galoshes and umbrellas in which he sheltered himself from real life." Burkin is here especially perceptive in his evaluations of Belikov's abstractions as falsehoods. In Bergson's terms, the ancient Greek which Belikov so loves is the language of analysis, the use of abstract terms in order to inscribe something inherently unique and unrepeatable. The fundamental falsity of analysis, of all generalization, is proven when his system of thought is confronted with a piercing, dramatic human experience - the experience of love. Thus, in comparison with the individuality of this experience never felt before, Belikov's abstractions must necessarily collapse, resulting in their own dissolution. Once this happens, Belikov cannot live. Thus, one word can be seen as an expression of Belikov's impossible task - the transformation of his own, living self into "anthropos," man in general, who can never actually be said to exist. Belikov's desire to transform himself into a general category of existence is why he must "with a sugary

expression...as though to prove his words" pronounce his love of the Greek language, and why, when he does actually allow his exterior barriers to be overcome by his love of Varenka, he must compare her to the Greek language, which for him has been his strongest refuge, saying she "reminds one of the ancient Greek in its softness and agreeable resonance." Although it is tempting to see in this description a reason to ridicule Belikov, the importance of such a comparison should not be overlooked, because he is comparing a general system of thought, a language, with an individual person, a comparison which cannot and will not withstand the actual feeling of his love for her.

The metaphoric meaning of "anthropos" is again seen by its key role in Belikov's eventual demise and death. This is brought about by one of his student's prank, which, through direct comparison, reveals the fundamental dissonance between intuition and analysis, something perceived immediately by the rest of the town. The student draws a picture of Belikov and Varenka arm-in-arm, under which is written, "Anthropos in love." Burkin tells us how "the expression was caught to a marvel," which is due to the force of its equivalence of two unlike things, which illustrates the absurd nature of Belikov's ideological system of experience in comparison to his actual love of Varenka. The strength of the comparison also overwhelms Belikov because it is *visual* and therefore irrefutable; the conceptualization of experience through language by which Belikov has coped with his own intense feelings are found to be powerless when confronted with an *ineffable* truth. Thus, the *pictorial* can be seen as expressing intuitive knowledge, and, in this instance, it supersedes Berlikov's concepts by way of its undeniable humor.

Belikov's reaction to the prank may, upon first reading, strike the reader as an overreaction, leading the reader to dismiss this part of the story as melodrama or black humor,

because Belikov is such an eccentric person. However, this would be to understand Belikov through external signs only, without the use of intuition. As stated at the beginning of the story, Burkin believes there to be many such people in the world like Belikov, "who try to retreat into their shell like a hermit crab or a snail." If we consider the idea that there are many such people who, if to a lesser degree than Belikov, yearn to retreat into a similar world of socialized behavior and abstract ideals, this only proves the difficulty of extracting oneself out of such systems until the point of eventual disillusionment, which many characters in Chekhov's stories find impossible, so attached have they become to the concepts ruling their existence (we see a similar conflict in the story "The House with the Mezzanine," in which two characters of opposite political dispositions also fail to disassociate themselves from their conceptualizations of experience and suffer as a result). This prank marks a point of no return for Belikov - either he *accepts* that he must step out of his shell and *accept* the unreality of the concepts which have, until now, dominated his life, or retreat permanently from existence itself. In this, we can begin to articulate what Chekhov meant exactly when he said Ibsen's stories are not like "life;" once Belikov realizes that "life" is foremost defined by uncontrollable, spontaneous feeling, and that this feeling of meaning in life is impossible to inscribe through the ancient Greek language, (or any language) he cannot bear to continue living. In this sense, Belikov *had* to die, in order to establish why, in the world of experience outside of the story, people such as Belikov continue to act as they do. In this story, Chekhov shows us the shortcomings of analysis which become apparent, not only by way of reading philosophy, but by the way these abstract concepts inevitably come apart and shatter in the face of experience; if "real life" could be defined by concepts, then such concepts could sustain an individual indefinitely.

Yet concepts repeatedly fail to do this is Chekhov's works. Thus, we encounter a recurring motif in Chekhov, in that he often characterizes life as something fundamentally connected to *struggle,* a search for meaningful answers to the questions posed by the characters. As the death of Belikov shows, the overcoming of such obstacles through struggle is not guaranteed - just the opposite. Chekhov is constantly affirming the difficulty of a fulfilling existence. He is a writer who embraces failure as a part of experience, often highlighting the ways in which failure comes more naturally and seems to be more prevalent in human experience than meaningful insight. In the absence of static concepts (which themselves only ultimately serve to delay, and do not rectify, the revelation of failure) any meaningful insight must take place in the midst of changing, adapting itself to make sense of new experiences.

Now that we have established the meaning behind the content of Burkin's story, let us now turn our attention to the framing device which envelopes his story, as well as the framing device for the second story, "Gooseberries," in order to elucidate the way in which Chekhov's narrative devices, the "form" of his stories, can be seen as reinforcing the concept of life as duration. "A Man in a Case" begins in the voice of the framing narrator, who places us at "the farthest end of village of Mironositskoe," where the two friends Burkin and Ivan Ivanych are lodging for the night. The narrator immediately describes the two men by their occupation, Bukin being a "schoolmaster" and Ivan Ivanych a "veterinary surgeon". There is a tendency by the framing narrator to rely upon occupations in order to immediately categorize the person he is describing. We will see how this becomes increasingly problematic as we move from one story to the other, but here any problem with such description is only hinted at, by the following ambiguous sentence, "Ivan Ivanych had a rather strange double-barrelled surname - Chimsha-Himalaisky - which did not suit him at all, and he was simply called Ivan Ivanych all over the

province" (Chekhov 350). There *appears* to be nothing suspicious in the narrator's descriptions of the two men, because Belikov's occupation has a direct bearing on his story; Burkin appears to be more-or-less the schoolteacher "type" and his story takes place in a school.

However, the presence of the framing narrator reveals how Burkin fails to heed the lessons of his own story. The descriptions of Burkin by the framing narrator imply *Burkin's similarity to Belikov*, unnoticed by Burkin himself but perceivable to the reader. Burkin is continually judging Belikov, coming near to intuitive sympathy when he remarks that there are others in the world like Belikov, however, he stops short of noticing the obvious similarities between *himself* and Belikov. Even though Burkin states he has met many people like Belikov, he still cannot think of *himself* falling victim to the same "distancing" attitude which defines the 'man in a case'. Burkin's distancing attitude towards his own narration is alluded to at the beginning of the story, when we are told from the perspective of the framing narrator (who seems to be viewing the two men from the outside) that "Ivan Ivanych, a tall, lean old fellow with a long mustache, was sitting outside the door, smoking a pipe in the moonlight. Burkin was lying within on the hay, and could not be seen in the darkness" (350). Burkin's obscured face shows his inclination towards reclusiveness, a decision to stay out of the sight of Ivan Ivanych even when the two men are conversing. Like Belikov, Burkin is sensitive to the expression of uncontrolled feelings and is disturbed when he witnesses them in others. When later, in "Gooseberries," Ivan Ivanych shows unrestrained pleasure in bathing himself, Burkin shouts, "That's enough!" Furthermore, in the same story, when the two men are trying to go to sleep, Ivan Ivanych's tobacco pipe keeps him awake at night because he could not locate the source of the smell; he "kept wondering where the oppressive smell came from" (Chekhov 370). When all nature is silent and ready for sleep at the end of "A Man in the Case," Burkin himself feels the

need to go to sleep as well, and refuses to listen to Ivan Ivanych's story. This mimics the way in which Belikov takes his cues of behavior from the external environment.

If Burkin placed himself directly inside Belikov's perspective, this would allow him to see the faults both he and Belikov share. However, the reader witnesses no such intuitive sympathy from Burkin. Instead, Chekhov preserves the role of intuition in the story by leaving the connection between Burkin and Belikov *implicit*. This lack of explicit comparison or judgement requires the reader to provide for themselves an intuitive connection between Belikov and Burkin, as intuition is blocked when it becomes a command, a didactic lesson. Thus, as the framing narrator reveals the similarities between the two men, yet conceals making such similarities explicit, the overall purpose of such a narrative style is to provide a framework through which an intuitive connection can be experienced *by the reader*. If too little information was provided, and the story relied on the characters themselves, the reader could not properly sympathize with Burkin, as Burkin is a man for whom intuition remains an impossible act. However, if the connection between Belikov and Burkin was made explicit, this would be just as detrimental to an intuitive grasp of the story; intuition must necessarily go beyond words, becoming one with the object of knowledge, and therefore cannot be stated directly by the narrator.

In the second story of the trilogy, "Gooseberries," we will only dwell on our first meeting with Alyokhin, an experienced man of the world who now works tirelessly on his rural estate. As in the other stories, the framing narrator first provides the reader with details about the man's physical appearance before describing his occupation. Again, we are reminded of Ivan Ivanych's and Burkin's occupation at the very onset of the story, when the framing narrator repeats, "Ivan Ilych, the veterinary surgeon, and Burkin, the high-school teacher, were already tired from

walking…" (Chekhov 362). The reason for the framing narrator to retell the reader this information is explained by the contrast formed by these declarative, absolute descriptions with the more ambiguous, conflicted account we are given of Alyokhin. When describing Alyokhin, the framing narrator displays a certain indeterminacy the reader has not previously encountered. The narrator describes Alyokhin as "a man of forty, tall and stout, with long hair, more like a professor or an artist than a landowner" (Chekhov 363). When it comes to Alyokhin, his physical qualities do not seem to match his occupation; whatever Alyokhin is, he is not wholly contained by the descriptions provided by analysis. Such incongruity between Alyokhin's appearance and occupation ensures the reader withholds judgement of him. The uncertainty the reader is made to feel in regard to Alyokhin is immediately justified by his ideas about experience, ideas which, much more so than the other two men, remain in harmony with Bergsonian duration and its subsequent understanding through intuition. The central conflict of Alyokhin's story is not the need to understand and use intuition, but instead how such lessons, when learned, should be applied to past and future experience.

As quoted previously, Alyokhin professes a sympathy with the "doctors" who feel the need to "individualize" each case of illness. As Tschebotairioff notes, this individualization is an allusion to the recommendation of the doctor G.A. Zakharin, who heavily influenced Chekhov while he studied medicine at Moscow University, and whom Chekhov greatly admired (85). Alyokhin disdains what he considers a Russian national characteristic of "poeticizing" love, "decorating" it with "momentous questions" which, in his opinion, obscures any real progress in investigating the "great mystery" that is love (Chekhov 371). Like Chekhov and Bergson, Alyokhin is not impressed with abstract, romantic, and ultimately unrealistic depictions of love. Alyokhin's ideas of experience is a vital piece of information, carefully provided to the reader

first, before Alyokhin actually begins retelling the story of his love. This establishes his subsequent narration as the most nuanced of the three, a voice of experience who resists the solidification of his personal experiences into concepts. Indeed, for Alyokhin, love is the instigator of the most tortured questioning, the word itself concealing the manifold ways in which love actually takes place in duration. He says that, "When we are in love, we are never tired of asking questions; whether it is honorable or dishonorable, sensible or stupid...Whether it is a good thing or not, I don't know, but that it is in the way, unsatisfactory and irritating, I do know" (Chekhov 372). Alyokhin knows from experience that love can be infuriating, as his own love affair remained largely unconsummated - but he does not apply this lesson universally, in that he does not think of love as either a "good thing or not". However, this is not to say that Alyokhin's sympathy with Bergsonian philosophy has provided his individual experience with meaning - indeed, the listlessness in which Alyokhin now lives suggests an inability to process his past experience in a way that can oriented towards future experience.

Fundamentally, the story is not "about love", as the questions posed by love are never resolved in the narrative. Love is immediately presented as a mystery, and Chekhov never resolves the essence of what love means, as no final and definite solution is presented. Instead, love should be seen as a natural and universally-shared drive which leads to moments of *individual insight*. In both "A Man in a Case" and "About Love," a single, piercing insight, (which leads Belikov to his death and leaves Alyokhin in a state of ennui) is instigated by one's experience of love, and although both characters are in some way able to conceal the truth of their love, when the moment of insight occurs, they each lose the ability to hide such feelings.

Insight is seen in both stories as a spontaneous eruption of past moments into the conscious present. In these and many other stories by Chekhov, insight is spontaneous, in that

such moments of insight are first felt by way of *vision*. In the case of Belikov, such insight is brought about by looking at the crude drawing; for Alyokhin, it is looking in the eyes of his lover as she is about to leave him, possibly forever. In contrast to the moment of insight, language is seen failing to communicate the feeling that silent vision encompases. Thus, the sense of sight is used by Chekhov to convey the inexpressibility of what goes on in the interior world of the characters. The juxtaposition of insight and ennui is thereby reflected by Chekhov by way of a juxtaposition between the sense of vision and the endless play of language.

We see an obvious contrast between language and vision in the story of "A Man in a Case;" Belikov is a character for whom his entire experience is mediated by language - even still, his insight is brought about not by a conversation with another character, but by a picture, a drawing. Likewise, in "About Love," we see how language can be deceptive, even counterproductive, in bringing about the revelation of insight. We see a juxtaposition of the two senses when Alyokhin goes to talk with Liza at night. At first we read how Alyokhin "saw every time from her eyes that she was expecting me, and she would confess to me herself that she had had a peculiar feeling all that and had guessed that I should come" (Chekhov 376). The unspoken insight which Alyokhin gleans from looking into his lover's eyes is correct - Liza is in fact expecting him, and this unspoken insight, which leads him to her house at night, is afterwards confirmed by her words. There is also here established a relationship between insight and action. Unlike the tedious questioning Alyokhin displays in his constant investigation of love through language, vision motivates an actual change in the character's external world. When Alyokhin goes to meet his lover for the final time, simply looking in her eyes is what precipitates their sobbing and kissing. However, after he arrives is Liza's home, he tells the reader that the couple "talked a long time, and were silent, yet we did not confess our love to each other, but timidly

and jealously concealed it." Language, far from leading the couple to share their experience, *delays* the communication of their love. During the interlude between Liza leaving and this evening, Liza's language, not suited to communication, is instead used to demoralize Alyokhin, Liza putting into words the opposite of her true feelings. For instance, whenever Alyokhin talked, "she disagreed with me," and whenever he would drop something she would say coldly, "I congratulate you." The coldness of her remarks is juxtaposed to the fiery passion which instigates such remarks - and it is the role of language to delay indefinitely the revelation of this insight.

The internal process of Aylokhin's questioning reminds us of Bergsonian analysis, in that his and Liza's articulation of their love, going on internally inside them, can but only circle around the topic of their love without ever properly inhabiting the reality of the love given to them instantaneously, without language, through the meeting of their eyes. We have already noted the key role vision plays in getting Alyokhin to meet with Liza. By this evidence, it should already be apparent to the two characters that the reason they both knew to meet that night is because of the fact they are in love. Despite his previous characterization of love at the beginning of the story as that which leads to endless questioning, by the end, Alyokhin more forcefully argues for the immediacy and spontaneity of acting upon that love, without taking into consideration any argument, that is, without the use of language. He tells us that, "I understand that when you love you must either, in your reasonings about that love, start from what is highest, from what is more important than happiness or unhappiness, sin or virtue in their accepted meanings, or you must not reason at all." The juxtaposition of Alyokhin's two sentences is interesting, in that is seems to say the same thing in two different ways. The "highest" reasonings one can give for love, that is, reasoning through language which we have

seen throughout the story, is used to communicate this love through language, is described as that which subverts such language by taking these words to override their "accepted meanings." In other words, if language is used to describe love, the words themselves must be given new meaning. But more importantly, if such words remain unavailable, "you must not reason at all," meaning you must not attempt to constrain such love, such insight, into language in the first place.

The use of the visual and the symbolic is a recurring motif in Chekhov's works, but Chekhov does not use either of these methods of insight in a straightforward way. However, this dichotomy between intuitive, non-linguistic communication and that of communication mediated through language has a philosophical and religious history which Chekhov inherited from the Russian Orthodox Church. Chekhov's connection with the ideas of the Orthodox Church must be brought to bear upon our analysis of his work, as he often reconfigures these categories to suit a specific purpose in his prose, yet this idiosyncratic purpose presupposes his audience's familiarity with the traditional dichotomy set forward by the Church.

CHAPTER 3:

THE VISUAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

As noted previously, Alyokhin's immediate and visual experience of looking his lover in the eye is what leads to a more complete (what Bergson calls "simple") insight into his own feelings, an insight that was delayed indefinitely by language. Although for Alyokhin this insight leads to a decisive act, we must be careful not to generalize from this story that Chekhov *consistently privileges* insight gained by the visual over and above that of language. Insight gained by the visual is able to capture non-linear and non-conceptual truths in a way language cannot, yet visual insight may nevertheless be deceptive. Chekhov often plays each of these methods of insight against the other, but whether any insight is the correct one, is, as always in Chekhov, left indeterminate.

In his implicit dichotomy between the visual and the symbolic, between what is immediately seen and what is mediated by language, Chekhov can be seen as following the epistemological and aesthetic tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church in a twofold manner: first, in regard to its "negative", apophatic theology, and second by way of the religious icon (although the agnostic Chekhov renounced the overarching dogma of the Church itself). As Julie de Sherbinin notes, "Chekhov was able to approach" the questions raised by religious faith in his stories "in no small part because of his insider's view of the Orthodox religion. His Christian upbringing educated him in the many media of the faith: Scripture, liturgy, iconography, acathist, prayer, apocrypha, the saint's lives, spiritual verses, and lubok prints" (de Sherbinin 43). In

particular, the young Chekhov was exposed the religious icons frequently: "Exposure to icons in the Chekhov home was a given. Pavel Egorovich, Chekhov's father, himself an amatuer icon painter, actively acquired icons (the family collection included at least three icons of the Mother of God) (de Sherbinin 55). By briefly summarizing what constitutes apophatic theology, as well as the theology surrounding the religious icon, we may uncover how the Russian Orthodox Church undoubtedly played a large part in the Chekhov's development as a writer, and more clearly see upon what foundations Chekhov built his dichotomy between the visual and symbolic.

"Negative" or apophatic theology is, according to the Church Father Dionysius, one of two theological methods, the other being "positive" or cataphatic (Lossky 25). Positive theology beholds objects, or even ideas, in the world, and attempts to use them to name the attributes of God. Negative theology proceeds by denying that our human conceptions can grasp what God is, and thereby proceeds, through negation, to define in what ways God will always remain a mystery. The noted religious philosopher, Vladimir Soloyvov, explains the distinction thus:

> For Positive Theology it is a valid approach to learn of God through consideration of His attributes, attributes such as Good, Merciful, Just, Loving, Wise, and so forth. The approach characteristic of Negative Theology relies on a rather different view of knowledge of God may be obtained. The exponent of Negative Theology holds that our understanding of 'good' and our human criteria for judging 'goodness' are so critically limited that it is inappropriate for us to assign such positive attributes to God (Sutton 12).

Intimately linked to apophatic theology is an appreciation of truths which go beyond the capacity for language to capture. Although I will avoid overemphasizing what many in the Orthodox faith consider to be the "spiritual" qualities of this form of theology, as Chekhov never relates to such insights as "spiritual", this fundamental belief in truths or experiences which go beyond language is nonetheless present in his works. Soloyvov notes that, "There are modes of intellectual and sensuous reality founded not on language, but on other communicative energies such as the icon or the musical note. And there are actions of the spirit rooted in silence…" (Sutton 9).

From what has already been stated about Chekhov's mode of narration and characterization, and in particular, the way in which he uses the visual in relation to language, Chekhov can be seen as following an apophatic mode of writing. Alyokhin knew he was in love when his eyes met those of his lover. Love is not shown to be a positive quality of life, but a quality known most intimately by way of the unspoken, visual, and spontaneous realization of its occurrence. Alyokhin himself adopts an apophatic mode of appreciating love when he describes what he knows love to *not* be, and can only attempt to express in language the ineffable, intuitive sense of love he felt in that moment by way of negation. In this way, Chekhov's mode of narration in this story is consistent with his position towards "preaching", or the placing of ethical judgement in his works. Chekhov disdains art that seeks to communicate an explicit political, social or ethical principles, not only because this distorns the "life" of that work, but because in life such principles are never simply *articulated*; articulation can only answer in the negative. Positive experience must first be *felt* before any articulation of it can even be attempted, and in his works, this insight is always mediated by sight or sound. Interestingly, Henri Bergson, a Catholic, also seems to endorse at least some aspects of apophatic theology when he provides this description of intuition:

> What is this intuition?...What first of all characterizes this image is the power of negation it possesses….It seems to me that intuition often behaves in speculative matters like the demon of Socrates in practical life; it is at least in this form that it begins, in this form also that it continues to give the most clear-cut manifestations: it forbids (Bergson 287).

The fundamental connection between Bergson's intuition and Orthodox theology is their shared emphasis on the limitations of language. Language, operating at the level of generalization, forces the unique interior experience of the individual to fit into its available paradigms. Instead, Bergson and Solovyov agree that individual experience is what instigates the need to communicate, and that the complexity of this experience prohibits its translation into language. Thus, by a self-conscious limitation upon language, the individual preserves the unique nature of experience.

In his attitude towards intuitive communication, which includes the visual as well as the melodic, Chekhov can be seen as following in the Orthodox tradition. In the writings of the earliest Church Fathers, the written word is the *equal* of the visual. St. Basil the Great states, "That which the word communicates by sound, the painting shows silently by representation" (Ouspensky 8) Even in the Christian faith, whose unity has been accomplished by way of the Bible, a written record, the Orthodox tradition reserved an equally-important space for the visual. Although Chekhov was a writer of prose, non-linguistic communication frequently occurs in his works, often used in contrast to the written or spoken words of his characters. Such an appreciation for the visual was an integral part of the Orthodox tradition, manifested most notably in the religious icon.

Chekhov often incorporates religious icons explicitly in his work, and, although he rejects most of the Church dogma surrounding them, he nevertheless uses them to articulate a mode of understanding that breeds comparison with other, overt articulations or descriptions of his characters. As Savely Senderovich notes, in Chekhov, "The icon always appears in an environment of contrast, either as "part of a series of images that contain internal contradiction" or affiliated with "a double with an opposite and profane meaning" (de Sherbinin 67). So although Chekhov denies that the icon is, in itself, a force for good, or a representation of divine truth, or a worker of miracles as is stated in the Orthodox dogma, he nevertheless inherited from the dogma surrounding icons a belief in the power of the image to convey intuitive truths. Icons are used in his work as a way of implying, instead of explicitly stating, that an unspoken intuitive form of communication is at work behind the explicit actions or statements of his characters.

"In Autumn" is one such story that utilizes a visual medium in order to communicate intuitively to the reader what takes place within the mind of the protagonist, Semen Sergeich. Key to interpreting this story is resolving the contradiction between the presence of the image, which inspires revealing actions from several characters, and the statements made by these same characters. Because there is no authorial presence which would tell the reader the exact meaning implied by this contradiction, the reader is left to judge the relative importance of the visual, tied to action, and the symbolic, tied to language.

At the beginning of the story, a drunkard comes into a tavern and sells a beautiful locket for a drink. A peasant recognizes him as Semen Sergeich, his former master, and relates his story to the other travelers. He was once a wealthy man, fell madly in love with a woman, only to discover on his wedding night that she only married him for money, and she leaves him that day to join her other lover in the city. Tikhon, the innkeeper, accepts the locket as payment for a

drink, opens it, and finds the portrait of his Semen's former love inside. When Semen asks for the locket back from Tikhon, he discovers that Tikhon has scratched out the image of Maria Egorovna, which makes Semen exclaim that, "There no one for me to believe in now" (Chekhov 119).

What is of interest here is not necessarily the progression of the plot, but the way in which the portrait of the woman relates to the established tradition of Russian Orthodox iconography, and, in so doing, communicates to the audience details of Semen's interior world intuitively, details of which are at odds with Semen's explictly made opinions. Such lockets like the one carried by Semen are highly reminiscent of the small portraits of the Virgin often carried by the faithful, a detail with which a native Russian reader would be highly familiar. This detail is made even more explicit by Chekhov in naming Semen's wife "Maria". Incongruity is present between Semen's words, that he now lacks "belief," and his actions, which make clear that he is still beholden to the image of Maria. In this sense, the religious language around which icons are appreciated are to be implicitly reinterpreted by the reader as providing us with the *opposite* image of the truth. What makes Semen exclaim that he lacks all faith is precisely his overpowering, *intuitive* faith in the memory of his former love, a faith communicated without language by Chekhov through the portrait's influence over Semen's actions, specifically his asking for the locket back.

As Julie de Sherbinin says, explicit attitudes such as those presented in the story are "facilitated by the Christian creed, the language of which aims to provide consensus and communication among the faithful." However, "the limitations of language create the drama" of this story, because Semen's statements,which resemble a religious creed, a general formula, must be reinterpreted as a desperate attempt by him to make such a formula suit his own, emotional

needs. Such an attempt to force a generalized creed to suit individual duration totally undermines the purpose of the original creed (de Sherbinin 70). While other characters, such as the peasant, believe Semen at his word when they call him an "unhappy martyr," the perceptive reader should instead interpret the peasant's statement as further evidence of Chekhov *undermining* the idea that such creeds can ever be interpreted universally, in the same way by every individual. The peasant is only making an external judgement of Semen, one which lacks a nuanced approach to his psychological state, one which sympathizes too much with his outward distress and looks too uncritically upon its interior cause. The peasant's staunch faith that Semen's martyrdom is following the proscribed models of Christian teaching should be perceived by the reader as implicit clue by Chekhov that such a rote interpretation is flawed, and that this story is purposefully subverting faith in generalized creeds as such.

Incongruity between the words spoken between the characters is superseded by the actions inspired by the visual image. This contradiction reaches its climax during Semen's reaction to the portrait being scratched. Far from losing his faith, Semen believes most deeply in the power of the image of the lover who betrayed him. The power of the image is so strong that Semen feels the need to explicitly deny it, but to take him at his word would be to fundamentally misunderstand the story. The visual is, in this instance, the force of Semen's demise, and his lover's portrait has become an article of faith making him dependent upon his past happiness, in a way, making Semen "drunk" on its power. Thus, we can see how, by utilizing icons, Chekhov relates powerful, unspoken emotions of his characters, but the power of the icon itself is shorn of its religious connotations. In Chekhov's stories, icons, instead of becoming a religious medium, are transformed into a particularly potent medium of intuitive knowledge, divorced from ethical proscriptions, as is consistent with Chekhov's overall project of elminiating didacticism from art.

The story does not intend to subvert the meaning of the specific religious creed surrounding icons, but in the universality of any such creed or generalization, as a shared creed does not inhibit individuals from interpreting such generalization to suit their specific needs.

In another story, "The Lady with the Dog," we see Chekhov make an even more explicit comparison between vision, language and insight, going so far as to make the sense of sight a key aspect of the story's title. The story can be read as one circular motion from the first vision the protagonist, Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov, has of his lover Anna, to the moment of insight of his love for her, also brought about by his sense of vision, when he goes to see her at the theater. What changes throughout the story is Gurov's own appreciation of his sense of vision, in that he goes form a man only concerned with external appearances, a man hunting for beautiful women to sleep with while on vacation in Yalta, to a man for whom his sense of vision is the one meaningful way he knows himself to be truly in love, "for the first time in his life," as he says towards the end of the story.

Vision is repeatedly mentioned throughout the story; Chekhov's carefully repetition of the role eyesight plays upon this love affair implies its priority over that of language, the mediation of feeling into generalized concepts. We see how Gurov's instigation of the love affair is brought about by him seeing the "lady with the dog." However, once the couple meet and talk, the actual content of their conversation is not recorded verbatim by the narrator, an indication that the content of their talks is not as important as their being in close proximity to one another. Their first talk together is "light, bantering conversation….of free, contented people, who do not care where they go or what they talk about" (416). However, when the moment comes for Gurov to seduce Anna, "he looked at her intently and suddenly embraced her and kissed her on the lips" (417). Nothing from their conversation would seem to indicate why Gurov chose to act upon his

impulse in that moment - the only indication as to why he chose to act in this moment is that his eyes were looking at Anna. However, because Anna reciprocates his advances, there is nonetheless evidence for the fact that a kind of unspoken communication did take place between the two.

Before this scene, we encounter Anna scanning the ships arriving at the port, with her lorgnette in hand. We know that she is a married woman, and that in all likelihood she is looking for her husband who is said to be arriving into town soon. The narrator tells us that her "eyes shone," both an indication of her love burgeoning affection for Gurov as much as it is an indication of her increasingly-distant attitude towards her husband. Her husband has not arrived, as we soon find out, because of the trouble he is having with his eyes. Considering the importance of vision to the story, this detail is of particular importance when we consider the characterization of Anna's husband we receive first from Anna, and then directly from Gurov, when he sees him at the theater. Given that in the story the key way by which insight is revealed is through vision,her husband's poor eyesight is an indication of his poor understanding of his relationship to his wife and, by extension, his relationship to the world at large. Anna calls her husband a "lackey," meaning someone who does not stand up for himself, someone easily moulded by the pressure of society. This is confirmed when Guov finally sees him, and describes him as "a young man with little side-whiskers...he nodded his head at every step, and it seemed that he was perpetually bowing….there was something of a lackey's modesty; he has a sweet smile, and the badge of some learned society gleamed in his buttonhole, like the badge of a lackey" (424). The husband's poor vision is a metaphor for his incapacity to gain meaningful insight about the world. Like "A Man in a Case," he has allowed generalized impressions to become the only way in which he understand the world. The husband's failure to gain insight

about himself and the world in which he lives transforms Gurov's own insight into an oppositional force in the narrative.

When Anna and Gurov part for the first time, Gurov tells Anna to, "Let me have one more look at you...One more look. Good" (420). Here, as in many other places in the narrative, Chekhov is establishing the primal role of sight in the love affair, and, unlike in Gurov's previous loves, Gurov's memory of Anna only *increases* in intensity as time passes. As we have previously seen in other stories, insight is brought about by vision. Unlike the play of language, which is incapable of reaching a definite moment of insight, insight inspired by vision instigates *action*, a resolution to end the relentless series of questions about love. The intensity of his visions makes Gurov go to the theater where he is sure Anna will be in attendance. After "searching greedily with his eyes," he finally spots Anna. "When Gurov looked at her, his heart was wrung, and he realized clearly that there was now no person closer, dearer, or more important for him in the whole world…" (424). The revelation of this love is instantaneous, coinciding with the moment Gurov sees Anna. Like in Chekhov's other stories, the moment of insight is never properly appropriated into language at the moment of its happening - this is the reason for such importance to be placed on the role of sight in the first place. Only afterwards, during moments of contemplation as happens at the end of the story, are the characters allowed to narrator or pass judgement on their experience. Thus, insight can be said to at all times proceed the written expression of its happening. In this way, Chekhov preserves the fundamentally-intuitive way of appreciating experience, by metaphorically allowing a role for vision which both indicates and conceals the internal operation of understanding.

As we have seen in Chekhov's "Man in a Case", the generalizing qualities of language may not only block communication, but can actively be used to deceive other people, or even to

deceive oneself, as Alyokhin realizes in “About Love”. In “The Witch”, Chekhov incorporates his particular style of narration and characterization, as well as his use of the visual and the symbolic, so that his reader must understand the story by way of intuition. However, “The Witch” is also an example of the way Chekhov includes ethical themes without recourse to preaching. Such subtly in presenting ethical themes is common in Chekhov’s work. As Kalinsky notes, “His natural mode of expression was understatement rather than diatribe” (Kalinsky 43). “The Witch” takes place entirely inside the hut of Savely Gykin, the sexton of a small church estate called Gulyaevsky Hill, who is also married to the beautiful and virtuous Raissa Nilovna. After minimal exposition, only telling the reader “it was approaching nightfall,” our unnamed and unseen narrator focuses exclusively on Savely, briefly describing his appearance before inserting us directly into the flux of his duration. We know this because of the narrator’s inclusion of the simple, yet important, sentence, “He was listening,” which tells us that, even though the narrator remains in the third person, it is Savely’s thoughts we are currently following. Given the fact that we are inside Savely’s head, this helps explain the confusing and disorienting description we are provided of the snowstorm currenting battering his hut, which Savely imagines to be a kind of invading army, an unstoppable force of destruction. He thinks to himself that “there was a regular battle going on,” and that “a victorious force was in full chase over the fields...” Savely then hears “something vanquished was howling and wailing...a plaintive lament sobbed at the window, on the roof, or in the stove.” In Bergson’s terms, the unique qualities of this description are proof of its attachment to an individual duration, not simply the words of the narrator. Savely does not know at the beginning of the story who the “victorious force” might be, nor can he name the source of the “plaintive lament.” What Savely

does know is the content of the sigh, which "sounded not like a call for help, but like a cry of misery, a consciousness that it was too late, that there was no salvation" (Chekhov 198).

We know from the very end of the story that it is *Savely himself* who is the source of the cry of misery, when he hears again that "something wailed in the stove, in the chimney, outside the walls," only this time "it seemed to Savely that the wailing was within him, within his ears" (Chekhov 201). This specific repetition of the description of the snowstorm, the only difference being Savely's realization as to the source of its terror, reveals several details about the story simultaneously. The repeated line shows the reader that Savely's perspective is the one which the narrator is communicating - the description changes in parallel with Savely's changing duration. More importantly, the repetition of such an idiosyncratic description shows the extent to which Savely sympathizes with his own experience of duration. Savely's self-sympathy is the foundation around which Chekhov structures the narrative. The idiosyncratic language of the narration never deviates from Savely's own experience. If we remember that, for Bergson, intuitive sympathy towards another person is possible, it is because every person sympathizes with their own experience of duration. This "simple" and "absolute" relation to our one's own duration allows one to "intuit" the experience of another. Intuitive sympathy is complete when the descriptive language of analysis is replaced with the ineffable thoughts and feelings which characterize duration.

However, an individual's ability to intuit another's duration does not necessarily follow from their self-sympathy. *This ability to intuit another's experience is precisely what Savely lacks*. The distinctly-inarticulate nature of the second "lament" strongly suggests Savely has intuited flaws within his own character which go beyond the ability of language to capture. Savely, as Bergson claims, is indeed able to sympathize intuitively with his own experience. But

instead of allowing this intuitive insight to influence his actions, which would connect his past to his present, (precisely what Bergson defines as freedom) Savely instead chooses to reframe this insight to fit the ideological categories of the Orthodox Church, specifically its category of 'witch'. Raissa most clearly distinguishes herself from Savely by way of her intuitive sympathy, through which she is able to perceive the very same flaws which strike Savely as a revelation. Savely is compelled to brand Raissa a witch because he refuses to acknowledge his own intuitive feeling, and therefore unwilling to intuitively sympathize with her.

Through this critical flaw in Savely's character, Chekhov explores the difficulties involved in utilizing what Bergson describes as an "effort of the imagination" required in the use of intuition. I would go further than Bergson and claim that, in this story, Chekhov is stating that this "effort of the imagination" has *moral* and *ethical* implications. Although Chekhov never makes these ethical concerns explicit, they are strongly suggested by the frequent contrasts present in the work between Savely, Raissa and the postmen. The ethical content of the story is made most explicit by the inclusion of the Biblical image carved into the sword of the young postman.

The particular attachment of the narrator to one person shows Chekhov and Bergson agree that all individuals fundamentally sympathize with their own duration. Chekhov diverges from Bergson by investing what for Bergson is a philosophical method, intuition, with an ethical purpose, demonstrating his immense concern for human suffering. However, such ethical implications are never stated outright. Chekhov's implicit contrast between Raissa and Savely reinforces the ethical implications of intuitive sympathy. Yet Chekhov's presentation of these characters also requires the reader to use their own intuitive faculties in order to perceive the

numerous contrasts between Savely and Raissa, which allows the reader to decide for themselves the ethical implications of such comparisons.

In "The Witch," Chekhov uses physical objects in order to suggest the ineffable feelings taking place within the interior world of his characters, which allows the reader to intuit such feelings. Two such objects are Savely's bed and hut, which are mentioned together in the second sentence of the opening paragraph. The bed represents what is Savely's most defining characteristic: his laziness. One of the first things we are told about Savely is that "it was his habit to go to sleep at the same time as the hens," (meaning very early) and the first time we actually see Savely, he is lying on his "huge bed" under a "greasy patchwork quilt," with his "big unwashed feet" sticking out at the end. The bed is where Savely spends most of the story, until he forced to escort the two postmen away (and even then he is only driven to do so because of his irrational fear of his wife meeting other men). What is emphasized here is not only Savely's laziness, but also the resulting *dirtiness* of himself and his hut. The pervasive filth which emanates from his body taints everything else inside his house except Raissa, who is always described as being beautiful, white and clean. Although Savely never seems to mind his own filth, Raissa notes towards the end that "almost half the room was filled up by the bed," which to her is a "shapeless ugly mass" before adding that everything in the hut "including the absent Savely himself, was dirty, greasy, and smutty to the last degree, so that it was strange to see a woman's white neck and delicate skin in such surroundings" (Chekhov 200).

Just like his bed, Savely and his hut share certain similarities which allow the reader to sympathize intuitively with him. This becomes most apparent towards the end of the story, after Savely unleashes his first "plaintive lament," which in his mind echoes throughout the house - in the windows, roof and stove. It is as though the house being battered by the snowstorm *is the*

same experience as Savely being battered by his own confused, interior feelings. The hut carries symbolic power throughout the story because it not only provides important information about Savely's past, but it also manifests what are *ineffable, inward* qualities of Savely's personality. His hut is a temporal signpost used by Chekhov to show the reader Savely's progress through the story, through duration "When commenting on the temporal movement of the external world, Chekhov uses tangible, visible signposts to stress the inexorable progression" of a character's duration (Tschebotairioff 118).

The physical location of the hut suggests the immense influence the Russian Orthodox Church has had on Savely, and, vice versa, what having such a man as Savely in the ranks of the clergy tells the reader about the Church. The most important detail we are provided about the hut is its peculiar position, which we are told "adjoins the wall of the church." In case the reader failed to notice this detail when it is mentioned in the second sentence, the narrator elaborates on it again, pointing out how the hut "adjoined the wall that encircled the church and the solitary window in it looked out upon the open country" (Chekhov 200). We must be alert to Chekhov's careful repetition of this detail, which strongly implies that the hut's physical attachment to the Church wall has a symbolic meaning. Being a married man, Savely is a member of the secular clergy, a person who could be considered both inside and outside the Church, the same way that Savely's hut is located halfway between the "earthly" secular world and the "heavenly" realm of the Church. Vladimir Lossky notes that in the Church, "the secular clergy (married priests and deacons), or confraternities of laymen may occupy themselves with social work, or devote themselves to other outward activities," such as providing hospitality to travelers, which is the kind of work the retired Savely performs in order to collect his pension (Lossky 18).

Chekhov introduces the two postmen mainly so that the reader may learn more about Savely; their presence inside the house lets the reader see how Savely responds to other people and draw comparisons between the postmen and Savely (as Raissa herself does). The story of how Savely's came to the town of Gulyaevsky Hill shows how deeply dependent he has been upon the Church his entire life. His current position came about solely through the recommendation of the his superiors, having nothing to do with merit or endeavor. Raissa is insistent on telling the two postmen this story, even though they did not ask to hear it, and the obvious, though unspoken, subtext of this story is that Savely has accomplished very little in his career to be rewarded with such an easy retirement and such a beautiful wife. Raissa says, "My father was sexton here in the old days, and when the time came for him to die, he went to the Consistory and asked them to send some unmarried man to marry me that I might keep the place, so I married him." The most telling response comes from the older of the two postmen, who whistles and says, "Killed two birds with one stone! Got wife and job together" (Chekhov 202).

Although his humble position in society could be interpreted as Savely living up to the Christian ideal of poverty, Raissa tells us that the true reason for Savely's low status is his cowardice. Given the fact that Savely was rewarded for his service, the reader can infer that his cowardice was seen as exemplary behavior from the perspective of Savely's superiors, who know that a man who refuses to stand up for himself can never seek real power or authority and can therefore be more easily abused. In this way, the Church directly supports and rewards Savely for his worst attributes, and shows us, through the figure of Father Nikodim, it's terrible corruption and fixation on material well-being, regardless of its effects on others. The physical *as well as spiritual* or emotional support Savely receives from the Church is the ultimate meaning of his hut being buttressed by the wall.

In order to shame Savely, Raissa "immediately" informs the postmen that he could get a "good berth" somewhere else, but Savely is too "lazy and afraid of people" to ask for the promotion. By the end of the story, the reader knows the truth of Raissa's accusations by way of Savely's feelings toward the snowstorm. Serving as a contrast to Savely's inability to sympathize with another duration, Raissa shows an ability to sympathize intuitively with her husband. Because Savely knows he has been extremely fortunate, having done nothing to deserve his position or his wife, he is constantly defending the clergy, and by extension himself, even when they commit abuses of which he himself is the victim. Again it falls to Raissa to explain how, once every summer and winter, Father Nikodim "from the next village" comes and takes "almost all the crops for himself." Savely responds by growling, "Father Nikodim is a saintly soul, a luminary of the Church; and if he does take it, it's the regulation!"

With one wall being attached to the Church, we are provided with another small though important detail about the hut, which is that it has only one small window, effectively minimizing contact with the outside world. The image of a one-window hut embodies Savely's selfishness, his inability to sympathize with others. The narrator juxtaposes Savely's narrow and provincial attitude towards the outside world to Raissa's intuitive faculties. When we are first introduced to her, she is looking out of the window. In this specific instance, the window in the hut not only embodies qualities of Savely, but also suggests qualities in Raissa which fundamentally set them apart. By way of a physical object, Chekhov never deviates from describing Savely's duration while also characterizing Raissa as being fundamentally different than her husband. The ability to intuit the duration of another is displayed twice by Raissa, by her truthful description of her husband, as well as her allowing the young postman to stroke her neck. Chekhov links positive moral qualities such as hospitality and truthfulness (as well as

physical beauty) to Raissa's intuitive faculties, in direct opposition to the moral and physical qualities of Savely.

Raissa finally states her intentions at the end of the story when she says, "If it weren't for you, I might have married a merchant or some gentleman! If it weren't for you, I should love my husband now!" (Chekhov 203). Contrast Raissa's yearning for a better world to Savely's response to the appearance of the postmen: "Savely jumped on the bed in two skips, stretched himself on the feather mattress, and sniffing angrily, turned with his face to the wall. Soon he felt a draught of cold air on his back." Savely goes as far as possible away from the door and window and chooses to face the wall, towards the comfort of his own selfish desires, which he finds in the literal and figurative shadow of the Church.

The contrast between the active, productive postmen and the parasitic Savely is what ultimately causes Savely to acknowledge his inferiority in his second "plaintive lament". We learn from Raissa that, in the time of Raissa's father, there used to be an active community and rich members of the gentry from which the clergy received their subsistence. Now, however, "the gentry have gone, and I need not tell you there's nothing for the clergy to live on." Raissa "need not" tell postmen that the clergy have nothing to live on because they already know the clergy provide nothing for themselves, being an economic burden on every other class - both peasant and gentry. The obvious contrast created here is between Savely the clergymen and the government postmen, who represent one of the most important functions of the state (especially in the rural and dangerous areas of Russia). Unlike the vital, even noble occupation of the postmen who fulfill their duties with care, (the older gentleman is careful not to leave the post outside, and they do not stay to rest) the clergy are there solely to provide spiritual redemption to the community, which Savely and Father Nikodim seem to fail to accomplish on a most basic

level. The moral impetus is felt by the reader not as an imposition, but as a result of the implicit comparison between the postmen and Savely. This contrast is even more emotionally heightened because Savely himself responds to it, though he cannot bear to state it outright.

Knowing Savely's economic background, the terrible corruption of the Church, and the uncertainty Savely feels towards his wife, we return full circle to the beginning of the story, to Savely's reaction to the storm, and come to understand Savely's attitude towards it. For Savely, the snowstorm embodies the threat of change, the transition to a future which does not include him as a class or individual. What provokes the first lament is Savely's inability to define the purpose of the clergy to which he belongs, a comparison which is then forced upon him by the postmen. Being the lowest rank, he knows he is the most expendable member of the hierarchy of priests, and that he the most threatened by any hint of reform which would limit the influence of the Church. The appearance of the postmen, and especially the younger one for whom Raissa has an obvious and immediate attraction, has shamed Savely into admitting that his own occupation has no purpose or merit. All of these conflicting emotions occurring within Savely, which are impossible to capture through language, are captured and intuitively communicated through distinctly-inarticulate "plaintive lament".

The second lament is when I believe Savely becomes aware of an intuitive insight, which is that unless *he himself* changes, there is nothing he can do to stop his own deserved destruction. Chekhov follows Bergson not only in presenting the reader with a psychology of self-sympathy, but also in stipulating that, when converting this self-sympathy into an intuitive act, no other source other than the *individual* can supply the images, metaphors and feelings by which one accomplishes intuitive sympathy. As Bergson says, "If a man is incapable of getting for himself the intuition of the constitutive duration of his own being, nothing will ever give it to him,

concepts no more than images" (19). The necessity of the individual to accomplish intuition, the only way by which duration preserves its uniqueness, means that in the context of Chekhov's story, it is Savely, and Savely alone, who is to blame for his stagnant behavior and overall cowardice. A change does indeed take place within Savely, which forces him to intuit, at least in a limited way, the duration of his wife, as he now comes to realize the truth of her judgment of him.

Unfortunately, the more Savely acknowledges his own failures, the more strongly he believes his wife is a witch. Just as self-sympathy does not necessarily lead to intuitive sympathy, intuitive sympathy does not necessarily lead to ethical behavior. For Savely, intuitive insight in regards to himself and his wife instigates an *increased* use of ideological categories through which he can interpret these new insights in order to resist change. Savely's conscious decision to reject his new insight is foreshadowed symbolically by Savely turning away from the window and door, to dwell in his bed, refusing to carry out his duty to help the postmen. In Bergson's terms, Savely has come to an intuitive insight about himself, as well as that of his wife, yet he consciously refuses to allow such insight to have any influence over his actions.

At the start of the story, Savely "was not firmly convinced of the truth of his suspicions," that his wife is a witch, who enticed young men to come to their hut during snowstorms. At the end of the story, however, just after Savely realizes that it is he himself who emits the great sigh of defeat, he also states that "this evening has completely confirmed him in his suspicions about his wife". He "no longer doubted that his wife, with the aid of the Evil One, controlled the winds and post sledges" (Chekhov 204). But the reader implicitly knows by the many contrasts presented by the narrator that Raissa bears no similarity to a witch. The reader infers that Savely claims his wife to be a witch as a result of the change which has taken place within him from the

start of the story. Witchcraft is an ideological category inherited from the Church which facilitates his continued selfishness, *in spite* of his newfound intuitive sympathy. We see Savely attempting to comfort himself through generalization, in that there were other witches before his wife, saying to Raissa, "It's not for nothing there are prayers in the breviary against your kind!" But the actual substance of his inward feelings is that of self-loathing. Thus, language itself, particularly the reactionary language of the Church, is Savely's ultimate salvation from his own insight gained during the second description of the snowstorm. But the repulsive nature of this retreat from his own experience surfaces indirectly by his newfound attraction to his wife, seeing in her a "supernatural, weird power;" the word the "weird" communicating to the reader that Savely is utterly unable to express what it is he feels in his wife's presence - to do so would dissolve the carefully established categories now set in place by Savely. She now bears "a peculiar, incomprehensible charm of which he had not been conscious before" (Chekhov 204). Savely's intuitive sympathy, which drove him to categorize his wife as a witch, also reveals to him the enormous gulf in physical and spiritual beauty between himself and his wife. He has become conscious of her beauty, but the result of his decision to see his wife as a witch necessarily means he lacks the proper words to describe this attraction, which is driven by the contradiction between witchcraft and his wife, a contradiction he himself imposes in order to continue to live as a static, parasitical burden upon his wife and society.

By dismissing his wife as a witch, he can simultaneously degrade her opinion of himself while casting a virtuous sheen upon his own feelings which are really the *antithesis* of holiness. But Savely knows more than anyone that his wife defies this categorization, so that Savely simply adds to the definition of witchcraft that what is actually good and beautiful in the world: cleanliness, fortitude, and hospitality. But Chekhov also seems to be implying that there is also a

natural attraction to the good which Savely cannot totally fail to notice, and even desire. “The fact that in his own stupidity he unconsciously threw a poetic glamor over her made her seem, as it were, whiter, sleeker, more unapproachable.” Savely’s own guilt and dirtiness results in an *increased* attraction to Raissa, whose purity and beauty are shown by her white neck, which the younger postmen was allowed to stroke. When Savely reaches out to touch it, Raissa instead hits him on the nose. The story concludes, “The pain in his nose was soon over, but the torture in his heart remained” (Chekhov 205). Raissa’s physical reaction to Savely represents the climax of the story, brought about by the contradictions between herself and her husband. However, Chekhov’s narration does not bring the contradictions to a close - Savely’s moment of insight has been delayed indefinitely by his insistence on labeling his wife as a witch, in spite of his inward, contradictory relation to her. By ending the story before Savely renounces his emotional stagnation, Chekhov leaves the reader to contemplate Savely’s mistake without explicitly making an authorial judgement as to its ethical implications.

The story encourages reading Raissa as a virtuous character most explicitly through the Biblical image on the postmen’s sword, in which Judith slays the Assyrian general Holofernes. The meaning behind the image on the sword is never explained by the narrator, which represents a conscious decision by Chekhov to juxtapose the ideological language of Savely with the intuitive faculties of Raissa. In the Old Testament story, Holofernes is about to destroy Judith’s home, but before this, Judith is allowed access to his tent because of her extreme beauty. He soon becomes intoxicated and passes out. Judith takes advantage of this moment and cuts off the man’s head. Throughout her life, Raissa has been at the mercy of men, from her father to her husband. Yet in the presence of this young and active postman, presenting Raissa with a stark contrast to her own husband, becomes the means by which Chekhov imparts an intuitive

meaning to the work, by way of the image of Judith. The power of the image resides in its implicit comparison between Raissa and Judith, yet Chekhov's conscious decision to leave the image unexplained also requires the reader to discern its unspoken meaning in a way which mimics Raissa's intuitive faculties.

Chekhov incorporates both visual and symbolic elements in his narratives, by which his characters reach, or fail to reach, moments of insight. From the subsequent interaction between each, in which Chekhov does not overtly champion one method over the other, he preserves the reader's ability to intuitively determine a character's perceived success or failure. We have already seen how language, the realm of the symbolic, often delays the moment of insight, whereas the visual instigates an immediate insight in Chekhov's characters, the veracity of which is left indeterminate. What remains to be answered is in which stories, and in what way, Chekhov utilizes language in order to instigate insight as well. In a wider sense, the question we must answer is Chekhov's relationship to language in general: in what way did Chekhov use language in order to communicate the experience of duration intuitively to his reader. In Bergson's terms, how did Chekhov preserve intuition, a method of communication defined by its fundamental resistance to language, within language itself? This question deserves special contemplation, considering Chekhov's overall attachment to the medium of prose throughout his career. Chekhov displays an awareness of the limitations of prose by his frequent incorporation of non-linguistic cues, yet Chekhov nonetheless decided upon prose as a medium by which to communicate intuitively. Chekhov's relationship with his own text is elucidated most clearly in stories which incorporate other texts into the narrative, thus showing the reader how Chekhov, through his characters, sees the interaction between texts and individual duration. In his short story, "The Student", Chekhov incorporates the Bible into the narrative and, in so doing, presents

his readers with his own understanding of the relationship between a text and real life, and how language may mediate experiences of duration in spite of its overarching tendency towards generalization.

CHAPTER 4:

"THE STUDENT" AND CHEKHOV'S RELATIONSHIP TO LANGUAGE

The central focus of "The Student" is the relationship between a passage from the Bible (in this instance, the disciple Peter's denial of Christ) and the emotional transition from hopelessness to hopefulness which takes place within a young seminary student, Ivan Velikopolsky. Unlike any other work of Chekhov encountered thus far, in "The Student", the mediation of insight through language does not delay the moment of insight, but is instead the foundation upon which an act of communication takes place. In so doing, the story reveals how Chekhov believed language may be used in order to communicate an experience of duration. In this specific scenario, the hopelessness felt by Ivan at the beginning of the story is communicated to the two troubled widows by his retelling of Peter's denial. Although, as always in Chekhov, the success of Ivan's communicative act is left indeterminate, I believe what Chekhov is saying is that such indeterminacy is always present in any act of communication, but that such indeterminacy is proof each participant has preserved the uniqueness of their own duration.

At the beginning of the story, Ivan struggles to reconcile his religious education with his bleak emotional present, in which both history and the natural world appear devoid of the progressive change promised by his Christian faith. Even though it is spring, "when the woods few dark, an inauspicious cold, piercing wind blew in from the east, and silence fell. Needles of ice stretched over the puddles, and the woods became disagreeable, godforsaken, hostile" (290). Even though, in the course of the narrative, Ivan is introduced to the reader after this description of the cold, the "godforsaken" quality of the woods attaches this particular feeling to Ivan, as one

who perceives godlessness because he is searching for a connection with God. The natural world seems incapable of change, as winter has lingered longer than normal, and this cold is linked in Ivan's mind to the historical lineage of Russia's past, a lineage with which Ivan feels intimately connected:

> "He thought how the same wind had blown in the days of Rurik and Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great and there had been the same crippling poverty and hunger, the same leaky thatched roofs and benighted, miserable people, the same emptiness everywhere and darkness and oppressive grief, and all these horrors had been and were and would be and even the passing of a thousand years would make life no better" (291).

Ivan links the lack of progress in the natural world from winter to spring to the lack of historical progress. The bitter cold is reimagined by Ivan as representing the experiences of past generations, in which the people were oppressed and impoverished, living under the rule of powerful men who were wholly indifferent to their pain. Ivan sees no possibility of people's lives changing for the better, and in this sense, he sees the mission of Christ failing to achieve its goal of universal liberation.

Ivan's belief in the interconnected nature of the past, present and future represents a key element of the story the reader must bear in mind at the story's close, as the change which takes place within Ivan revolves around a new appreciation of historical progress and his place within it. However, in both his pessimistic and optimistic historical perspectives, Ivan comes to reach his conclusions through the same method, that of *intuitive sympathy with the pain of other people*. In the beginning, the pessimistic Ivan interprets the passage of time as merely recycling the pain of past generations. By intuiting the pain of past generations, and noting its reproduction

in the present, he cannot think of history as achieving any kind of progress. This lack of change means that, even in a thousand years, there will still be people living in misery. However, Ivan intuites this notion of unending pain from a generalized "people" - he is attaching this misery to no one in particular. This is made all the more apparent by Ivan when he gives the names of the rulers under which the people suffered, (Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great) but does not name those who suffered in the same way. Both the natural world and human history appear to him as identical, static, external forces under whose influence the individual remains powerless. In this way, Ivan's intuitive sympathy with the pain of past generations is a passive response to his external environment. The passive nature of Ivan's attitude, dependent upon his external environment, results is the projection of his own, intense emotional turmoil onto similarly external factors: the course of history and the pain of past generations. However, Ivan's passivity leads him to make the erroneous claim that no change will occur, even in a thousand years. Such a claim is as erroneous as making the claim that it will literally *always* be winter, and that the spring will never arrive. The idea that it will always be winter determines Ivan's entire attitude of the past. This results is his misguided intuition of an abstract notion of "people" whose pain Ivan is intuiting, whereas Ivan is actually projecting his own pain onto a notion of "people" he has created in response to his passive reaction to the external environment.

However, the very need for Ivan to invent this historical "people" shows a deep yearning for an attitude towards history which would make sense of the pain of past generations by linking it to the present, revealing a way in which his Christian faith could be redeemed. I believe Chekhov employs the Christian faith in "The Student" not as a literal history, nor is he necessarily endorsing its claims, but simply as a well-known story, by which the past and the present can be united. This is similar to what Bergson says when he compares "our whole

psychical experience" to "a single sentence, continued since the first awakening of consciousness, interspersed with commas, but never broken by full stops" (Douglas 111).

The story takes place a day before Easter, drawing a connection between Ivan's yearning for the redemption of his faith with the followers of Christ waiting for the resurrection of their leader. Ivan's historical perspective changes when the "people" in the abstract are replaced by two women living in a nearby village, Vasilia and Lukerya.

The change within Ivan from pessimism to optimism is the result of his conversation with Visalia and Lukerya. The description given of the two women, living in a nearby village and who are poor and in pain themselves, links them to the "people" Ivan imagines at the beginning. Both Vasilia and Lukerya are widows, and Lukerya is pocket marked with a "slightly stupid face" (Chekhov 291). Through the two women, the pain of the "people" has been transformed from an abstract concept to the experience of living individuals. Linked to the transformation from the abstract to the real is the change from cold to warmth, which takes place when Ivan approaches their fire. When Ivan approaches them, Ivan says, "Well, winter's back" (291). The reader can infer from Ivan's greeting that his thoughts remain on his philosophical musings in the proceeding passages, in that "winter returning" when it is spring, two days before Easter, alludes to his belief in the lack of historical progress. However, the *fire* is the symbolic connection between a change in Ivan's physical environment and a change in his emotional temperament which instigates his retelling of Peter's denial of Christ. Ivan says, "Peter the Apostle warmed himself at a fire just like this on one cold night"....holding out his hands to the flames" (291). The beginning of his story in which Peter warms himself by the fire parallels a description of the Ivan holding his hands to the fire. Because of the link between Ivan's external

environment to his attitude towards the past, his beginning of the story marks his change from pessimism to optimism.

Ivan regards his conversation with the two women as a successful act of communication, because he feels as though they all shared (through intuitive sympathy) the pain of Peter. Ivan's role as a storyteller is to transform his individual, and therefore inexpressible, grief into language. Ivan incorporates idiosyncratic elements in his retelling of the story, which do not inhibit, but which in fact *encourage* intuitive sympathy from his audience. Ivan diverges slightly from the text in order to emphasize the connection between the descriptions found in the Bible and the present in which he is telling the story. Ivan elaborates upon the cold which surrounded Peter, saying, "It was cold then too. And oh, what a terrible night it was. An exceedingly long and doleful night" (291). The description of Ivan's actions just after he says this implies his emphasis on the cold is a result of their current physical environment: "He looked around at the darkness and gave his head a convulsive shake" (291). Unlike the influence he felt from the cold previously, in which the cold and history become synonymous, the cold is here reinterpreted in order to emphasize the effect of the fire, foreshadowing the changing nature of Ivan's relationship to the past.

Ivan does not treat the written word of Peter's betrayal as a static work, yet the idiosyncratic features of his narration does not lead the two women to sympathize with his own pain, but that of *Peter*. In Bergson's terms, Ivan's sympathy with his own duration, the pain he feels due to the stagnation of human progress, is the basis upon which Ivan intuitively sympathizes with Peter, inhabiting Peter's experience as if it were his own. Whereas the Bible only states that Peter followed the procession of people arresting Christ, Ivan colors his narrative with details about Peter's internal feelings: "Peter - exhausted (he'd hardly slept, after all),

plagued by anguish and trepidation, sensing something dreadful was about to happen on earth - watched from afar…" (Chekhov 292). However, Ivan is not compelled to garner sympathy with his own plight by the idiosyncrasies of his narration, but utilizes his intense pain to more vividly communicate the pain of *Peter*. Ivan's intuitive act of sympathizing with Peter allows the two women to sympathize intuitively with Peter as well.

By his storytelling, Ivan has managed to transfer his interior turmoil as the basis upon which the two women intuit the same pain, by way of Peter's experience, whereas this pain was originally the source of Ivan's isolation. Thus, the Biblical text describing Peter has transformed Ivan's pain into a point of convergence between three unique durations, that of Ivan, Vasilia and Lukerya. Intuitive sympathy with Peter's pain has been transformed from an isolating influence into the means by which all three share the same experience, that of Peter's, while each person approaches the text from their own unique perspective, their own unique duration. The emotional impact of Ivan's story is shown by the reaction of the two women. Vasilia "suddenly burst into sobs...tears, large and abundant, rolled down her cheeks...Lukerya, her eyes still fixed on the student, flushed, and the look on her face grew heavy and tense like that of a person holding back great pain" (Chekhov 292).

Although Ivan's belief in the lack of historical progress, tied to the unnaturally long winter, led him to erroneous conclusions, the pain which inspired such a comparison informed the unique structure around which he bases his retelling of Peter's denial. By intuitively transferring his own emotional turmoil into that of Peter, this granted his story a greater emotional impact, and the two women were able to intuitively sympathize with that pain by way of their own, interior feelings. In so doing, Ivan accomplished an act of intuitive communication. The link between his previous attitude and his newly emerging, optimistic attitude is the pain

brought about by his struggle to connect the influence of the past with his present. After he is finished talking with the two women, the link between Ivan's pessimistic and optimistic attitudes is reinforced by the repetition of the former. The reader is lead to believe Ivan may return to his former pessimism, which coincides with a return of the cold: "Again it was dark, and his hands began to freeze. A cruel wind was blowing - winter had indeed returned - and it did not seem possible that the day after would be Easter" (Chekhov 293). However, the key difference is that Ivan has replaced his former, abstract sympathy with a historical "people" with the pain of the two women. The next paragraph, which interrupts Ivan's return to pessimism, dwells on his interaction with Vasilisa. "The student's thoughts turned to Vasilisa: if she wept, it meant the things that happened to Peter on that terrible night had some relevance for her…" (Chekhov 293).

Although the idiosyncratic elements of Ivan's narration of Peter's story helped the two women to intuitively sympathize with Peter's pain, Ivan himself measures the success of his communicative act not by its relation to his own pain, but to that of Peter. This informs the reader that the Biblical text remains the foundation upon which this intuitive insight was shared by all parties in the conversation. "If the old woman wept, it was not because he was a moving storyteller but because Peter was close to her and her whole being was concerned with what was going on in Peter's soul" (Chekhov 293). As foreshadowed by the change which takes place when Ivan approaches the fire, the replacement of the "people" of the past with this present act of communication transforms Ivan's attitude from pessimism to optimism. This change in perspective parallels Ivan's change from passively accepting his attitude towards history from his external environment to actively conversing and communicating with two living examples of people living in misery. The experience of communication, his active involvement in the present,

results in a new appreciation for history, a new perspective by which his present act is intimately connected to the past. This new appreciation for history is rooted in the text of the Bible, through which all three intuitively felt the pain of Peter. Ivan realizes the possibility that the past have an active effect on the present, thus opening the future to the possibility of change.

Ivan's new optimistic attitude is metaphorically presented as a chain, in which the past and present are linked through an undivided sequence of events: "The past, he thought, is tied to the present in an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of the other. And he had just seen both ends of that chain: he had touched on end and the other had moved" (Chekhov 293). The reader may presume that the "end" touched by Ivan is the present, however, this interpretation of the metaphor of the chain would only see the present influencing the past, and not vice versa. The ambiguity of the chain metaphor leaves open the possibility of the present affecting the past, in the sense that an intuitive sympathy with past experience reveals new insights. Chekhov is keen to include the direct influence of the past upon the present when the narrator describes how Ivan "kept thinking of how the truth and beauty guiding human life back there in the garden and the high priest's courtyard carried on unceasingly to this day and had in all likelihood and at all time been the essence of human life and everything on earth…" (Chekhov 293).

Although some critics argue against the genuineness of Ivan's insight, such as Wolf Schmid in his essay "The False Insight of Ivan Velikopolsky", we must bear in mind that this interpretation directly contradicts Chekhov's stated attitude towards his work. As Andrey Shcherbenok points out, "Chekhov called "The Student" his favorite short story and cited it to defend himself against the accusation of pessimism" (Shcherbenok 300). Any such analysis which doubts Ivan's success in communicating must also take into account the narrator's intimate knowledge of Ivan's interior world, a relationship that is not shared with the two women. If the

pleasure Ivan feels at the end of the story is to be interpreted as misguided or inappropriate, this must take into account the vast quantity of details in the text which would seem to encourage a reading of the story in which the narrator privileges Ivan's point of view. The narrator's connection to Ivan is reflected in the idiosyncratic descriptions of nature and history, a connection that is lacking between the narrator and the point of view of the two women. In this sense, the narrator stands in for any artist who attempts to communicate an experience of duration. Although proof that such communication takes place will forever be indeterminate, because of the necessity of preserving the unique qualities of duration, the vision expressed by the artist, though imperfect, is preferable to the absence of such an attempt. As Bergson say, "What makes the picture is the artist's vision, his entry into the very life of his subject by sympathy, something that he never succeeds in expressing perfectly, though the imperfect expression may reveal to us more than we could see without it" (Bergson 49). Schmid's analysis in particular relies upon a complete separation of the narrator from Ivan's point of view, an analysis which fails to explain both the text as well as Chekhov's intention when writing the story.

Thus, the text itself can be seen as reinforcing Chekhov's own interpretation of the piece, one which harmonizes easily with the revelation felt by Ivan at the end of the work. Therefore, we can safely assume that the story Chekhov wrote is meant to describe a successful act of communication. Because the success of Ivan's communicative act incorporates the written word, "The Student" is highly useful in examining the rest of Chekhov's ouvoure, because "The Student" is a self-conscious attempt by Chekhov to show the relationship between a text and a successful communicative act. Chekhov also elucidates how the language of his own prose

should be properly interpreted as a medium through which his reader may intuit “real life”, life understood as duration, despite the inherent obstacles language presents.

In conclusion, “The Student” explains how the indeterminacy of any communicative act through language must necessarily exist, if the preservation of the uniqueness of duration is to be maintained. What language allows the artist to achieve is a mass audience, yet language tailored to suit the need of individual duration still requires the individual to supply, from their own experience, the ineffable qualities of duration which would complete its “picture”, its vision of “life”. Through the symbolic use of the fire, I believe Chekhov has found a visual symbol for the text itself, as something which itself is alive and changing, yet may be referred to as a static subject of contemplation.

Through the comparison between the visual and the symbolic, Chekhov compares the interaction between two method of knowing which mimics Bergson’s concepts of intuition and analysis. Although language naturally prefers the analytic, because of its overarching tendency towards generalization and conceptualization, language may itself be utilized in a specific way, through visual and non linguistic cues, in order to communicate an experience of duration.

Chekhov’s specific manner of narration and characterization preserves the uniqueness of duration by requiring his reader to sympathize with his characters intuitively. Chekhov’s carefully maintained silence concerning the interior world of his characters allows the reader to supply from their own experience of duration those ineffable qualities which transcend language. The true genius of Chekhov is in the subtlety and specificity of the details he does provide, which are highly suggestive without being didactic. Chekhov is the Bergsonian artist *par excellence*, as one who believed that a true appreciation of life requires one to recognize it in all its complexity, its injustice and its absurdity, but that a true picture of “life” would nevertheless

be the most emotionally impactful, and that a true picture of “life”, no matter how seemingly bleak or hopeless, is preferable to the illusions of concepts. As A.S. Suvorin noted that Chekhov’s independence of thought and objectivity were “far from pessimism.” For him Chekhov confirms “the remarkable words of Beethoven - that the only heroism in the world is to see the world as it is, and still to love it” (Jackson 13).

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