The Darling Study Guide

The Darling by Anton Chekhov

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Anton Chekhov's short story "The Darling," considered one of his finest, was first published in 1899. Leo Tolstoy, his contemporary and one of the greatest Russian writers of the nineteenth century, was quick to celebrate Chekhov's achievement in "The Darling," comparing it to "a piece of lace," like those woven by "old maids," who "put their whole life, all their dreams of happiness, into their lace." "The Darling" is a character sketch of Olga Semyonovna, the "darling," a young woman whose life takes on meaning only in relation to the men to whom she attaches herself.

Olga first marries a theater owner. When married to him, she thinks and speaks only of the theater. After he dies suddenly, she soon marries a timber merchant. During this marriage she thinks, speaks, and even dreams only of timber. After he, too, dies, Olga takes up with a veterinary surgeon, who is estranged from his wife and son, and she speaks only of veterinary concerns. When he, too, leaves her, Olga's life becomes empty, as do her thoughts. Without a man around to form her identity, Olga grows old and loses the charm that had earned her the nickname "darling," until the veterinary surgeon reenters her life, only to abandon his young son, Sasha, to her care. Olga's life once again takes on meaning, as she absorbs herself with the care of Sasha, who ultimately feels smothered by her demonstrations of maternal love.

Chekhov's story has been discussed in terms of its narrative perspective about the character of Olga. Critics have long debated whether Chekhov meant to ridicule Olga's character, as representative of a woman whose life has no meaning outside of her relationship to men; to celebrate her character as an ideal of selfless maternal love; or to evoke pity for the plight of women, whose lack of education and social standing leads to a life of emotional and intellectual dependence on men.

Author Biography

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860, in Taganrog, a Russian town on the Sea of Azov. His father owned a small grocery store, where Chekhov worked as a child, and imposed a strict religious discipline on the family. When Chekhov was sixteen, his father's business failed, and the family moved to Moscow to avoid debtor's prison while Chekhov stayed on to finish his secondary school studies. After joining them in Moscow in 1880, Chekhov began to support his family by writing short, humorous sketches for popular journals. Measures of his prolific literary output during this time are the some three hundred short, humorous pieces written in the subsequent four years. Meanwhile, he enrolled in medical school at the University of Moscow, earning his degree as Doctor of Medicine in 1884. Chekhov later made the now famous comment that, while medicine was his wife, literature was his mistress.

That same year, 1884, his first two collections of stories were published: the first was entitled *Tales of Melpomene,* and for the second, *In the Twilight,* he was awarded the Russian Academy's Pushkin Prize for distinguished literary achievement. His only novel, *The Shooting Party,* was also published in serial form between 1884 and 1885. A turning point in his literary career was in 1888 when he published his first piece in a serious journal, a long short story entitled "The Steppe." He subsequently turned exclusively to writing longer, more serious stories. In 1889, Chekhov took a trip across Siberia to study life in a penal colony in Sakhalin where he stayed for two years, eventually publishing the monograph, *The Island of Sakhalin* (1893-1894). Chekhov continued to publish short stories, purchasing a six hundred acre country estate in 1892.

In 1898, he met and befriended Stanislavsky, whose newly formed experimental Moscow Art Theater eventually produced many of Chekov's plays. His major dramatic works include *The Sea Gull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1896), *Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). In 1901, he married the actress Olga Knipper, who starred in many of these productions.

In the late 1880s, Chekhov showed signs of the onset of tuberculosis, and he spent the last years of his life, from the late 1890s, in health spas in Crimea, France, and Germany, where he died in 1904. Over the course of his life, the inexhaustibly prolific Chekhov published approximately four-hundred-and-fifty narratives. Throughout the twentieth century, Chekhov, a cultural icon in Russia, has been considered internationally to be one of the greatest and most influential of short story writers and playwrights.

Plot Summary

As the "The Darling" opens, Olga Semyonovna, also referred to as Olenka, sits with Kukin, the owner of an outdoor theater and a resident in the lodge Olga inherited from her father. Kukin complains every night of the rain, which drives patrons away from his theater; he also complains that no one appreciates the theater as art any more. Olga and Kukin marry, but it rains on their wedding day, and Kukin "retained an expression of despair." Once married, Olga works in the office of Kukin's theater and talks only of the rain and the indifference of people to the art of the theater. When Kukin goes to Moscow on business, around the time of Lent, Olga does not know what to do with herself. Kukin is detained in Moscow, but he sends word that he will be home by Easter. On the Sunday before Easter, however, Olga receives a telegram announcing that Kukin has died suddenly. Olga mourns his death deeply.

Three months later, she walks home from church with one of her neighbors, Vassily Andreitch Pustovalov, who is a timber merchant. Shortly afterward, Pustovalov sends "an elderly lady" to Olga's house as a matchmaker. Pustovalov and Olga end up marrying quickly. Olga helps Pustovalov at the office of the lumberyard, thinking, dreaming, and speaking only of timber. As Pustovalov does not care for the theater, Olga dismisses the theater as "nonsense." The couple live for six years, "quietly and peaceably in love and complete harmony." After Pustovalov catches cold and dies a month later, Olga mourns him deeply, wearing nothing but mourning clothes for six months.

However, she begins to be seen having tea in her yard with Smirnin, a young veterinary surgeon in the army, who lives at her lodge. Smirnin is married and has a son, but he is estranged from his wife due to an affair she had. When Olga begins to speak of nothing but veterinary concerns, it is apparent to everyone that she has taken up with the veterinarian. Soon, however, Smirnin leaves her because his regiment is transferred far away.

With no man to give her life meaning, Olga has nothing to think of, speak of, or dream about. With no one else's opinions to adopt, "she had no opinions of any sort." She even dreams of her empty yard. Without another person by which to define herself, her brain and her heart are empty. Years go by, and Olga loses the healthy vigor that earned her the nickname of "darling." She starts to look old, and no one greets her when they pass her on the street.

One day, however, Smirnin arrives with his son, Sasha, and his wife, with whom he is reconciled. Olga insists they live in her house, and she moves into the lodge. But Smirnin's wife soon leaves permanently to go live with her sister, and Smirnin is mostly away at his work. Olga, perceiving that Sasha has been virtually abandoned by his parents, takes him into her care, making him the new center of her life. She devotes herself entirely to his care, speaking and thinking only of Sasha and his schoolwork. But Sasha is embarrassed when she tries to follow him to school and tells her to go home and let him walk alone. Olga's life once again has meaning because she lives through

Sasha, but Sasha feels smothered by her care and cries out in his sleep words that express his anger toward her and his desire to be free of her smothering love: "I'll give it to you! Get away! Shut up!"

Summary

"The Darling" is a short story that explores the themes of love, loss, and oppression. The story, which is told in the third person, tells the tragic tale of Olenka, a young woman who seems to lose her sense of self each time she falls in love. As each relationship evolves and then ends, the reader watches Olenka seemingly reinvent her personality so that her personality and interests match those of the man with whom she is engaged in a relationship.

As the story begins, Olenka, the daughter of a retired college professor, is sitting on her back porch deep in thought. Evening is approaching and it looks as though it might rain. The manager of a local outdoor theater, a man named Kukin, is in the garden bemoaning the threat of bad weather; his business is highly weather dependent and he has already had to cancel several other performances because of rain. In addition, he is highly critical of the theater's patrons. Despite his efforts to stage first-rate productions, it appears as though the patrons prefer to be entertained by clowns and other "vulgarities." Each evening, this scene repeats itself until it seems as though Kukin is nearly mad.

As Olenka watches and listens to Kukin, she begins to realize she is in love with him. Olenka, it seems, is not happy unless she has someone in her life to love. She is a compassionate, gentle young woman who is seen as a delight to those around her and often elicits cries of "You Darling!" from those with whom she speaks.

Eventually, Kukin proposes to Olenka and they are married. When he sees Olenka on their wedding day, he appears to be so moved by her beauty that he, too, cries the familiar phrase "You Darling!" Unfortunately, it rains on their wedding day, adding to Kukin's despair.

Now married, Olenka spends her days working at the theater with Kukin. When she meets people she knows, she tells them how important the theater is to her and, echoing Kukin's sentiments, laments that the public doesn't seem to appreciate the quality of the productions being staged. As time passes, she becomes more intricately involved in the productions and is personally insulted when the local newspapers' writers criticize the performances. The actors are fond of Olenka and, like so many other people, frequently refer to her as "the darling." Olenka is fond of the actors as well and often lends them money.

In the winter, Kukin and Olenka rent an indoor theater in town and occasionally sublet it to other performers. Olenka seems to be quite content with her life and begins to gain weight. Kukin, on the other hand, suffering from the strain of continually worrying about their finances, becomes increasingly thinner. Olenka tries to pamper him by making warm tea and wrapping him in warm blankets, acts that Kukin seems to appreciate.

Near the beginning of the Lenten season, Kukin travels to Moscow to find some new actors. He is detained there and writes that he will return in time for Easter. Olenka is clearly lonely and troubled by Kukin's absence and finds that she has trouble sleeping.

On the Sunday before Easter, Olenka receives a telegram notifying her of Kukin's death. She is overwhelmed with grief and travels to Moscow for the funeral. When she returns home, she is inconsolable. The neighbors feel sorry for Olenka and refer to her as "the poor darling."

Three months later, on her way home from Mass, Olenka finds herself walking with one of her neighbors, a man named Vassily Andreitch Pustovalov who is the manager of the local timber merchant. As they walk, Pustovalov tells Olenka that everything in life is pre-ordained and that it is necessary to be accepting of God's will.

As time passes, Olenka realizes that she likes Pustovalov. Not long after she has this realization, a matchmaker visits her. The matchmaker tells her what a wonderful man Pustovalov is. A few days later Pustovalov visits. Shortly after his visit, Olenka contacts the matchmaker to make the final arrangements. Olenka and Pustovalov are soon married and are very happy together.

After their wedding, Olenka begins working with her husband at the timber merchant's and before long, becomes well versed in the trade. Even her dreams seem to be centered on the timber trade. She even begins to share her husband's opinions on everything ranging from timber to how they will spend their free time. Fearing she spends far too much time working, Olenka's friends suggest she take some time off for more pleasant pastimes such as going to the theater. Olenka ignores their suggestions, telling them that she has no use for such trivial pursuits.

Olenka and Pustovalov customarily attend Mass on Saturday evening and early morning Mass on holidays. They enjoy a comfortable life, eat well and treat themselves to a visit to the baths once a week.

When Pustovalov goes on an extended wood-buying trip, Olenka misses him terribly. She passes some of the time in the company of Smirnin, a young army veterinary surgeon to whom she and Pustovalov have rented their lodge. Smirnin and Olenka spend most of their time together playing cards and talking, primarily about the young surgeon's home life. He is separated from his wife because she had been unfaithful. Smirnin is still angry and hurt about this transgression. And although Olenka feels badly for Smirnin, she advises him to try to make amends with his wife, primarily for the sake of their son.

When her husband returns from his trip, she tells him of Smirnin's troubles. They both agree they feel most sorry for Smirnin's son. Eventually, the couple find themselves at the holy icons asking God to bless them with children.

Olenka and Pustovalov live happily together for the next six years. Their idyllic life together came to a crashing end when Pustovalov dies four months after catching a cold from which he never recovered.

Olenka is once again devastated and spends the next six months in relative solitude, leaving her home only to go to Mass or to her husband's grave. Eventually, she begins to work her way out of her despair and to resume some of her previous routines. Smirnin once again becomes a regular visitor, prompting some to believe that Olenka would marry for a third time. While neither Olenka nor Smirnin comment on the relationship, it is clear that Olenka is falling into the familiar pattern of becoming part of Smirnin's world. She immerses herself in veterinary medicine and repeats many of Smirnin's ideas and beliefs to those she meets. While they generally get along well, Smirnin sometimes becomes frustrated with the way in which Olenka tries to sound as though she is expert in matters relating to veterinary science.

Eventually, Smirnin leaves with his regiment and Olenka is once again alone. In the months that follow, unable to become interested in anything, she retreats into her own world. She thinks about nothing and is unable to form an opinion about anything at all.

Years pass. The town grows, but Olenka's home falls into disrepair. She passes the summer days on her porch and the winter days at her window. And so it continues until one July evening when there is a knock at her gate. Olenka answers the knock and is delighted to find Smirnin. Although he has also aged considerably in the intervening years, Olenka finds that her fondness for him returns almost immediately.

Smirnin explains to Olenka that he has reconciled with his wife and that they have come to the town to find a place to settle down. Olenka offers her home to Smirnin and his family and tells him that she would be quite comfortable living in the lodge. Before long, Olenka's old house is painted and repaired and ready for Smirnin's wife and son, a boy named Sasha, to move into.

Almost immediately, Olenka becomes smitten with Sasha. She spends a great deal of time with the boy helping him with his school lessons. When Sasha starts high school, his mother leaves the town to go live with her sister. Because Smirnin was also often gone for days at a time for his job, Olenka decides to bring Sasha to live with her.

For six months they live together. During this time, they establish a routine in which Olenka wakes the boy each morning for school and as he eats his breakfast, she reminds him to work hard in school and to obey his teachers. The boy seems to have little patience for Olenka and is ill mannered with her. Then, as he sets off for school, she follows him until they are near to the building. At this point, she calls him back to give him a piece of fruit or other type of treat. When they reach the street where the school stands, he turns around and tells Olenka to go home. They repeat this little ritual each morning.

Despite Sasha's growing impatience, Olenka seems to once again come alive. She regards the boy as her own and becomes deeply attached to him. Her youthful looks reappear and once more, people greet her with the familiar "darling" endearment. Everywhere she goes she talks about Sasha and the high expectations being placed upon him at school.

Each evening, the two have supper together before spending time working on the day's lessons. Then, after she puts Sasha to bed, she thinks about the day when Sasha will inevitably leave her. This brings her to tears.

One night, Olenka is awakened by a loud knock at the gate. Fearing it is a telegram from Sasha's mother and that she will have to send the boy away, she begins to shudder. Soon she realizes that it is only Smirnin returning home from a night at the club. Once again content, her thoughts turn to the boy she loves so much, the boy who sometimes calls out in his sleep, "I'll give it you! Get away! Shut up!"

Analysis

Anton Chekhov's short story "The Darling" is a story that contains a number of themes: love, loss, and oppression. On the surface, the story of Olenka appears to be a tragic one; in addition to caring for her elderly and ill father, she endures the death of two husbands and the rejection of a suitor. While there is no denying that Olenka's life does indeed have some tragic elements, there is also a great deal of irony at play.

There is also the existence of what appears to be love throughout the story. Whether Olenka actually loved her husbands and suitor is really unimportant. She believed she loved them and behaved in the way she assumed women in love typically act. There is no doubt that Olenka believes that by fully immersing herself in her husbands' worlds, she is demonstrating her love and commitment. Further, she reportedly loved her father. Although not much of their relationship is revealed during the story, the narrator's reference to Olenka's father sitting in a dark room and breathing with difficulty is symbolic of the fact that she has smothered him in the same manner as she has smothered her husbands.

This causes one to wonder about Olenka's childhood. There is no reference made to her mother throughout this story, but the reader is told that she had once loved an aunt. The possibility exists that she grew up motherless and is now overcompensating for the lack of maternal love in her childhood years with her oppressive behavior.

This possibility becomes even more plausible when one considers the dramatic changes that take place in Olenka's physical appearance each time she falls in love. Recall that during her marriage to Kukin and even in her marriage to Pustovalov she flourishes - the narrator uses phrases such as "plump shoulders" and "rosy cheeks" to describe her physical attributes during these periods. Yet when love leaves her, and she withdraws emotionally and even seems to physically wither, and the narrator uses phrases such as "plain and elderly" to describe her physical being. To describe the extent to which Olenka appears to thrive on love, the narrator says it appears as though she "could not exist without loving."

There are also significant changes in her emotional demeanor as love ebbs and flows in her life. When she is alone, she is withdrawn and depressed but when she has someone on which to focus her attention, she becomes animated and vibrant. But even

more interesting than this is that Olenka seems to assume the personality of the person whom she loves. Recall that when she married Kukin, she seemingly became an instant authority of all things relating to the theater. During her marriage to Pustovalov, she became learned in the timber industry; and, in another example of irony, tells a well-meaning friend that she has no use for the theater when it is suggested that she might need to take some time away from her work and relax. Finally, during her relationship with Smirnin, she takes on the air of someone who is a learned authority in veterinary medicine, much to the annoyance of her companion.

In fact, Smirnin is the only one of Olenka's loves that tells her that her behavior is annoying; her husbands continually thank her for taking such good care of them. This is another example of irony - the men who appreciate her care the most die. Their deaths, however, are symbolic of how Olenka's actions smother these men. Once they marry her, she assumes their personalities, interests and any characteristic that had once made them individuals.

There is also irony in the title chosen for this story. To casual observers, Olenka appears to be a lovely, "darling" young woman: yet to those to whom she is closest, particularly her husbands and Smirnin, she is the complete opposite. This is not to say that she is purposely so. As noted earlier, it is possible that her behavior is the result of a lack of love in her childhood. It is also quite possible that Olenka's actions quite simply stem from her belief that, as a wife, it is her duty to die herself and fully immerse herself in the life and interest of the man she is with.

There are glimpses of this in her relationship with Sasha. What is different in this relationship is that this time she does not assume Sasha's personality traits but rather becomes intricately absorbed in the most minute details of his life, almost to the point of becoming obsessed. This is particularly apparent when she follows the boy to school each day. Sasha, like his father, is annoyed by Olenka's actions but does not confront her directly. Rather, his ire becomes apparent in his dreams when he exhorts her to "Get away! Shut up!"

While the story does not continue past this point, it seems apparent that Sasha's outbursts are relatively common. The fact that his words do not seem to hurt Olenka speaks volumes to her unconditional love for the boy, again providing testimony that she loves in a way that she believes to be proper.

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Characters

Elderly lady

The elderly lady is a matchmaker between Olga and her second husband. The elderly lady, only a slight acquaintance, comes to visit Olga and to drink coffee with her one afternoon. After a brief visit from Pustovalov, Olga realizes she loves him and sends for the elderly lady to make a match between them.

Kukin

Kukin is Olga's first husband. He is the owner of an open-air theater called the Tivoli. He complains on a daily basis that the rain has once again driven away his audience, and that nobody appreciates art anyway. He is described as

a small thin man, with a yellow face, and curls combed forward on his forehead. He spoke in a thin tenor; as he talked, his mouth worked on one side, and there was always an expression of despair on his face

As the story opens, Kukin is a boarder at Olga's lodge, but they soon marry, and Olga adopts Kukin's concern for the rain and the indifferent public. One night, Olga receives a telegram informing her that Kukin, who was away in Moscow on business, has died suddenly. His body is taken by train back to Olga's town where she mourns his death for three months.

Mavra

Mavra is Olga's cook. She is only mentioned once, when all three of the men in Olga's life have died or left her, and Olga has no one's opinions to adopt except those of the cook: "Whatever Mavra, the cook, said she accepted."

Olenka

See Olga Semyonovna

Plemyanniakov

Plemyanniakov is Olga's father. Before her first marriage, he was the man her life revolved around. He does not appear in the story, but it is mentioned that he left her the lodge in his will.

Vassily Andreitch Pustovalov

Pustovalov is Olga's second husband. Before they marry, he is Olga's neighbor and a manager at the lumberyard. His manner of dress, "a straw hat, a white waistcoat, and a gold watch-chain" make him look "more like a country gentleman than a man in a trade." Three months after her first husband's death, Olga meets him on their way home from church. Shortly afterward, he sends an older woman as matchmaker, and the two marry. Olga and Pustovalov live happily together for six years. But "one winter day after drinking hot tea in the office, Vassily Andreitch went out into the yard without his cap on to see about sending off some timber, caught cold and was taken ill." Although he has "the best doctors," he dies a month later.

Olga Semyonovna

Olga is the "darling" referred to in the story's title. She is also referred to as Olenka. Olga is the protagonist of the story. Her primary characteristic is that her life revolves around whatever man she attaches herself to. She first marries a theater owner and adopts his despair over the weather and his disdain for the public, who do not appreciate his art. When he dies suddenly, Olga mourns bitterly, but three months later she meets a timber merchant. They quickly marry, and Olga helps him with his business, talking and dreaming only of timber. After six years, the timber merchant becomes ill and dies. Olga mourns his death bitterly, but six months later she takes up with a young veterinary surgeon who lives in her lodge. Although he is married, he is estranged from his wife. During this time, Olga speaks and thinks only of veterinary concerns. But this does not last long, as the surgeon is soon transferred to another town. When Olga is once again left without a man in her life, she finds that she has nothing to say or think. Years go by, and Olga grows older and less attractive, as she thinks, dreams, and speaks of nothing. Only when the veterinarian returns with his wife and son, does Olga's life once again take on meaning. But this time it is Sasha, the little boy, who becomes the focus of all her thoughts. When he is virtually abandoned by his mother and father, Olga takes the boy under her care, as if he were her own.

Smirnin

Smirnin is a young veterinary surgeon in the army. When Olga first meets him, he is renting a room in her lodge. He is estranged from his wife because she had an affair, and only sends her money to support their little boy. While her second husband is out of town, Olga sits with Smirnin to drink tea and play cards. Six months after her second husband' s death, it becomes clear to everyone that she and Pustovalov are having an affair because Olga begins to talk only of veterinary concerns. Olga is happy with Smirnin, but his regiment soon departs to a far away place, and Olga is again left alone. Years later, Smirnin returns, reunited with his wife and son, and Olga insists that the family lodge with her. But the wife soon leaves and, although Olga and Pustovalov do not take up their affair, Olga devotes her life to caring for his son.

Sasha Smirnin

Sasha is the son of Smirnin, the veterinary surgeon, and his estranged wife. He is described as "a boy of ten, small for his age, blue-eyed, chubby, with dimples in his cheeks." When Smirnin and his wife are reconciled, they bring Sasha with them to live in Olga's house. Olga's black cat immediately delights Sasha. After the mother departs and the veterinary surgeon is often away for his work, Olga takes care of Sasha for "it seemed to Olga as though Sasha was entirely abandoned, that he was not wanted at home, that he was being starved, and she carried him off to her lodge and gave him a little room there." Sasha then becomes the center of Olga's life. She does his homework with him and speaks to others only about Sasha and his school. But Sasha is embarrassed when Olga follows him on his way to school, and he must tell her to go home and let him walk the rest of the way alone. The last lines of the story are given to Sasha's cries in his sleep: "I'll give it to you! Get away! Shut up!" In his nightmares, Sasha is able to express his anger at the smothering presence of Olga in his life.

Smirnin's wife

She is described as "a thin, plain lady, with short hair and a peevish expression." Olga first hears about Smirnin' s wife when he tells her of their estrangement due to the wife's infidelity. Olga at first encourages him to reconcile with her. Olga does not meet the wife until years later when the two are reconciled and come with their son to live in Olga's house. But the wife soon leaves again, going to stay with her sister in Harkov. When she does not return, Olga takes over the mothering of the little boy.

Themes

The Role of Women in Society

Critics have interpreted the tone of the story as an indication that Chekhov was lampooning the limited role of women in nineteenth-century Russian society as nothing more than an appendage to men, with no thoughts or opinions of their own. Soon after the publication of "The Darling," however, contemporary writer Tolstoy made the argument that while Chekhov set out to "sacrifice" the character of Olga as a typically vapid woman, he inadvertently blesses her in her ultimate role as mother. Tolstoy's view was based on his opinion that women serve no greater role in society than that of loving mother, and that women's highest virtue is their capacity for love. Critics continue to debate the narrative perspective of "The Darling" and Olga's character: Is she an object of ridicule, pity, or admiration? The fact that these questions continue to provide critics with material for speculation and debate, even one hundred years after its initial publication, is a testament to Chekhov's skillful sense of ambiguity in the telling of this story.

The Nature of Love

Chekhov's story develops a character, Olga Semyonovna, who thrives on love and withers away without love. The story, however, questions the nature of such a love, which is born more of dependency and personal emptiness than of a true sympathy of souls. Olga is largely indiscriminate in her choices of the men to whom she attaches herself. Having no internal life of her own, she attaches herself to a theater owner, a lumber merchant, and a veterinary surgeon, without any true sense of each man's character or of her own opinions in relation to his. Love, for Olga, is a matter of filling up the "empty yard," which is all she can dream of when there is no man with whom to share it. Her "love" is based on a vast internal void in her own character, which craves to be occupied by some man, without regard to the particularities of who the man is. In terms of contemporary popular psychology, Olga's attachment to men is that of a "codependent" who gains her sense of self only from her emotional dependence on others.

Loss, Abandonment, and Death

During the course of the story, Olga falls in love with, and then loses, three men. The first two, Kukin and Pustovalov, whom she marries in sequence, abandon her through sudden death. Olga's response to each death is highly melodramatic. She wails dramatically upon Kukin's death, and evokes a similar response upon the death of Pustovalov. After each funeral, she openly mourns the man's death through the length of time she continues to wear her mourning clothes. Olga's sense of loss after each death is, on the one hand, represented as extreme and sincere. Yet, on the other hand,

the reader is invited to question the sincerity of her mourning because she attaches herself to a new man within three to six months after the death of each preceding man. It becomes clear that while Olga certainly suffers the loss of the man in her life, the ease with which each man can be replaced indicates that it is not so important to her which man in particular comes next so long as he can fill the void left in her life by the loss of the previous man. Olga's eventual attachment to Sasha, the little boy, is initially inspired by her sense that he has been "abandoned" by his parents. It is her identification with the feeling of being abandoned that leads her to "love" Sasha.

Maternal Love

In the end, her "maternal" love for Sasha, the little boy, is really born of her own need for a male object of her affections and is ultimately stifling to the healthy development of the child as an individual. Under the guise of doing everything she can for Sasha, Olga in fact selfishly smothers Sasha with her attention to meet her own emotional needs. Each act of supposed kindness or generosity, such as following him to school to give him a candy, is in fact a method of manipulating him into satisfying her desire for love and attention. The final lines of the story emphasize the oppressive nature of Olga's "love" for Sasha, as he calls out in his nightmares the sentiments he cannot express during the day: to Sasha her attention is demanding, overbearing, and oppressive.

Style

Realism

Chekhov's short story is in the style of realism, which predominated Russian literature throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet, while writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky wrote in a realistic style that conveyed a political message or moral philosophy, Chekhov's stories, as critics have pointed out, instruct the reader not so much in how to live but in how not to live. "The Darling" is realist in style partly in its portrayal of life in a provincial Russian village. Chekhov focuses on the mundane details of daily life as important indicators of character, giving the story a somewhat static tone, as nothing much "happens" in Olga's life, except a series of marriages and deaths.

Narrative Tone

Critics have often discussed the tone of the narrator in "The Darling" as an indicator of the author's perspective on the character of Olga. Chekhov's literary roots as a writer of brief, humorous sketches can be detected in the somewhat mocking tone of his portrayal of Olga. For instance, with the death of each husband, the narrator relates the passion and depth of Olga's mourning, but, almost in the same breath, relates her involvement with a new suitor only months after the death of the last. Some critics interpret this mocking tone as evidence that Chekhov's intention was to criticize the limitations placed on women by traditional gender roles. However, some critics note that, by the end of the story, the narrator's tone changes from that of mockery to that of pathos. Olga emerges as a pathetic creature, whose all-encompassing love for the little boy is met by his disdain and scorn.

Character Sketch

Chekhov is known for his virtually plotless stories, which focus on the details of character, rather than the intricacies of plot. Chekhov's literary beginnings as a writer of short, humorous sketches can be traced in this "character sketch" of Olga Semyonovna. Every detail, event, and character in the story is designed to develop and illuminate the central character. Further, the story focuses on Olga's defining character trait: that she blindly devotes herself, in turn, to each of the three men in her life, molding her personality to suit the interests and opinions of whoever is her current husband or lover. By the end of the story, having lost all three of these men, Olga devotes her love to Sasha, the son of Smirnin, who is her former lover.

Thus, at the beginning of the story, it seems that Olga's defining personality trait is her charm, indicated by the town's nickname for her: "the darling." However, as she grows older and loses this charm, it becomes apparent that her need to lose herself in the love of a man (or male child) is her most enduring trait because it outlives the charm of her youth. There is thus a certain irony in the title of the story—"The Darling"—because, by

the end, she is no longer considered to be "darling." In fact, the little boy whom she loves is somewhat repulsed by her smothering attentions.

Chekhov's description of each of the other characters in the story operates as a minor character sketch in and of itself. Critics have noted that the minor characters in "The Darling"—particularly, the three men in Olga's life—resemble "caricatures"—meaning that they are ironic representations that emphasize the most glaring flaws and absurdities of these men in a somewhat humorous tone.

Setting

"The Darling" is set in a small, provincial Russian town during the mid-nineteenth century. Olga and her various suitors are of an emerging class of small merchants, petty property owners, and managers, which arose in Russia in the wake of the 1861 emancipation of the serfs. Pustovalov, Olga's second husband, is a prime example of a small-town merchant (he is the manager of a lumber yard) whose pretensions are indicated by his concerns with dressing above his station and the consumption of "fancy" foods. His character is indicative of the societal changes taking place in Russia during the second half of the century.

Allegorical Names

Critic Nadya Peterson, in her article, "The Languages of 'The Darling,'" makes note of the allegorical implications of each central character' s name.

The name of Olga's first husband, Kukin, suggests the Russian word *kukish,* which is a rude gesture. This reference implies that Kukin is somewhat crude, unrefined, and perhaps even offensive. Thus, the name presents the character of Kukin with some irony because he sees himself as above other men, an artist of the theater, and is disdainful of the masses who do not appreciate his art. Chekhov, however, endows his character with a name that signals to the reader not to take Kukin too seriously.

Similarly, the name of Pustovalov, Olga's second husband, implies "triviality and vacuousness." This reference suggests the shallow nature of his love for Olga, which seems to be based more on outward behavior and habits, and ultimately lacks true love of any real depth.

The name of Smirnin, the third man in Olga' s life, means "the weak one." As with the first two men, the name of this character signals to the reader not to take him too seriously. Indeed, his character is ultimately "weak," and lacks conviction in his relationships: he passively endures his wife's infidelity, engages in an illicit affair with another woman, leaves Olga to return to his wife, and later, after his wife dies, remains in Olga's house but does not resume their love affair.

Olga's name is associated with the phrase "little soul." Unlike the names of these men, her name communicates to the reader that Olga—despite her glaring weaknesses,

silliness, and other personality flaws—is pure of heart and soul and that the reader is expected to regard her with genuine compassion, regardless of the fact that her approach to relationships with men seems silly and naïve.

Russian Folklore

In her article, Peterson points out the similarities between the character of Olga and the traditional characteristics of the witch in Russian folklore. Peterson points to Olga's black cat, a common familiar of the witch, as well as her frequent visits, with her second husband, to the bathhouse, "the traditional locus of all prophecy, sorcery, and magical cures in Russian folklore."

Historical Context

Russian Literature in the Nineteenth Century

Chekhov's innovations as a short story writer appeared on the Russian literary scene during a period of transition from what is termed the "golden age" of Russian literature to the "silver age." The predominant literary style in Russia, beginning in the 1840s, was that of realism. Because the government exercised strict censorship over political expression, fiction writers took on the burden of expressing political views through their stories. Nikolai Gogol, an early master of the Russian short story, combined realism with elements of the fantastic in his widely influential story, "The Overcoat." Masters of the Russian realist novel include Turgenev *(Fathers and Sons,* 1862), Dostoyevsky *(Crime and Punishment* in 1866 and *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1879-1880), and Tolstoy *(War & Peace in* 1865-1869, *Anna Karenina* in 1875-1877, and the novella *The Death of Ivan Ilych* in 1886). In the 1880s, however, the predominance of the realist style began to wane, as Chekhov became a dominant literary figure for his innovative style of short stories. Around the turn of the century, the predominant style became that of "symbolism," influenced by movements in French art and literature. Chekhov's work marked this transition in that it is "realist," without being as overtly political or moralistic as his literary predecessors. Maxim Gorky became the heir to Chekhov as the master of the short story.

Women in Nineteenth Century Russia

As modern Russia emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Russian women began to publicly express a desire for greater equality, particularly through access to higher education. Chekhov's stories about women often refer to this context of pressure for social change in which women's roles in society are seen as limited and limiting.

The Intelligentsia

The "intelligentsia" in Russia in the latter half of the nineteenth century was a group of intellectuals who favored revolutionary ideas over aesthetic concerns. Russian realist writers, such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov, were strongly opposed to the intelligentsia, whose single-minded concern with revolutionary ideas opposed the more subtle implications of the social concerns addressed by the fiction writer.

The Moscow Art Theater

The Moscow Art Theater was founded by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1898 as an experimental theater devoted to a dramatic style of "naturalism." The theater opened with a production of Tolstoy's *Fyodor Ivanovich,* but its first significant success was Chekhov's play *The Seagull,* also performed that year.

The Seagull had been a failure in a previous production by another theater, but was met with instant critical success in the hands of the newly formed Moscow Art Theater. Chekhov's play was uniquely suited to the theatrical style developed by the Moscow Art Theater, as both focused on the inner life of their characters. Their performance of *The Seagull* won instant notoriety both for the theater itself and for Chekhov as a talented playwright. Chekhov's subsequent major plays, *Three Sisters, Uncle Vanya,* and *The Cherry Orchard* were also performed by the Moscow Art Theater, and the writer and theater became closely associated with one another in the minds of the public.

Russian Literary Life

Earlier in the nineteenth century, Russian literary life revolved around salon-gatherings of writers, artists, and intellectuals who came together to informally discuss and share their ideas and work. Later in the century, the locus of Russian literary life turned to the publication of journals. Even novels were originally published in serial form in such journals before being collected and published in book form. Most journals supported a clearly defined political stance. Chekhov was unusual in that he was able to publish his stories and humorous sketches across a wide range of journals, thus avoiding association with any one political perspective.

Modern Russia

The most significant event in Russian history of the nineteenth century was the 1861 emancipation of the serfs. (Russian serfs were agricultural workers whose status was little more than that of slaves.) The emancipation of the serfs heralded a variety of social and economic reforms, as well as continuing political struggles over the rights of both rural and urban workers. The emancipation was made possible in part by Czar Alexander II, who ascended to power in 1855. In the 1860s and 1870s, revolutionary groups began to appear and gain popularity, leading in part to the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. Alexander III followed, reigning from 1881 until his death in 1894. Crop failures and the resultant famine in 1891 lead to revitalized revolutionary organization, which further increased with the succession of Alexander III's son, Nicholas II, who reigned from 1894 until the Russian revolution of 1917. Socialist organizations solidified in the last few years of the century into two main groups, the Socialist Revolutionaries (founded in 1901) and the Social Democrats (founded in 1898). During and after the last few years of Chekhov's life, massive strikes took place in 1885, 1896, 1902, and 1903. Discontentment culminated in the revolution of 1905-1906, which caused much unrest but ultimately failed.

Critical Overview

Chekhov is widely considered one of the greatest short story writers of the past two centuries; his international influence can hardly be overestimated.

Thomas Winner, in his introduction to *Chekhov and his Prose,* states that Chekhov "is recognized today as perhaps the greatest of short-story writers whose innovations in form and technique as well as expressions of many hitherto untried themes have immeasurably altered our literary traditions." In his economic use of descriptive language, Chekhov has been called the Russian Guy de Maupassant, in reference to the great French short story writer.

"The Darling," first published in 1899, is widely considered to be one of Chekhov's finest short stories. It is often discussed in conjunction with "The Lady with the Pet Dog," as an example of Chekhov's depictions of the place of women in Russian society. "The Darling" is also often categorized among Chekhov's sketches of peasant life in rural Russia. As is most of his fiction, it is a realist tale, set in the cultural and historical context of Russia in the decades following the 1861 emancipation of the serfs. Chekhov's use of descriptive language has been noted for its cool, journalistic, even clinical style, with setting and action often described with the sparseness of the stage directions in a play. As a character sketch, with strong elements of parodic humor, it shows the traces of Chekhov's early literary career as a writer of short, humorous pieces. Chekhov himself saw "The Darling" as a humorous story; however, as with his plays, readers and critics often detect more serious elements of character beneath the surface level parody.

Upon its initial journal publication in 1899, "The Darling" was immediately praised by writer Leo Tolstoy, who was deeply moved by the story. As Nadya Peterson, in her article "The Languages of 'Darling,'" points out, the story was "admitted into the canon of Russian literature by its patriarch— Leo Tolstoi—as one of Chekhov's masterpieces." Peterson explains that the story

elicited widely different responses from contemporary readers and critics to what they perceived as 'The Darling's' message. Some found in the story an idealized portrayal of the Russian woman, others were angered by its demeaning depiction of womanhood.

Tolstoy's famous essay, for example, praises the author for achieving exactly the opposite of the effect he had intended. As an oft-cited analysis of the story by one of Chekhov's greatest contemporaries, this essay is worth discussing in some detail. Tolstoy compares Chekhov to a Biblical character who, sent to the top of a mountain to curse the Israelites, instead blessed them at the will of God.

Chekhov, likewise, according to Tolstoy, meant to "mock the poor creature" of Olga Semyonovna, and "knock the Darling down," but, "concentrating upon her the close attention of the poet, raised her up." Tolstoy reads "The Darling" in the context of a feminist movement among Russian women in the late nineteenth century, by which he

regards Chekhov's intention in creating the character of the "darling" as a counterexample to the "new woman," stating that "in writing 'The Darling' he wanted to show what woman ought not to be." Tolstoy, clearly disdainful of this feminist impulse, characterizes what he believed to be Chekhov's intent:

I believe that while he was writing "The Darling," the author had in his mind, though not in his heart, a vague image of a new woman; of her equality with man; of a woman mentally developed, learned, working independently for the good of society as well as, if not better than, a man; of the woman who has raised and upholds the woman question.

Tolstoy goes on to argue that Chekhov inadvertently created the character of a woman who, Tolstoy believes, is in fact the ideal of womanhood, in opposition to "the whole of the absurd and evil activity of the fashionable woman movement." He argues that the character of Olga, who loves men selflessly, completely, and without judgment, is an ideal of the capacity for feminine love and that her eventual devotion to Sasha, the young boy, represents the highest ideal of maternal love attainable by a woman. Tolstoy concludes that while Chekhov intended to mock Olga for her blind devotion to the men in her life, he

unconsciously clothed this sweet creature in such an exquisite radiance that she will always remain a type of what a woman can be in order to be happy herself, and to make the happiness of those with whom destiny throws her.

While many modern readers and critics may call into question Tolstoy's praise for Olga as an ideal woman, not to mention his disdain for a movement toward women's rights, his essay raised the central questions upon which critics frequently focus in discussions of "The Darling": to what extent is the story a mockery of the character of Olga Semyonovna, who cannot live without love, and to what extent does it represent her as an ideal of womanhood? Peterson describes the story as "a puzzle which has long bemused critics," explaining that "to the modern critical sensibility 'The Darling' remains no less of a challenge than when it first appeared in print." As Peterson explains, "For almost a century now readers have been trying to decide whether Chekhov's woman is there to emulate or ridicule."

Some critics have pointed out that while the story begins in mockery, its tone changes to one of pathos by the conclusion. Others consider Olga's capacity for love to be, while not the saintly ideal described by Tolstoy, at least a redeeming character trait. Thomas Winner, for instance, claims that "While it appears at first that Olenka may become one of Chekhov's typical figures of emptiness and hypocrisy, the fact that she is capable of love, even though it is submissive and possessive, distinguishes her from many Chekhovian lonely protagonists." Nevertheless, Winner makes clear, as have many critics, that "Olenka's absurdity cannot be overlooked." Perhaps it is the very ambiguity of Olga's character that has earned "The Darling" its place as one of Chekhov's greatest stories, which, one hundred years after its initial publication, continues to be widely anthologized and as passionately discussed by critics as it was at the time of its initial publication.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in cinema studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses the characterization of the men in Olga's life.

Chekhov is known for his virtually plotless plays and short stories, which focus more on the details of character than on action. "The Darling" is one such "character sketch," in which all elements of the story work to portray the character of Olga Semyonovna. While critical discussion tends to focus on Olga herself, it is useful to examine the characters that surround her, both in their own light and in terms of the ways in which they illuminate Olga's character. It is also interesting to note that there is a little bit of Chekhov himself in each of these characters, suggesting an undertone of self-parody on the part of the author.

The perspective of the townspeople is important at key points in the story as it can be used as an indicator of Olga's character development. A description of the impression made by Olga on the men and women in her town provides the central explanation of why she is nicknamed "the darling":

At the sight of her full rosy cheeks, her soft white neck with a little dark mole on it, and the kind, naive smile, which came into her face when she listened to anything pleasant, men thought, 'Yes, not half bad,' and smiled too, while lady visitors could not refrain from seizing her hand in the middle of a conversation, exclaiming in a gush of delight, 'You darling!'

When Olga develops a romance with the veterinary surgeon, the narrator again takes the perspective of Olga's fellow villagers; the evidence of her affair is not confirmed directly, but it is indicated by the local perception that such an affair could be "surmised" by the sight of Olga in her garden with the veterinary surgeon; and the fact of the affair is made apparent only when Olga is heard in town discussing nothing but veterinary concerns. An important change in Olga's character, which develops after the third man in her life has left her, is again described in terms of how she is perceived by her fellow townsfolk: "She got thinner and plainer, and when people met her in the street they did not look at her as they used to, and did not smile to her." In other words, she is no longer the "darling" she once was to them.

Olga's central character trait is that she thrives when there is a man in her life and loses all sense of meaning when she is without a man. Yet the particular men she chooses to marry and become involved with are telling of more subtle elements of her character. A closer look at the series of men who become the center of Olga' s existence sheds light on her own character as well.

Olga's first husband, Kukin, is the owner of an outdoor theater called the Tivoli. Kukin's central character trait is his daily, ceaseless obsession with two concerns, the rainy

weather, which affects his performances, and the "boorish" public, who do not appreciate the true art of the theater. Chekhov's portrayal of Kukin resembles the type of short, parodic character sketch he mastered early in his career as a humor writer. Yet the character of Kukin may also be a form of self-parody on the part of Chekhov. Chekhov's play *The Seagull* was first performed in 1896 and was a complete flop, in the eyes of critics and audience alike. Chekhov was strongly affected by the criticism of this production and was certainly in a position to regard the inappreciative public with disdain, not to mention a sense of the tragedy of the misunderstood artist. Kukin's rant regarding the futility of creating theater for an ignorant audience caricatures the classic dilemma of the true artist who must submit his art to the scrutiny of an ignorant and misunderstanding public.

It's enough to make one cry. One works and does one's utmost; one wears oneself out, getting no sleep at night, and racks one's brain what to do for the best. And then what happens? To begin with, one's public is ignorant, boorish. I give them the very best operettas, a dainty masque, first rate music-hall artists. But do you suppose that' s what they want! They don't understand anything of that sort. They want a clown; what they ask for is vulgarity.

These very words could easily have emanated from Chekhov himself in the wake of the initial failure of *The Seagull* on the stage. However, after the 1898 production by the newly formed, experimental Moscow Art Theater, Chekhov's talent as a leading playwright was belatedly, albeit enthusiastically, acknowledged. By the time "The Darling" was published, in 1899, Chekhov may have been in a better position to parody such a character, whose blame of the inappreciative public for all his woes is a subject of mockery. Kukin's concern with his indifferent public is later described in exaggerated metaphysical terms. There is an element of parody in Chekhov's choice to elevate Kukin's frustrations to the metaphysical level of "destiny." And, to further the humorous exaggeration of Kukin's discontentment, his struggle is described in terms of a military battle; when Olga lies in bed at night, hearing the sounds of the band and the fireworks emanating from the theater, "it seemed to her that it was Kukin struggling with his destiny, storming the entrenchments of his chief foe, the indifferent public."

Kukin's second, and equally emphatic, complaint in life is the weather—the rain—which he insists keeps his audience away. His concern with what seems to him continual rain could objectively be considered legitimate, given that he makes his living running an open-air theater.

And then look at the weather! Almost every evening it rains. It started on the tenth of May, and it's kept it up all May and June. It's simply awful! The public doesn't come, but I've to pay the rent just the same, and pay the artists.

However, Chekhov's description of Kukin's despair over the weather is again parodic. Kukin manages to turn a rainstorm into a personal affront to himself as an artist; furthermore, his incessant railing against natural circumstances out of his control suggests that he prefers to blame external forces for his personal defeats. The next day, when "the clouds would gather again," Kukin responds with a "hysterical laugh": "'Well,

rain away, then! Flood the garden, drown me! Damn my luck in this world and the next! Let the artists have me up! Send me to prison!—to Siberia!—the scaffold! Ha, ha, ha!" Kukin's preoccupation with the rain is an indication of his character, which sees only melodramatic tragedy in his life and is unable to enjoy even the night of his wedding to the "darling" Olga: "He was happy, but as it rained on the day and night of his wedding, his face still retained an expression of despair."

Chekhov's portrayal of Kukin's physical appearance is equally unflattering, describing him in terms that suggest a weak, sickly, unattractive man:

He was a small thin man, with a yellow face, and curls combed forward on his forehead. He spoke in a thin tenor; as he talked his mouth worked on one side, and there was always an expression of despair on his face.

Rather than evoking pity or sympathy, the characterization of Olga' s husband describes a bitter, unattractive, unhappy man who spends his life blaming factors out of his control—such as the weather—for all of his woes in life. While Olga thrives during their marriage, Kukin only seems to whither away: "Olenka grew stouter, and was always beaming with satisfaction, while Kukin grew thinner and yellower." It is clear that Kukin's continual battle against rain and the public is a measure of his own inability to view the world and his life in any other than a negative way; he "continually complained of their terrible losses, although he had not done badly all winter."

Olga's response to Kukin is set in contrast to the narrator's parodic and unflattering depiction of the theater owner. While the reader is meant to chuckle at Kukin's incessant and hysterical ranting and raving over his "destiny," Olga is truly moved. "Olenka listened to Kukin with silent gravity, and sometimes tears came into her eyes. In the end, his misfortunes touched her; she grew to love him." Olga's inability to see the absurdity of Kukin's character and her genuine sympathy for his "misfortunes" are what ultimately cause her to fall in love with him. It is in part the disjunction between the narrative perspective on Kukin, which is mocking and parodic, and Olga's perspective on Kukin, which is absurdly sympathetic, that sheds light on her character.

Olga's second husband, Pustovalov, the manager of a lumberyard, is characterized in terms of his status as a social climber and of his piety. Pustovalov's physical appearance is described in only two lines, which reveal, through key details, his class standing and aspirations: "He wore a straw hat, a white waistcoat, and a gold watch-chain, and looked more like a country gentleman than a man in trade." This description uses visual cues to indicate a man who aspires to rise above his merchant class to that of "country gentleman" and who places great importance on the trappings of economic class as evidenced by the "gold watch-chain." The character of Pustovalov takes on more meaning in the context of the history of modern Russia. The 1861 emancipation of the serfs (who were little more than slaves) in Russia heralded a variety of economic reforms. A new class of merchants emerged as a result of some of these changes, which resulted in societal changes as well. Pustovalov seems to represent this emerging merchant class, taking on the trappings of a "country gentleman" although he is merely the manager of a timber yard. Chekhov here may have been hinting at the

class standing of his own family: his grandfather was a serf who purchased his family's freedom when Chekhov's father was a boy, before the emancipation of the serfs; Chekhov's father became a minor merchant, who owned a small grocery; Chekhov, born one year before the emancipation of the serfs, received a higher education, becoming both a doctor and a celebrated man of letters, who eventually purchased a country estate, making him a sort of "country gentleman." In Pustovalov, Chekhov characterizes the type of class rise that became possible in Russia, even within one or two generations of serfdom. Once Olga has married Pustovalov, she, too, takes on the trappings of a higher class; she now wears such upscale fabrics as silk; as they walked home from church each Sunday, "her silk dress rustled agreeably." Their eating habits, too, are "fancy"; after church they eat "fancy bread and jams of various kinds."

Pustovalov is also characterized by his long hours spent at work, his piety, and a disdain for public entertainment, which is in direct contrast to the theater owner, Kukin. Olga first encounters Pustovalov walking home from church. After they are married, when Olga dreams of timber and cries out in her sleep, his response is to tell her to "Cross yourself!" He does not like "entertainments and holidays," and their only outings are to church, which they do often: "On Saturdays, Pustovalov and she used to go to the evening service; on holidays to early mass." Although the narrator assures the reader that the couple are happy, there is some hint that Pustovalov's piety and hard work may result in a rather dull life. It is the response of Olga's friends, who, noting that her life is now limited to working at her husband's office or staying at home, encourage her to go out to the theater or the circus, which implies that they perceive her life of hard work and piety to be lacking in pleasure. The parallel between Pustovalov, a petty merchant, and Chekhov's father may go further in that Chekhov's childhood was dominated by his father's strict piety and his requirement that the young Chekhov work in the family store. Thus, while Olga is said to be contented in her life with Pustovalov, the narrative invites the reader to question the appeal of this lifestyle.

The third man to come and go through Olga's life is Smirnin, the veterinary doctor in the military. Although the narrator assures the reader that Olga is happy with Smirnin, his character comes across as somewhat cold and not especially kind to her. When she talks to his dinner guests of veterinary concerns, the only thing she talks about as long as she is with Smirnin, he is embarrassed by her displays of ignorance. After the guests leave, "he would seize her by the hand and hiss angrily" that she was not to talk about "what you don't understand." Smirnin's physical "seizing" of Olga's hand and his angry "hiss" characterize him as unkind, especially given Olga's guilelessness and her "darling" character. Smirnin's lack of feeling may have been hinted at by the fact of his wife's affair; the implication being that perhaps he was not entirely kind to her either. And his ultimate abandonment of his own son makes clear his lack of feeling and sympathy toward others. While it is not clear that Chekhov saw himself in such an unlikable character, the fact that he himself was a country doctor (although not a veterinarian) again hints at a form of self-mockery in creating such a character with obvious parallels to his own life.

While Olga's primary character trait is her inability to find meaning in her life without a male object of her affections, she is also characterized by her inability to see the

significant flaws in each man's character. The disjuncture between the narrator's perspective on each man and Olga's perception of him works to develop Olga's character as so dependent on attaching herself to a man that she fails to see his blatant flaws. Although the narrator repeatedly assures the reader that Olga is "happy" with each man, the story's characterization of Kukin, Pustovalov, and Smirnin invites the reader to question the sincerity of such assertions.

Robert Payne, in his study *The Image of Chekhov,* has pointed out that although Chekhov is known for the clinical objectivity of his narrative perspective, it is also true that he "put himself into most of his stories"; Payne states that, in fact, Chekhov "is present in a surprising number of them." As Chekhov considered "The Darling" to be a humorous piece, one can imagine that the little bit of Chekhov in each of these characters was a playful form of self-parody on the part of the dramatist, doctor, and social climber, all too aware of his peculiar place in Russian social history.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on "The Darling," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Evdokimova examines "The Darling" to discover why critics, including Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky, have viewed "The Darling" as both positive and negative in terms of its portrayal of femininity.

"All men are scoundrels, and all women are charming creatures," concluded one of Chekhov's contemporaries after reading "The Darling" (1899). "This is a mockery offensive for a woman," complained another. The way the story was received by Chekhov's contemporaries not only reveals the readers' uncertainty about the role of the woman in society and about the masculine ideal of femininity but also testifies to the inherent ambiguity of the story itself.

When the story first appeared in print, several critics believed that Chekhov's plan was to mock a dependent and unemancipated woman, who had no opinions of her own but was capable only of repeating the words of her husbands, her lover, and even a schoolboy. Critics blamed Olenka for submissive-ness. Maxim Gorky supported this negative interpretation: "ike a grey mouse, the Darling anxiously darts about, a sweet, gentle creature who is capable of loving so much and so submissively. One can slap her in her face, and even then she will not dare to let out a moan, the gentle slave." Others, among them Tolstoy, perceived this character as the very embodiment of femininity, as a true ideal of womanhood: "The soul of Darling, with her capacity for devoting herself with her whole being to the one she loves, is not ridiculous but wonderful and holy." Tolstoy not only admired "The Darling," but he proclaimed that, although Chekhov's intent was to curse the heroine, against his will he blessed her.

It is obvious that both Tolstoy and Gorky, to take only two examples, manipulated their interpretations of the text to emphasize one characteristic of the heroine at the expense of others; indeed, they assimilated "The Darling" to their own mythopoetic systems. Thus, when Tolstoy included Chekhov's story in his *Readings for Every Day of the Year* (Krug chteniia), he even went so far as to cut out sentences and passages from Chekhov's text that did not accord with his interpretation. He eliminated Olenka's dreams and all sensual details from Olenka's portrait in order to make his interpretation of the heroine as a "holy soul" more convincing. Gorky, by contrast, was so concerned with the fate of abused and submissive Russian women that he ignored the facts that Olenka is not a victimized wife, that she is not abused, neglected, or misunderstood, that she is financially independent, and that no one in the story ever tries to give her a slap in the face. No matter how interpreters manipulate Chekhov's text, clearly Olenka generates both positive and negative feelings. As Tolstoy himself aptly pointed out about "The Darling," "This is a pearl that similar to litmus paper may produce different effects." Let us analyze the grounds that the text offers for such contradictory interpretations, the sources of the heroine's ambiguity, and the mythopoetic paradigm that lies at the core of Olenka's character and characterization.

"Dushechka," translated traditionally as "The Darling," is a story of a young woman, Olenka (nicknamed *dushechka,* which means "little soul" and is a term of endearment

commonly used to address a woman), and of her four loves: two husbands, a lover, and a little schoolboy, Sashenka. The story is constructed as a cyclical, cumulative repetition of the same situation: affiliation and separation. Each time Olenka engages in a relationship, she identifies herself completely with the person she loves, to the extent of assimilating all his thoughts and opinions. Each time she stays alone, she loses all interest in life, all opinions, and she almost ceases to exist.

In his book *The Phoenix and the Spider* Renato Poggioli, inspired by Tolstoy's definition of the heroine as the one who does "what is loftiest, best, and brings man nearest to God—the work of loving ;" made an attempt to interpret the s tory as a new version of the myth of Psyche. The very title of the story "Dushechka," a diminutive form of *dusha* (soul, or Psyche), suggests this parallel. In addition, this title brings to mind Bogdanovich's poem *Dushenka,* which is a free version of La Fontaine's *Les amours de Psyché et de Cupidon.* La Fontaine's tale, in turn, goes back to Apuleius's account of the myth of Cupid and Psyche in *Metamorphoses.* The perception of Olenka as a modern, Russified Psyche, however, is misleading.

The myth of Cupid and Psyche comprises a number of key motifs that are absent in Chekhov's story: Psyche marries outside her community (in folklore variants the girl often marries a monster); she violates the taboo against seeing her husband; she wanders in search of a lost lover, who is Cupid himself; and finally she is happily reunited with him. In Apuleius's version of the myth, Psyche in the end gives birth to a daughter, Pleasure. The heroine of Chekhov's story is the very opposite of Psyche. Olenka marries local residents, violates no taboo, commits no mistake, stays in her own house all the time, and is not happily reunited with her beloved; instead, her last love for a little boy, Sashenka, is full of troubles. Unlike Psyche, Olenka is barren, unable to conceive children with any of her lovers despite her obvious desire to become a mother; while married to her second husband, Pustovalov, Olenka prays to God to give her children.

Whereas the legendary Psyche marries outside her community, that is, into the other world, and then searches for her lost lover, Olenka seeks nothing, never crossing the boundaries of her domestic universe. In this respect she is much closer to Gogol's "old-fashioned landowners" or to the Manilovs in *Dead Souls* (this couple, we may recall, called each other *dushen 'ka)* than to the curious and venturous heroine of Apuleius's tale. Like Gogol's old-fashioned landowners, Olenka lives in a secluded world, physically and emotionally limited to her home territory. She seeks her happiness nowhere but in her own house, never leaving the place "where she had lived since childhood, and which was bequeathed to her in the will." Significantly, all Olenka's men come to live in her house: her first husband, Kukin, the veterinarian Smirnin and his son, Sashenka, are all her tenants; Pustovalov, Olenka's second husband, is her neighbor, but he also moves into Olenka's house after their marriage. Olenka has no contacts with the external world, contacts that would take her beyond her familial realm. Father, husbands, a lover, a boy whom she loves as her own son—all of them form one constellation of "relatives." Even Olenka's maiden name is Plemiannikova (from *plemiannik,* "nephew," that is, a person belonging to one *plemia,* "tribe").

The external world beyond her courtyard brings Olenka nothing but troubles. The description of Olenka's marital bliss is immediately followed by the scene in which Olenka receives a telegram informing her of Kukin's death. This news is preceded by "an ominous knock" on her garden gate, that is, by a transgression of the boundary line separating Olenka from the outside world: "late on Palm Sunday evening, an ominous knock suddenly was heard at the gate. Someone was banging at the door as though hammering on a barrel: bang! bang! bang! . . . 'Open up, I beg you,' said someone behind the gates in a deep, hollow voice. 'A telegram for you.'" This "ominous knock" brings to mind the man with a little hammer from Chekhov's story "Gooseberries." Chekhov was working on this story at approximately the same time as he was writing "The Darling." In "Gooseberries" Chekhov writes: "Behind the door of every contented, happy man there ought to be someone standing with a little hammer, who would keep reminding him by his knocking that there are unhappy people and that happy as he himself may be, life will sooner or later show him its claws. Disaster will strike—sickness, poverty, losses—and nobody will see him or listen to him, just as now he neither sees nor listens to others."

At the very end of "The Darling," just when Olenka is happy again, she is again reminded of the external world by "a loud knock" on the gate:

Suddenly a loud knock was heard at the gate. Olenka wakes up and is breathless from fear. Her heart is pounding. Half a minute later, there is another knock.

"A telegram from Kharkov," she thinks, beginning to tremble all over. "Sasha's mother wants him in Kharkov. Oh, goodness me!"

This time the alarm is a false one, but the knock on the gate is a warning. It is obvious that Olenka's last love, too, will abandon her.

The interpretation of the character of the "darling" as Psyche is based on emphasizing only one characteristic of Olenka—her capacity for love— the characteristic that Tolstoy praises so much in his essay. This selfless aspect of Olenka's love makes Tolstoy declare that Chekhov's heroine is an "example of what woman can be in order to be happy herself and to make those happy with whom her fate is united." Tolstoy goes on to develop his thought: "What would become of the world, what would become of us men if women had not that faculty and did not exercise it? Without women doctors, women telegraphists, women lawyers and scientists and authoresses, *we* might get on, but without mothers, helpers, friends, comforters, who love in man all that is best in him—without such women it would be hard to live in the world."

The ideal of femininity Tolstoy puts forth in his essay is clearly what femininity is for men, or more precisely what it is for Tolstoy; it is defined as "complete devotion to the beloved," literally, "the complete giving up of self to the one you love" *(polnoe otdanie sebia tomu, kogo liubish').* For Tolstoy the ideal of femininity is, in fact, the annihilation of woman's individuality and of her existence as separate from that of man. As opposed to Tolstoy, Chekhov questions this ideal and points to the ultimate danger of Olenka's

"complete giving up" to those she loves. The self-abnegating nature of Olenka's love is epitomized in the scene when the "darling" follows the boy down the street to school:

"Sashenka, dear," she calls after him.

He looks back, and she stuffs a date or a caramel candy into his palm. When they turn into the street near the grammar school, he feels ashamed that a tall, stout woman is following him, so he turns around and says:

"Go home, Aunty. I'll make my own way now."

Olenka gives Sasha something—a date or a caramel—he does not need. Moreover, the boy wants to "make [his] own way" and perceives Olenka's complete devotion as an assault on his autonomy.

The nature of Olenka's love and character is far more reminiscent of another mythological figure than of Psyche. This is the Greek nymph Echo. In Ovid's account of the myth in his *Metamorphoses,* Juno becomes angry with the nymph Echo for distracting her with chatter, while the rest of the nymphs run off to Jupiter. As punishment, Juno deprives Echo of the ability to initiate discourse, enabling her only to repeat the last syllables of words uttered in her presence. Thus, upon falling in love with Narcissus, she is forced to use his words even for her own declaration of love, as she has no words of her own. When she seeks to embrace Narcissus, he pulls away, saying: "I'll die before I yield to you." She then merely repeats the last part of his sentence: "I yield to you." She offers him what he does not need—herself. Her love is rejected, and Echo runs off into the woods and, finally, into rocky caves. In these hollow spaces she withers away with longing for Narcissus, first shrinking to a skeleton and then to only a voice. With no sounds to reverberate, this voice is not heard, and Echo practically ceases to exist; she is reborn, however, each time someone speaks words to echo.

Olenka mirrors the archetypal image of Echo. Like Echo who returns only fragments of speech, Olenka echoes the world around her, but she creates a reduced version of it. People, names, objects, feelings—everything is small and described in diminutive terms: Olenka, Vanichka, Vasichka, Volodichka, Sashenka, little cat *(koshechka),* little window *(okoshko).* Olenka even uses adjectives in diminutive form: *slavnen'kii, khoroshen'kii, umnen'kii, belen'kii.* And of course, Olenka herself is not *dusha* but only *dushechka.* She is not Psyche but only a faint, diminutive echo of Psyche.

Not only does Olenka repeat her men's words, but her very existence is reduced to a form of repetition. Like Echo, she has nothing of her own; she completely lacks any sense of an autonomous self. When she embarks upon a new love, she merges completely with the object of that love. While married to Ivan Kukin, the manager of an open-air theater, she identifies herself as "Vanichka and I" and echoes all his views: "Whatever Kukin said about the theater and the actors she repeated." Exactly the same occurs with Pustovalov, the veterinarian Smirnin, and even the boy Sashenka. Olenka's lack of self is not limited, however, to her lack of opinions. Not only does she not have

her own conscious life, but she has no subconscious life of her own either. Even while asleep, she dreams about her husband's business: while married to Pustovalov, the manager of the local lumberyard, she has visions of timber, planks, and boards in her dreams.

Olenka's story, like Echo's, follows a sequence of births and deaths. Olenka is reborn each time she has the opportunity to merge her life with someone else's and to repeat someone else's "word." And Olenka dies an intellectual and spiritual death whenever she is deprived of that opportunity, losing all capacity for judgment and opinion. Like Echo, who shrivels up in the rocky caves after being spurned by Narcissus, Olenka withers away in her empty courtyard when her loves die or leave her: "Now she really was alone . . . She got thinner; she lost her looks. And the passersby in the street would no longer look at her, as they used to before, and would no longer smile at her . . . She would gaze blankly at her empty yard. She would think of nothing. She would want nothing. And afterward, when night came, she would go to bed and would dream of her empty yard. She would eat and drink as if against her will."

By contrast, in those moments when Olenka is full of love, she physically fills out as well: "Looking at her full *[polnye]* rosy cheeks, her soft white neck with a dark mole on it . . . men thought, 'Yes, you'll do!'" After Olenka's marriage to Kukin, her fullness *(polnota)* is stressed again: "He feasted his eyes on that neck and those plump *[polnye],* healthy shoulders." During this marriage, the narrator notes, "Olenka grew fuller *[polnela]* and beamed with happiness." And when Olenka finds her last love in Sashenka, she is described again as "a tall, stout *[polnaia]* woman."

The opposition full-thin *(polnyi-khudoi)* is further developed in the story into the opposition full-empty *(polnyi-pustoi).* In "The Darling," emptiness and thinness are observed to accompany the periods of Olenka's spiritual emptiness and solitude: "When she was with Kukin and Pustovalov, and later with the veterinary surgeon, Olenka could explain everything, and she would give her opinion on any possible subject, but now her mind and her heart were as empty as her yard." Love for the little boy brings Olenka back to life, once again inspiring her with opinions "after so many years of silence and emptiness *[pustoty]* in her thoughts."

Yet Olenka's fullness turns out to be ambiguous. When Smirnin reappears, bringing his son with him, Olenka's empty courtyard, a metaphor for her soul, is filled with dust: "On a hot July day, toward the evening, when the town herd of cattle was being driven along the street and the whole yard was filled *[napolnilsia]* with dust clouds, someone suddenly knocked at the gate." These dust clouds will inevitably dissipate, though, and the courtyard will become empty again. Likewise Olenka's fullness is always temporary. It is, in fact, itself a cloud of dust. She is doomed to stay forever empty in her empty yard, waiting for someone to come and to give her fullness of being, if only for a brief moment. Such is the fate of the Greek nymph Echo, hiding in hollow caves and waiting for those she can echo in order to become Echo, that is, in order to exist at all.

Given the typological similarity between the Darling and Echo, one can understand why Chekhov's story generated such contradictory responses from its readers. For the myth

of Echo itself engendered different and often contradictory interpretations, in part because, in addition to the canonical and better-known tale of Echo and Narcissus discussed above, there exists a distinctly different version of the myth—the tale of Echo and Pan. In this tale, recounted in Longus' s *Daphnis and Chloe,* Echo is a wood nymph and an excellent musician. She is a virgin who avoids the company of all males. Pan becomes angry with her because she rejects his advances and because he envies her musical skills. He therefore takes revenge on her by sending shepherds to rip her body apart. The pieces of Echo's body are then flung all across the earth, but they still sing and imitate all sounds as the nymph did before. "Pan himself they imitate too when he plays on the pipe," says Longus in his account of the myth.

Whereas the myth of Echo and Narcissus centers on Echo's reverberative sounds and repetitive language, the fable of Echo and Pan emphasizes the musical and, therefore, creative aspect of Echo. Hence two strands of interpretation—one positive and one negative—derive from the two conceptualizations of this figure. As John Hollander points out in his book *The Figure of Echo,* "in general it is in the milieu of Pan that Echo becomes a credential voice, associated with truth." It is this tradition, then, that led to the adoption of Echo as the symbol of poetry itself. By contrast, the negative readings of Echo arise from Echo's hollowness and repetitiveness, the qualities associated with the other Echo, the spurned lover of Narcissus. Thus Hollander concludes, "Pan's Echo is lyric, Narcissus' is satiric."

The ambiguity of Olenka's character and the differences among its interpreters lie precisely in that Olenka can be seen as both a satiric and a poetic character. The story, indeed, contains both lyrical and satiric overtones. As one Chekhov scholar has noted, at the end of the story the narrator's tone shifts from the satiric to the lyrical, as, for example, in the following passage: "For this little boy, to whom she was not related in any way, for the dimples in his cheeks, for his school cap, she would have given her whole life; she would have given it gladly and with tears of tenderness. Why? Who can tell why?" Here the narrator's irony gives way to lyrical pathos.

Tolstoy, indeed, perceives Olenka poetically. It is no coincidence that in his defense of the Darling, Tolstoy alluded to "the god of poetry": Chekhov "wanted to ridicule this woman, but the God of poetry took over, and he portrayed her charm and self-sacrifice"; Chekhov, "like Balaam, intended to curse, but the God of poetry forbade him to do so and commanded him to bless." To stress the poetic element of the story, Tolstoy repeatedly refers to Chekhov as a poet. In his afterword to "The Darling" the word *poet* is used five times. In this essay Tolstoy juxtaposes the comic and the poetic in the story. He insists that even though there are many comic elements in "The Darling" and many characters are indeed ridiculous, the heroine herself is not laughable: "Kukin's name is ridiculous, and so even is his illness and the telegram announcing his death. The timber dealer with his sedateness is ridiculous, and the veterinary surgeon and the boy are ridiculous; but the soul of Darling, with her capacity for devoting herself with her whole being to the one she loves, is not ridiculous but wonderful and holy." Thus, the very qualities of Olenka that lend themselves to satire—her dependence, her lack of self—Tolstoy interprets poetically. But while poeticizing the heroine, Tolstoy disrupts Chekhov's text, as Pan did the body of Echo. Fascinated with "The Darling," Tolstoy

nevertheless does violence to the text: desiring to possess it, he appropriates "The Darling" and reproduces it in his own *Krug chteniia.* But he eliminates some passages from Chekhov's text; that is to say, he "tears it to pieces." Pan's desire leads to destruction. Incidentally, Tolstoy concludes his afterword to "The Darling" with a story that reveals the connection between desire and destruction: "At the other end of the riding school a lady was learning to ride. I thought of how to avoid incommoding that lady and began looking at her. And looking at her, I began involuntarily to draw nearer and nearer to her, and although she, noticing the danger, hastened to get out of the way, I rode against her and upset her; that is to say, I did exactly the opposite of what I wished to do, simply because I had concentrated my attention upon her." Tolstoy uses this anecdote to illustrate his point that the outcome of Chekhov's story contradicts its intent: "The same thing has happened with Chekhov but in an inverse sense." Best of all, however, this anecdote illustrates Tolstoy's own attitude toward "The Darling": he "concentrated his attention upon her," and as a result he "upset her."

If Tolstoy in his reading of "The Darling" follows the tradition associated with Pan's version of the Echo myth, then satire-oriented readers, such as Gorky, deny the heroine any poetry, scorning her as did Narcissus. They view Olenka as the embodiment of the negative woman-Echo type, emphasizing her vacuity and dependence. I suggest that both types of readings are valid and can be explained by the story's archetypal connections to the same complex myth, that of Echo. In both myths Echo is punished for her creativity either as a storyteller or as a musician, and her autonomy is not tolerated. In both cases Echo's physical being is ultimately destroyed either as a consequence of Narcissus's scorn or as a result of Pan's desire. It is the tale of Echo and Narcissus, however, that most clearly conveys the dynamics between scorn, desire, and destruction associated with the myth of Echo. As Julia Kristeva mentions in her essay on Narcissus, "Narcissus encounters a prefiguration of his doubling in a watery reflection in the person of the nymph Echo." Indeed the figure of Echo in this tale is not limited to the role of a rejected lover and points to the ambiguous nature of Narcissus's attitude toward his own mirror image: Narcissus rejects an acoustic reflection of himself (Echo, or a reflected sound) but falls in love with his visual reflection (reflected light). As the desire for one's reflection leads to destruction, Narcissus's rejection of Echo could be interpreted as an attempt at self-preservation. Hence, we see the inherent tension of Narcissus' s love for himself: the reflection of self is both spurned and desired. The way Chekhov portrays the Darling in his story suggests the same tension between desire and scorn of one's own mirror image that is revealed in the myth of Echo. What Tolstoy thought to be a disparity between the outcome of the story and its intent is, in fact, equally present in "The Darling": the author both "blesses" the heroine and "curses" her. He is both attracted to a woman Echo and scorns her, as he sees the inherent danger of Echo's love and of the love for Echo.

Source: Svetlana Evdokimova, "'The Darling': Femininity Scorned and Desired," in *Reading Chekhov's Text,* edited by Robert Louis Jackson, Northwestern University Press, 2001, pp. 189-97.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Poggioli examines Chekhov's revision of the "merry widow" pattern in "The Darling."

Chekhov's early stories are of some interest to the critic only inasmuch as they anticipate the accomplished master, destined to mature a few years later. Otherwise, their importance is slight, although it would be wrong to despise pieces that are still able to amuse and intrigue the reader. They were written in the early eighties, or about seventy years ago; and it is rare for any kind of writing, especially at the popular level, to survive with any effectiveness for such a long interval. This is even truer when one considers that the writing in question was never taken too seriously by the author himself. Both the critic and the reader should never forget that the young Chekhov wrote to entertain, and to add a little to his own income in the bargain.

The periodicals for which Chekhov wrote his early tales wanted to give their public cheap and easy laughter, rather than rare and thoughtful humor, and Chekhov the budding writer readily complied with his editors' demands. He did so without indulging in vulgarity or coarseness; yet at that stage of his career he dealt only with stock situations, to which he gave, half spontaneously and half mechanically, stock responses. In brief, what distinguishes Chekhov's literary beginnings from his mature work is their relative lack of quality—the banality of the stuff, the uncouthness of the style, and the conventionality of the outlook. The ideal of the early Chekhov is the commonplace; the muse of his youth is the muse of commonness. Yet shortly afterwards he was able to grow into a genuine and original writer, and to raise his own inspiration, even within an odd and comical framework, to a level of "high seriousness." Many critics and readers have seen in Chekhov the dramatist a more accomplished artist than in Chekhov the storyteller, and, even without sharing such an opinion, one can easily acknowledge that sense of redemption that this somber story fails to find even in death. This is particularly true of the more important of the two stories discussed below.

In Chekhov's canon there are two tales, written at different times, which, starting from the opposite poles of pathos and irony, and following divergent paths, end by giving us parallel transfigurations, in realistic terms, of the same myth. This myth is the ancient story of Psyche, which remained lively and meaningful for the artists and writers of so many centuries, but which our commercial culture has mummified into the everlasting indignity of a softdrink ad. Chekhov used the Psyche legend not openly, but obliquely, as a furtive hint that even in the profane prose of life there may lie hidden poetry's sacred spark. The grimness or the grayness of our daily lot seems to dominate both of these tales, but the sudden appearance of Psyche redeems their somber or dull view of life with a vivid, and not too unreal, flash. The first tale discloses the vision within the span of a simple image; and the second, of a mere name. That image and that name reduce in their turn the whole legend to a single symbol, hiding, rather than revealing, the myth it transcribes in quasi-hieroglyphic form. The symbol itself, eclipsed by the cloud of the letter, buried under the matter-of-factness of a naturalistic report, has

escaped all scrutiny, thus making even less visible the presence of the myth it suggests and for which it stands. Yet in the end the beauty and poetry of the ancient legend triumph over all obtuseness and absurdity, over the obscurity of life and the disguise of art; and Psyche's face shines forth again, in one case through tragedy's, and in the other, through comedy's, mask. It is mainly such a passing and fleeting allusion to Psyche and her story that, beyond all appearance, makes these two tales what they really are; yet a detailed examination of their plainest and lowest level of meaning is required to reinterpret them within the higher, and deeper, frame of reference of both symbol and myth.

The first of these two tales is "Anyuta," which was written in 1886. The story seems to have been conceived in a mixed mood, half pathetic, half morbid; and it lies halfway, so to speak, between Mürger' s *Scènes de la Vie de Bohême* and the most sordid tales of the early Dostoevski. At least at first sight, its protagonists impress us as the conventional seamstress and the conventional student, sharing their poverty and love in the same barely furnished room. Yet, from the very beginning, we surprise them in a highly unconventional situation. The student is preparing himself for one of the examinations he is about to take at the Medical School. In order to get his anatomy straight, he asks Anyuta to take her blouse off, and starts counting her ribs. A while later, a friend drops in. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts, he has come to take Anyuta away, since he needs a model, and wants her to pose for a painting he is working on. Anyuta retires to dress, and in the meanwhile the visitor reproaches his host for his slovenly life. When left alone, the medical student decides that he and the seamstress must part; he tells Anyuta of his decision as soon as she comes back from her sitting, bringing in the sugar she has just bought for the tea of her penniless friend.

Here Chekhov's contrapuntal technique acts, so to speak, negatively: the words and thoughts of the student fail to break the inarticulate silence of the girl. She is the only mute and passive figure of the story, acting with the resigned dumbness of a sacrificial lamb. The author adds his own silence to the silence of the heroine, pretending to look on her from the outside, which is exactly what the other two characters do. Thus all the references to Anyuta, while remaining external and objective, become highly symbolic. This kind of implied, and, so to speak, inert, symbolism grows more and more important in the creations of the late Chekhov. Here it finds expression not only in Anyuta's silence, but also in the parallel indifference of the two students, both of whom treat the seamstress, even if for different ends, as if she were merely an anatomical specimen.

In this story, the obvious love angle is completely overlooked. With unobtrusive but penetrating irony, Chekhov makes Anuyta' s body serve the higher purposes of art and science. In reality, she serves, with both her body and soul, the blind selfishness of two human beings who consider her an inferior creature, while she is morally far superior to them. As for the ribs, says the medical student, "they are like the keys of a piano: one must study them in the skeleton and in the living body." Yet in reality he treats her as if she were a corpse on a slab. The art student is even more matter-of-fact: he handles Anyuta as if she were something neither living nor dead, but only a thing, a piece of property of so little value that it is better to borrow than to own it. "Do me a favor," he asks his friend, "lend me your young lady for just a couple of hours! I am painting a

picture, you see, and I can't get on without a model." He asks for her as he would ask for a plate of fruit, to be discarded or returned, because he needs it to paint, not to eat. Yet the supreme irony of the story is that the young artist wants to produce something far nobler than a mere study. He is not one of those naïve painters who are satisfied with representing either a nude or a still life. He aims far higher, as we learn from the answer he gives to his friend's question about the theme of the painting he is working on: "Psyche; it's a fine subject."

Neither the students nor, for that matter, Anyuta, will ever realize that the only Psyche of the story is she herself. Yet this is the feeling conveyed to the reader by the tale's closing vision, when the abandoned seamstress returns noiselessly to the corner window of her lonely room, like a Cinderella without beauty, without a prince, and without a magic wand. While treating the *scène de vie de bohême* as if it were a "slice of life," Chekhov succeeds in changing the story into a tragic fable without words. And he does so by projecting on the shabby walls of a bohemian garret, beyond the falsity of a painted image which remains unseen, the true likeness of poor Psyche of old, as she was when she lost her lover, and was left like an orphan alone in the darkness of this world.

The second tale is "The Darling," which Chekhov wrote more than ten years later, in 1899, at the decline of his years, when his art was gradually changing the tragicomedy of life into something far too noble for pity, and far too pure for contempt. The change is particularly evident in this story, of which one could say, to paraphrase Milton's words, "nothing is here for tears." Nothing is here for laughter either, because "The Darling" ends by "saying yea" to life, by judging it "well and fair." Yet if the critic will go back to the text, so as to recapture the impression of his first reading, he will undoubtedly conclude that the final esthetic outcome transcends the tale's original intent. And he will do so even more confidently if he learns that his conclusion is supported by the authority of Leo Tolstoy, who was a great admirer of this story, as well as of Chekhov in general.

The protagonist, Olenka, is "a gentle, softhearted, compassionate girl, with mild, tender eyes, and very good health." Everyone feels captivated by her good nature, and exclaims: "You darling!" at the sight of her pleasant looks. She lives in her father's house, and watches from her back porch the tenant living in a lodge they rent. The tenant, whose name is Ivan Kukin, is thin and no longer young; he manages an open-air theater, and complains constantly about the rain which ruins his business, and about the public which fails to appreciate his shows. By listening to his misfortunes, the "darling" falls in love with him. She marries Kukin, works in his office, and accepts all his views as her own, repeating all he has to say about the theatrical arts. Despite her total identification with her husband, Olenka grows stouter and pinker, while Kukin grows thinner and paler. After a year has passed, he goes to Moscow on business, and within a few days Olenka receives a misspelled telegram informing her of Kukin's sudden death.

The poor widow loses all interest in life, but after a three month interval she meets at mass Vasili Pustovalov, a dignified gentleman working at a timber merchant's. In a day

or two Pustovalov proposes, and Olenka marries again. The "darling" helps her new husband in the shop, and absorbs herself in the timber trade as fully as she had previously done in the theater world. For six years, her husband's ideas become her ideas, but her mind returns to emptiness as soon as her second husband follows the first into the grave. Yet within half a year she finds happiness anew, this time with an army veterinary surgeon, by the name of Vladimir Smirnin, now renting her lodge. Smirnin is married and has a son, but lives separated from his wife and child. Everyone realizes what has happened as soon as Olenka goes around discussing sanitary questions and the dangers of animal epidemics. "It was evident," as Chekhov says, "that she could not live a year without an attachment," and yet nobody thinks ill of the "darling" for this.

But Smirnin is suddenly transferred to a distant place, and Olenka is left alone again. Time passes, and she becomes indifferent, sad, and old: "what is worst of all . . . she had no opinion of any sort." Like all old lonely women, she has a cat, but does not care for her pet. Suddenly her solitude is broken again: Smirnin, looking older and wearing a civilian suit, knocks again at her door. He has left the service and has come back with his family, to start life anew. Olenka yields her house to the newcomers, and retires to the lodge. With this change of perspective, her life seems to take a new turn. And this time she falls in love with the little Sasha, who is ten years old. Soon enough, the father starts working outside, and the mother departs to live elsewhere. Thus Olenka mothers the boy, who calls her auntie, and tells her about his studies, and his school experiences. Now the "darling" goes around discussing teachers and lessons, home assignments and class work. And everybody understands that there is another man in her house and in her life, even if this time he is another woman's child, whom she loves like the mother she was born to be.

This résumé fails to do justice to the story, and to point out the internal contradiction already alluded to. Tolstoy's commentary fulfills, however, both tasks almost perfectly. In the opening of the critique of this piece, which he collected in *Readings for Every Day of the Year,* Tolstoy recalls the biblical story of Balaam (Numbers, 22-24). The King of the Moabites ordered him to curse the people of Israel, and Balaam wanted to comply with this command. But while climbing the mountain, he was warned by an angel, who at first was invisible to him, while being visible to his ass. So, when he reached the altar at the top, Balaam, instead of cursing the Jews, blessed them. "This," Tolstoy concludes, "is just what happened with the true poet and artist Chekhov when he wrote his charming story, 'The Darling.'" Tolstoy then proceeds to develop his point:

The author evidently wanted to laugh at this pitiful creature—as he judged her with his intellect, not with his heart—this "Darling," who, after sharing Kukin's troubles about his theater, and then immersing herself in the interests of the timber business, under the influence of the veterinary surgeon considers the struggle against bovine tuberculosis to be the most important matter in the world, and is finally absorbed in questions of grammar and the interests of the little schoolboy in the big cap. Kukin's name is ridiculous, and so even is his illness and the telegram announcing his death. The timber dealer with his sedateness is ridiculous; but the soul of "Darling," with her capacity for

devoting herself with her whole being to the one she loves, is not ridiculous but wonderful and holy.

Nothing could be more exact, or better said: yet one may wonder whether Tolstoy is equally right in identifying the motive that had led the author of "The Darling" to take the pen. "When Chekhov began to write that story," says Tolstoy, "he wanted to show what woman ought not to be." In short, what Chekhov meant to do was to reassert his belief in the ideal of woman's emancipation, in her right and duty to have a mind and a soul of her own. While acknowledging the artistic miracle which had turned a satirical vignette into a noble human image, Tolstoy seems to enjoy as a good joke the implication that the author had to throw his beliefs overboard in the process. Being strongly adverse to the cause of woman's emancipation, Tolstoy speaks here *pro domo sua,* but the reader has no compelling reason to prefer his antifeminism to Chekhov's feminism. Tolstoy has an axe to grind, and his guess is too shrewd. One could venture to say that Chekhov sat down to write "The Darling" with neither polemical intentions nor ideological pretensions: what he wanted to do was perhaps to exploit again at the lowest level a commonplace type and a stock comic situation, which, however unexpectedly, develops into a vision of beauty and truth. If D. S. Mirsky is right in claiming that each Chekhov story follows a curve, then there is no tale where the curve of his art better overshoots its mark.

What must have attracted Chekhov was the idea of rewriting a haft pathetic, half mocking version of the "merry widow" motif: of portraying in his own inimitable way the conventional character of the woman ready and willing to marry a new husband as soon as she has buried the preceding one. That such was the case may still be proved through many eloquent clues. No reader of "The Darling" will fail to notice that Olenka calls her successive mates with almost identical nicknames: Vanichka the first, Vassichka the second, and Volodichka the third. These familiar diminutives, although respectively deriving from such different names as Ivan, Vasili, and Vladimir, sound as if they were practically interchangeable, as if to suggest that the three men are interchangeable too.

This runs true to type, since in the life scheme of the eternal, and eternally remarrying, widow, nothing really changes, while everything recurs: the bridal veil alternates regularly with the veil of mourning, and both may be worn in the same church. It is from this scheme that Chekhov derives the idea of the successive adoption, on Olenka's part, of the opinions and views of each one of her three men, and this detail is another proof that the story was originally conceived on the merry widow motif. Yet, if we look deeper, we realize that a merry widow does not look for happiness beyond wedded bliss: that she asks for no less than a ring, while offering nothing more than her hand. But Olenka gives and takes other, very different things. She receives her husbands' opinions, and makes them her own, while returning something far more solid and valuable in exchange. And when she loses the person she loves, she has no more use for his views, or for any views at all.

This cracks the merry widow pattern, which begins to break when she joins her third mate, who is a married man, without a wedding ceremony or the blessing of the Church. And the pattern visibly crumbles at the end, when Olenka finds her fourth and last love

not in a man, but in a child, who is the son of her last friend. "Of her former attachments," says Chekhov, "not one had been so deep." Now we finally know Olenka for what she really is, and we better appraise in retrospect some of the story's earliest, unconscious hints. Now, for instance, we understand better her girlish infatuations for such unlikely objects as her father, her aunt, or her teacher of French. For her, almost any kind of person or any kind of love can do equally well, and it is because of this, not because of any old-maidish strain, that she fails to reduce love to sex alone.

Chekhov explains this better than we could, at that very point of the tale when the lonely Olenka is about to find her more lasting attachment: "She wanted a love that would absorb her whole being, and whole soul and reason—that could give her ideas and an object in life, and would warm her old blood." For all this one could never say of Olenka, as of Madame B ovary, that she is in love with love: she cares only for living beings like herself, as shown by the ease with which she forgets all her husbands after their deaths. Her brain is never haunted by dreams or ghosts, and this is why it is either empty, or full of other people's thoughts. This does not mean that the "Darling" is a parrot or a monkey in woman's dress, although it is almost certain that Chekhov conceived her initially in such a form. She is more like the ass of Balaam, who sees the angel his master is unable to see. Olenka is poor in spirit and pure in heart, and this is why life curses her three times, only to bless her forever, at the end.

Tolstoy is right when he reminds us that, unlike Olenka, her three men and even her foster-child are slightly ridiculous characters, and one must add that they remain unchangingly so from whatever standpoint we may look. The reminder is necessary: after all, the point of the story is that love is a grace proceeding from the lover's fullness of heart, not from the beloved's attractive qualities or high deserts. In the light of this, the parallel with Balaam's ass must be qualified by saying that Olenka sees angels where others see only men. Thus the double message of the story is that love is a matter of both blindness and insight.

While the whole story seems to emphasize Olenka's "insight," her "blindness" is intimated by a single hint, hidden, of all places, in the title itself. Since the latter is practically untranslatable, the foreign reader cannot help missing the hint. The "Darling" of the English translators is the Russian idiom *Dushechka,* meaning literally "little soul," and used colloquially as a term of endearment, a tribute of personal sympathy, a familiar and good-natured compliment. Chekhov never pays the compliment himself, except by indirection or implication: he merely repeats it again and again, in constant quotations from other people's direct speech. Thus the artist acts as an echo, reiterating that word as if it were a choral refrain, a suggestive *leitmotiv.* Yet, as we already know, everybody addresses Olenka in that way only when she is contented and happy, having someone to love and care for. As soon as she is left without a person on whom to pour the tenderness flowing from her heart, everybody ceases calling her Dushechka, as if she had lost her soul, as if she were no longer a soul.

Thus, even though intermittently used, that term becomes, so to say, Olenka's second name: and the reader finally finds it more right and true than the first. What one witnesses is a sort of transfiguration, both symbolic and literal: by changing into

Dushechka, Olenka ends by personifying the very idea of the soul. We are suddenly faced by an allegory and a metamorphosis, turning the story into a fable, which, like all fables, partakes of the nature of myth. With startling awareness, we now realize that Dushechka, after all, is one of the Russian equivalents of the Greek Psyche, and that what Chekhov has written could be but a reinterpretation of the ancient legend about the girl who was named after the word meaning "soul."

The legend, which Apuleius first recorded for us, tells how the youthful Psyche became the loving wife of a great god, who was Eros himself. Eros never showed her his face or person in the daylight; yet Psyche was happy as long as she could take care of her little house in the daytime, and share in night's darkness the bed and love of a husband she could neither know nor see. What the legend means to say is that love is blind, and must remain so, whether the loved one is mortal or an immortal creature. This is the truth which the Greek Psyche had to learn, while the Russian Dushechka seems to have known it, though unconsciously, all the time.

That Chekhov must have thought of this legend while writing "The Darling" may be proved by the fact that the name or word Dushechka is but a more popular variant of the literary *Dushenka,* after which Bogdanovich, a minor Russian poet of the eighteenth century, entitled his own imitation of La Fontaine's *Psyché,* which, in its turn, is a rather frivolous version of the same old myth. This slight difference in the endings of what is practically the same noun may have greater significance than we think. Both endings are diminutive suffixes; but while in Bogdanovich's "-enka" there is a connotation of benevolent sympathy, in Chekhov's "-echka" there is an insinuation of pettiness, and a nuance of indulgent scorn. This obviously means that Chekhov's serious tale is as distant from Bogdanovich's light poem as from the original legend itself: the distance may be considered so great as to preclude any relationship. We realize this, and we realize as well that our proof that such a relationship exists may be considered a verbal coincidence and nothing more. In reply to this objection, we could observe that Chekhov testified elsewhere about his knowledge of the legend itself. As we already know, he did so in "Anyuta," by simply stating through the mouth of his student-painter that Psyche is "a fine subject."

The student-painter is right, even if he is fully unconscious of the irony in what he says. Aware as he was of the irony he himself had put in those words, Chekhov must have been equally aware of their truth. Yes, Psyche is a fine subject, even when the artist deals with it so freely as to completely change its background and situation, lowering its fabulous vision to the level of a bourgeois and provincial experience, and transcribing its poetic magic into the plain images and the flat language of modern realism. This does not imply that the tale is deprived of wonder: there is no greater wonder than to make luminous and holy the inner and outer darkness in which we live, even against our will. And there is no greater miracle than to have changed into a new Psyche, with no other sorcery but that of a single word, this heroine of the commonplace, this thrice-married little woman, neither clever nor beautiful, and no longer young.

D. H. Lawrence recommends that we never trust the writer, but only the tale. This is what one should do even with Chekhov, although he is one of the most trustworthy of

modern writers, precisely because he builds on a broad moral structure, which compensates for the restrictions of his chosen literary forms. If this is true, then one must reject Leo Shestov's statement that Chekhov's is a creation *ex nihilo,* always returning to the nothingness from which it sprang forth. It would be more proper to define it a creation *ex parvo,* producing from humble beginnings a somber and yet beautiful world.

Source: Renato Poggioli, " Storytelling in a Double Key," in *The Phoenix and the Spider,* Harvard University Press, 1997, pp. 121-30.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay excerpt, Peterson examines the "obsession with language and with the power that language can bring to its possessor" in "The Darling."

On the surface "The Darling" is a comic story. Chekhov himself recognized it as such; moreover, the principles of the comic mode of expression are evident in the story's obsession with language and with the power that language can bring to its possessor. Other links to Chekhov's early comic stories include the static and theatrical beginning (reminiscent of stage directions), the circumstantial disruption (rain), allegorical names, and stereotypical characters. The heteroglossia of Chekhov's early stories is there, but it is more refined, approaching in its finesse the virtuosity of Dickens. "The Darling" is a *tour de force* of comic "hybrid" narration where several speech manners, several "languages" and belief systems are allowed to exist side by side. And, as in Chekhov's early comic stories, there is an emphatic distance between the implied author and his characters here. The author is a puppeteer whose control over his characters is total and unchallenged.

But the comic mode is not the only vehicle of meaning here. At a pivotal point in the story the author's attitude of amused dissociation is replaced by that of sympathy for his character. Now the comic mode becomes too circumscribed to convey the metamorphoses of Chekhov's heroine. The light garb of the comic story is abandoned as the narration shifts into a more complex mode, where the character is much less "flat," acquiring more facets to her individuality than before. Darling is the one who undergoes change while the males around her remain within the confines of their stereotypical characters. It is at this point that one, looking back, can discern the evolution of Darling through the stages of princess—woman—witch—vampire—the mythical Psyche—mother (in that order).

Darling—Olga Plemiannikova (her last name is linked to the Russian *plemiannik* (a nephew)—is a plump rosy-cheeked young girl whom everybody— men and women alike—adores and admires. She first marries a theater-manager Kukin (the association with a rude gesture—*kukish*—is obvious in the character's name) who brings happiness and purpose into her lethargic life. After marrying Kukin, Darling begins speaking in her husband's language— repeating his thoughts and ideas on the state of affairs in the theater, town, the world. Kukin dies unexpectedly, and Darling falls despondent. The major reason for her unhappiness is the lack of a coherent system of communication in her life—she has lost her language. However, soon after Kukin's death Darling marries again, and happily, a manager of a lumber warehouse, Pustovalov (another allegorical name with connotations of triviality and vacuousness). Once again, Darling is happy with her new husband and immediately adopts his language, system of values, and way of life. He dies too. Darling is again left adrift in life. Her next suitor is a veterinarian Smirnin ("the meek one") with whom she lives out of wedlock and whose ideas on stock raising, the care of animals, and on illness in general she adopts as avidly as she had assumed her former husbands' views on other issues. Smirnin leaves, but later returns with his son, Sasha, whom he eventually entrusts to Darling's care. Now it is the little

boy's thoughts on school, teachers and schoolmates that Darling takes for her own. The closure portrays the pain and joys of Darling's long-awaited and hitherto unfulfilled motherhood.

The title of the story reveals one of the governing principles of Darling's characterization—one of "diminution" of the woman. The soul (Russian *dusha)* is reduced in dimension here to the diminutive "little soul" (Russian *dushechka,* rendered "darling" in English). This principle is sustained virtually throughout the entire text, where *dushechka* (little soul) alternates with Olen'ka (little Olga) in descriptions of the main character. As will become obvious later in the discussion of the story, the eventual disruption in this pattern of characterization signals a change in the authorial attitude to Darling and a shift in the overall narrative mode.

Another important principle of characterization here is "scattering." What is deemed most attractive by those around Darling are the scattered elements of her beauty—her plumpness, roundness, her full neck and firm shoulders. Darling is dismembered by the text into delectable body parts evoking the pleasures of gazing, touching, of sexual satisfaction. "At the sight of her full pink cheeks, her soft white neck with a dark birthmark on it, and the kind artless smile that came into her face when she listened to anything pleasant, men said to themselves, "Yes, not half bad," and smiled too . . ." When Kukin "had a good look at her neck and her plump firm shoulders, he struck his hand together, and exclaimed, "Darling!"

"She was always enamored of someone and could not live otherwise," says Chekhov. Before Kukin she loved her father, her aunts and her French teacher. She is brimming with love, her body is ample; but, paradoxically, she is hollow too: without the other she has neither the means of communication (language) nor of procreation (children).

When male language is not there, when identification through another is impossible, Darling's feelings and thoughts are animalistic or ritualistic. Before marriage Darling appears on the porch of her house—mute—luxuriating in the anticipation of the approaching evening. After Kukin's death she compares herself to a hen without a cock. The death of her male is experienced by Darling as an abandonment—but expressed in the form of a ritual lament, another ready-made language designed for a particular event in life.

The languages provided to Darling by her husbands/lovers/authors/potential fathers of her potential children are adopted and consumed. The absorption of another's language is shown by means of direct quotes from Darling's husbands in her own speech. The mechanism of the absorption of another through the acquisition of another's language is underscored by the "symbiotic" construction "my s Vanechkoi" (Vania and I) used by Darling when speaking about her first husband and "my s Vasechkoi" (Vasia and I) when refering to her second. In the Russian construction both persons are subsumed in one first person Plural pronoun *my* (we). The importance of this detail is brought forth by the narrator when he notes that Darling's other nickname was "my s Vanechkoi" (Vania and I).

The process of absorption of another through the adoption of his language is supported here on the level of the plot as well. Her own father, whom she had loved before, languishes in the attic—sick and mute—to die sometime in the middle of the story. Kukin gets thinner and yellower, while Darling gets plumper and lovelier. Pustovalov's demise is presented as accidental, however the immediate cause of death is the tea brewed by Darling at the warehouse.

This seemingly harmless creature is transformed into a witch—her luscious neck a lure, the skillfully woven net into which unsuspecting males are only too eager to fly. Without the source, without the love "that would take possession of her whole being, her soul, her mind, that would give her ideas, a purpose in life, that would warm her aging blood," she withers away. The black birthmark on the white neck is a barely perceptable flaw, an illusion, or a fantasy, of an earlier, rapacious assault on this wholeness. Darling's black cat—her constant companion—is another sign that she is now a witch. So are the weekly visits she and Pustovalov pay to the bathhouse, the traditional locus of all prophecy, sorcery, and magical cures in Russian folklore.

The witch here is hidden, concealed under the guise of the diminutive and seemingly innocuous "little soul." But she is no less dangerous to her unsuspecting victims than the terrifying witch of Russian folklore. The problem which had plagued the little characters of Chekhov in his early comic stories—that of acquiring the language-power — Darling the witch solves simply by consuming the male possessor of that language. The first part of the story portrays the woman as a zero (Darling's Christian name is Olga) which appropriates, and destroys, the male for the purpose of this woman's self-embodiment, identification. In Hélène Cixous' formulation of identification (through reading): "When I say "identification," I do not say "loss of self." I become, I inhabit, I enter. Inhabiting someone, at that moment I can feel myself traversed by that person's initiatives and actions." Darling needs to "inhabit" someone to be happy. She is the ultimate body-snatcher of Russian literature.

But out of a witch here now emerges the mother. Darling's metamorphosis changes the scope of the story and is the primary source of its ambiguity. Darling's quest now appears to be a quest for maternal fulfillment. Her passivity, her captivating (literally so) beauty, her adoption of the language of the male, as well as her implied witchcraft appear to be Darling's rites of passage into motherhood.

Darling is the mythical Psyche whose Eros is not any of her husbands, but the adopted child. "Sasha, small for his age (he was going on ten), chubby, with clear blue eyes and dimples in his cheeks." He is also blond and mischievous—a lovely Cupid of Classical and Baroque vintage (and from the garishly painted drawing rooms of the Russian gentry). In this story, as in Apuleius' "Psyche and Eros": "each physical conquest is a concrete marker of an increase in psychic range, a claim of consciousness to apprehend and use what was formerly forbidden and inaccessible." But, if, as a modern critic observes, in the myth, "the main representative vehicle is a female who represents not the "feminine" but the human," in Chekhov's story the myth of Psyche is interpreted to accommodate the culturally determined view that a woman's force—her *jouissance,* to use the term of French feminist criticism—should be channeled into motherhood.

Darling's *jouissance* is found in the child. "How she loves him! Not one of her former attachments was so deep; never had her soul surrendered itself so unreservedly, so disinterestedly and with such joy as now when her maternal instinct was increasingly asserting itself. For this little boy who was not her own, for the dimples in his cheeks, for his very cap, she would have laid down her life, would have laid it down with joy, with tears of tenderness. Why? But who knows why?"

But, of course, it is clear, why. Darling's quest is accomplished; she is finally able to find the mother in herself, to fill a void in the text (the story avoids any mention of Darling's mother). When she extracts what she needs—a child—she is pacified, and the text spares one of the authors of her languages, the veterinarian Smirnin. Now Darling's possessiveness is culturally permissible; now the adoption of another's language and complete surrender to another are no longer suspect, nor ridiculous; for her love and devotion have found a proper channel.

Now the woman is portrayed as a more ambivalent figure. The comic tone of the first part of the story is abandoned, the metamorphosis from witch into mother is signalled in the text by the word "soul" *(dusha)* used in place of "little soul" *(dushechka)* to describe Darlings feelings—("never had her *soul* surrendered itself so unreservedly. . ."). For the first time in Darling's life she is ready to give of herself rather than to take away. She gains stature—because the threat of abandonment is both imminent and accepted by Darling as the natural outcome of the mother—male child relationship.

Her position is even more complex because she is not Sasha's natural mother, but, ironically, a pretender for the role. The close of the story anticipates the future abandonment. Little Sasha's nightmare is a protest against his adoptive mother; it is a premonition of Sasha's future and inexorable flight from the terrifying force of the feminine. ..

How can Chekhov's portraits of women in these stories be reconciled with the popular belief that he was, above all, an "objective" writer? It is with this question in mind that Chekhov's women characters have been scrutinized and diligently categorized into "types." As a result, Chekhov's attitude to his female characters has been applauded by some and condemned by others. Surprisingly, however, the humble cultural origins of Chekhov's views (and his personal idiosyncrasies) have often been overlooked in attempts to mold the writer's rather contradictory posture toward women (both in his life and work) into something acceptable to his admirers.

The search for culturally appropriate languages shaping the destinies of many Chekhov's characters finds its source in the fluidity of social identity in late Tsarist Russia. And the path of his characters is profoundly affected by Chekhov's own experience. In a very direct way Chekhov's rise to prominence involved the overcoming of the old cultural models linked very closely—through his father—to the religious world of the peasant community. The adoption of new symbolic languages—the secular world of the medical student, as well as the world of the poor and then successful author—must have put an indelible stamp on Chekhov's consciousness. The chaos of new symbolic systems had to be organized into a new cultural pattern, integrated into a

revised system of values; all of which led Chekhov the doctor to adopt avidly the "language of objectivity" preached at Moscow University by his mentor, Professor Zakhar' in.

Undoubtedly, the forces shaping Chekhov's explication of the feminine are also rooted in his personal (culturally and historically encoded) experience. Chekhov's reaction to the controversy around "The Witch" and "The Darling" points to a certain psychological trait—a pattern of behavior— which appears to have played a large role in guiding Chekhov's attitude to women and men, both in work and life. Chekhov's response to the storm created by the stories was one of detached amusement. This detachment is significant, since here we find Chekhov constructing a barrier between his public and private persona and the "difficult" Darling and Witch— his literary daughters (the same kind of a barrier put up between the implied author and the women characters in the text of these stories.) As with Chekhov's own relationships with women, a pattern of "conquer and flee" is evident in the author's "hands off" stance when confronted by a heated critical and popular response to the stories.

Chekhov's view of women undoubtedly "shared the blindness and exploitative bent of the prevailing patriarchal culture." Of course, Chekhov was not and could not be a feminist writer, but neither was he a misogynist, as some critics have claimed; rather he was a male writer whose views had been largely formed by his culture and who in turn assisted in this culture's subsequent development. Chekhov's early portraits of women had to conform to the rigid prescriptions of the cheap humour magazines where his first stories were published. They reflected the reigning attitudes and tastes of his low-middle class male readers; attitudes and tastes both blind and exploitative. Moreover, stereotypical portrayal of women (and men) is inherent in the comic genre— Chekhov's chief mode of early writing. In later "straight" stories the stereotypes are fleshed out, made more psychologically round and believable. Nevertheless, the contours of those first, sharply delineated characters are still discernible in some portraits of Chekhov's women.

To be sure, Chekhov's views on women evolved over the course of his career, along with the views of his society. The positive heroines of mature Chekhov transcend the confines of his mythically helpless women. This, however, is not the case with "The Darling."

As I have shown earlier in this article, the ubiquitous, and unsuccessful, quest by his characters for a "proper" language, displayed by means of comic heteroglossia, is the core of Chekhov's early work. And with comic heteroglossia comes the need for stereotypical characterization and for dissociation by the implied author from his characters. What worked for Chekhov in his comic stories is made to work in "The Darling" as well. Here, as before, a "case history" revolves around the lack of language. And, as before, the implied author stands at a distance and employs an aggressive course of "treatment" for a social malaise. As in "The Witch" and "The Pink Stocking," it is the "treatment" of the feminine that most concerns the author here. And, as in those two stories, he tames the woman's menacing force by ridiculing it.

However, in contrast to Chekhov's approach in his earlier stories, in "The Darling" his heroine's potential for destruction is explored to the fullest degree. And only after the threat of femininity has been amply demonstrated is she allowed to find what for her is a new language. It is at this point that the distance between the author and his character begins to shrink and authorial control is undermined. Undermined, but only to a degree. The choice of a new language for Darling is Chekhov's, and this language is not new after all; it is the only one deemed proper for women by Chekhov's society—the language of motherhood. The character's possessiveness finds a "proper" channel; however, the situation is made more complex when Darling appears as a pathetic figure soliciting the reader's compassion, since her maternal instincts are shown to be expressed toward a child who is not her own.

Chekhov's Victorian society perceived the woman to be "on the continuous periphery of culture's clearing"—between nature and culture. In "The Darling" the doctor-author's intended objectivity surrenders to the overpowering beliefs of his patriarchal society. Here the good woman of Chekhov speaks the mother tongue; and in her role of adoptive mother she is both sublimated and "tamed." In the end, however, she resists this final manipulation by her author; she strikes back by revealing Chekhov's ambivalent stance toward women and by compromising her first, and most important, author's "objectivity."

Source: Nadya Peterson, "The Languages of 'Darling,'" in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies,* Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1990, pp. 203-09, 212-15.

Critical Essay #5

In the following essay, Bayuk defines Olenka within the stereotype of the "Submissive Wife," but praises Olenka's adaptability, maintaining she is a "True Survivor."

"The female nature is afflicted with natural defec-tiveness" stated Aristotle, the father of logic and truth; "women are deficient" proclaimed St. Thomas Aquinas; "frailty, thy name is woman" asserted Shakespeare; "woman was made to yield to man and put up with his injustice" proclaimed Jean Jacques Rousseau, the fighter for social justice, and Sigmund Freud summed it all up in a pseudo-scientific manner by ascribing to women an evergrowing envy of that particular male organ that we were deprived of by our Creator, either for the lack of virtues or the lack of material (only so much can be fashioned out of a rib, even a large one).

Who, may I ask, could doubt the words of these men of wisdom? Through the centuries, convinced of their natural superiority, men created, built, made laws, discovered distant lands, and created masterpieces at their writing desks, while their women prepared meals, scrubbed floors and bore and raised children. The more fortunate ones were permitted to "inspire and encourage" their men, edit their manuscripts, arrange their paint brushes or pose for them, thus becoming immortal by the sheer luck of being dimply, pleasant to look at, or enigmatic.

Today, a great deal of research is underway to prove that women too had their share in creating our artistic and literary world. Numerous articles have ecstatically enumerated women of fame in an effort to recognize their contributions. Moreover, in some tribes women are considered equal or even superior to men in certain aspects. However the questions: "How does *our* society (The Western World) see its women? How are they portrayed in world masterpieces?" and "In what way do we still contribute to maintain these images?" are yet to be answered. The sex-based stereotypes are yet to be established.

Seven female types seem to dominate both men's and women's viewpoint. They are: the Submissive Wife, the Mother Image, the Dominating Bitch, the Seductress, the Sex Object, the Old Maid, and the Liberated Woman. Although no female reader will view herself as belonging to one of the above listed types, she is able to recognize them and perhaps come up with an example or two.

Although an additional type is emerging today in sociological work, an androgynous being—from "andros" and "gene" meaning male and female— its literary portrayal is nil. The opponents of the concept state that the myth of androgyny was created by men seeking feminine elements to complement themselves thus reducing women to merely symbolic status. The proponents of androgyny view this new being as a complete person operating in a harmonious human community where sexual dichotomy is no longer controlling its mores. In such a society, the child's sex will no longer determine his personality, behavior or the choice of a profession.

It seems that a society like the U.S.S.R. should become the cradle of such beings, since its government as well as many communist writers, believe in living in the ultimate sociological utopia where all are equal and everything is just. But do we find any evidence of androgynous beings in the Soviet literature? No, we do not. The old stereotypes prevail except that their members are now permitted to toil side by side with men: The old Maid could certainly become a barber tending the wild locks of viril males. The Submissive Wife would do well for a promotion-conscious commissar if she is at the same time a well behaved female. The Dominating Bitch could be a successful leader of a political cell, carrying her tag of a bitch to the cell's meetings.

Why is it that we cannot throw off this veil of sexual prejudice? According to some psychologists, certain stereotypes are particularly strong because they are formed not by a single society but the entire experience of mankind; Jung called them archetypes that corresponded to the images existing in the Collective Unconsciousness. Women are still viewed today, and in the communist countries as well, mainly in their biological, primordial role, as the mysterious source of life. The expression "You came a long way, baby," means very little; it was created by Madison Avenue men to appease the female's ego and to lure her into purchasing their products.

The popularization of literary images has increased their influence, obliterating the distinction between literary characters and real people. Sigmund Freud has implanted the idea still very much alive according to which woman, in departing from her biological and socially passive roles, pays for her folly with neurosis, solitude, social rejection, and death. This idea was exploited by countless writers including the contemporary Soviet authors. Women in Solzhenitsyn's works for example, are drab, lonely and passive; in fact, they are not very important. In fact, if we were to delete all female characters from his works except for *Cancer Ward,* there would be no noticeable loss of content.

In *Cancer Ward,* although women play an important part in the plot, they are too stereotyped: the Mother Image is the old cleaning woman; the Sex Object is the young nurse; the Sex Goddess is the young dancer who loses her breasts perhaps as a punishment for being too frivolous, and finally, the Liberated Women such as the two female doctors who work long hours, get no visible rewards, and pay for their ambitions and sterility with the lack of romance and a submission to cancer. Solzhenitsyn' s women are downright boring, and it is perhaps in their portrayal that his talent has failed him. Some critics believe that he did not know women very well, thus could not make them come to life in his novels. The fact that he did not know women of his own country is a very sad state of affairs.

Anton Chekhov's "The Darling" ("Dushech-ka") is one of the finest examples of *the Submissive Wife* type, grotesquely exaggerated, yet realistic even today. The Submissive Wife is a woman who willingly and *happily* submits to the domination of a male with whom she lives or associates. She readily acknowledges his superiority and lives and sees the world through the eyes of her mate. "The Darling's" heroine, Olenka, the daughter of a retired college professor, cannot exist without worshipping a man. She is described by Chekhov as a gentle, softhearted girl, with tender eyes, flushed cheeks, and naive smile that provokes a uniform reaction from men and women: "You darling!",

they say when they see her. All her life, she worships her men: her papa, her French master, her two husbands, her lover, and finally her "adopted" son. Olenka's sentences start with " Vanitchka and I" in the subject slot. When her husband, Vanitchka, goes on a business trip, Olenka, suffering from insomnia, compares herself to a hen, uneasy in the absence of the rooster.

When her husband dies suddenly, Olenka loses her emotional stability, her wish to live. Yet three months later, she is madly in love and anxious to wed Vasilij Pustavalov whose trade is timber and whose vocabulary is immediately absorbed by Olenka who now spices her conversation with such words as "baulk, pole, scantling, lath and plank." She dreams of mountains of perfect boards and six-inch beams; she is the Queen of Timber. Her favorite subject slot is changed from "Vanitchka and I" to "Vasichka and I." With the second husband gone who conveniently dies to keep the plot going, Olenka once more goes into a dormant state from which she is soon rescued by a veterinary surgeon, this time a married man, introduced in the plot presumably for the sake of variety.

During her affair with the veterinary surgeon, Olenka's talk is centered around the hoof and mouth disease and the municipal slaughterhouse. Reprimanded for such unbecoming subjects, she argues: "But what else can I talk about?" The "Vanitchka and Vasicka" phrase is now replaced by "Volodichka and I," and the story goes on, tracing Olenka's personality changes in adaptation to her mates.

The most appalling aspect of this story is of course the fact that Olenka's society continues to view her as "a darling," the true symbol of femininity. Chekhov wanted us to see the absurdity of it, but "do we?" It does not seem so. Olenka sees nothing wrong with her chameleon-like attitude. With each change she becomes a new woman. Her adaptability is worthy of Darwin's praise. She is a True Survivor.

On the other hand, we have heroines like Anna Karenina, a refined, educated woman, faithful in her own way, who dares to offer her love and her body, defying thus the mores of her times. What is her reward? Death. A brutal carnage of her beautiful body, the instrument of sin. She is a sex object, discarded, and punished in an appropriate manner: an eye for eye, in a true fashion of the Spanish Theater of the Golden Age.

Although we often blame men for creating sex stereotypes, women also are guilty in creating their own images. Are we still contributing to these stereotypes? And in what manner? Research shows that images are created by measurable units such as these:

1) Lexical choices—women tend to use their own vocabulary, "feminine and dainty," creating the image of submissiveness. Those who try to break away from it, often resort to vulgarisms in an effort to emulate men, and are instantly placed in the Liberated Woman class.

2) Intonational patterns—English uses three degrees of relative prominence in tonality or three pitch levels, with PL No. 4 reserved for emotional and stress situations such as

"fire," "help." Women often use PL 4 for unnecessary emphasis thus creating an impression of being over-emotional, hence not very stable.

3) The degree of assertiveness of speech— emphatic stress and the lack of pauses produce an impression of assertiveness. Women are said to be hesitant in their speech; they use sustained terminal contours, leaving sentences unfinished. On the other hand, those who try to be more assertive automatically acquire the status of the Bitch.

4) Tag questions—The overuse of tag questions such as "Don't you?", "Aren't you?", again gives an impression of hesitancy, lack of conviction, reliance on man's judgment and desire for his approval. Woman, according to research, use more tag questions than men.

5) Sentence length—Lengthy sentence structure ascribed to women make them appear too rambling, not very concise. If on the other hand they say very little, only echo what men say, then they are back into the Submissive Wife Group.

6) Finally, Body Language—head tilting as a sign of submissiveness; use of hands in a helpless and imploring manner, and too frequent smiles aimed to please and thus be rewarded. If you do this—you are the Submissive Wife, if you don't— you are the Bitch or an Old Maid. Either way, you lose. Today we can neatly classify but we don't know yet how to deal with stereotypes, or whether it is at all possible to eliminate them from literature.

Chekhov's Olenka, endowed by the author with numerous linguistic features of the Submissive Wife, is not the type one might associate with a Soviet female. Yet she has been traditionally a part of the Russian culture, and today she still has a certain appeal. She does not upset the political and social hierarchy; she is godsent to a tired Politbureau member who might find the submissiveness of his wife a counterbalance to his own socially-regimented condition.

Source: Milla Bayuk, "The Submissive Wife Stereotype in Anton Chekhov's 'The Darling,'" in *CLA Journal,* Vol. XX, No. 4, June 1977, pp. 533-38.

Critical Essay #6

In the following essay, Sperber considers Olenka as an "as if" personality, one with "a defective ability to invest emotional interest in others."

Helene Deutsch, in 1942, called attention to a form of emotional disturbance in which the "individual's whole relationship to life has something about it which is lacking in genuineness and yet outwardly runs along 'as if' it were complete." Those with this condition were designated "as if" personalities. Since Deutsch's paper, the condition has been described by others, and Ross has reviewed the literature concerning the concept, and discussed certain of its theoretical implications.

These "as if" individuals exhibit a defective capacity for love. They develop pseudoaffective relationships through identification with others. Their adaptation to reality depends on the ability to mimic others without appreciation for their real emotions. The relationships of the "as if" personality are often precipitously broken off by the partner, who senses the emptiness and dullness of the interaction, and the lack of emotional commitment in the presence of seemingly appropriate behavioral response. When a rejection does take place, or a disruption of the relationship occurs, for whatever reason, "At the first opportunity the object is exchanged for a new one and the process is repeated . . . Any object will do as a bridge for identification."

This type of behavior is considered a reflection of a defective ability to invest emotional interest in others due to deprivation during the period of most intense early dependency.

It is the intention of this paper to consider Olenka, the heroine of Chekhov's "The Darling," the light of Deutsch's conception of the "as if" personality.

Early in the story, Checkhov makes explicit Olenka's problem:

She was always enamored of someone and could not live otherwise. At first it had been her papa, who was now ill and sat in an armchair in a darkened room, breathing with difficulty. Then she devoted her affections to her aunt, who used to come from Bryansk every other year. Still earlier, when she went to school, she had been in love with her French teacher.

The book describes the four subsequent "loves" in Olenka's life. Kukin, a teacher manager, was the first of the four. Soon after meeting the manager, Olenka was "already telling her friends that the theater was the most remarkable, the most important, the most essential thing in the world, and that it was only the theater that could give true pleasure and make you a cultivated and humane person." Checkhov tells us that "what Kukin said about artists and the theater she would repeat. Like him she despised the public for its ignorance and indifference to art; she took a hand in the rehearsals, correcting the actors, kept an eye on the musicians, and when there was an unfavorable notice in the local paper, she wept and went to see the editor about it."

Olenka thrived on the relationship. She "was gaining weight and beamed with happiness." Things did not work out so well for her spouse, however. "Kukin was getting thinner and more sallow and complained of terrible losses, although business was fairly good during the winter."

Kukin eventually dies and Olenka sobs on hearing the news, "'Vanichka, my precious, my sweet! . . . To whom can your poor unhappy Olenka turn?" But three months later, returning from mass in deep mourning, she meets Vasily Andreich Pustovalov, the manager of Bagakayev's lumber yard, who walks her back from church to her gate. "All the rest of the day she heard his sedate voice, and as soon as she closed her eyes she had a vision of his dark beard." Three days later Pustovalov pays her a ten-minute visit, and says very little, ". . . but Olenka fell in love with him, so deeply that she stayed awake all night burning with fever. . . The match was soon arranged and then came the wedding."

Olenka becomes quite involved in Pustovalov's business. "It seemed to her that she had been in the lumber business for ages, that lumber was the most important, the most essential thing in the world, and she found something intimate and touching in the very sound of such words as beam, log, batten, plank, box board, lathe, scantling, slab . . ."

Deutsch notes that the "as if" person possesses a "passive attitude to the environment with a highly plastic readiness to pick up signals from the outer world and to mold oneself and one's behavior accordingly." Thus, Olenka becomes as involved in the lumber business as she had been in the theater: "Whatever ideas her husband had, she adopted as her own. If he thought the room was hot or that business was slow, she thought so too. Her husband did not care for entertainments and on holidays stayed home—so did she.

"'You are always at home or in the office,' her friends would say. 'You ought to go to the theater, darling, or to the circus.'

"'Vasichka and I have no time for the theater,' she would answer sedately. 'We are working people, we're not interested in such foolishness. What good are these theaters?' She always expressed herself in this sedate and reasonable manner, in imitation of her husband."

Unfortunately, Pustovalov dies and Olenka is widowed again. "'To whom shall I turn now, my darling' she sobbed when she had buried her husband. 'How can I live without you, wretched and unhappy as I am? Pity me, good people, left all alone in the world.'" But find someone she does, and within six months the neighbors observe Olenka doffing her "widow's weeds" and opening the shutters. They guess the "someone" is Smirnin, the veterinarian, who has rented a wing of the Pustovalov house. Their guess is confirmed when Olenka, meeting an acquaintance at the post office, would say: "There is no proper veterinary inspection in our town, and that's why there is so much illness around. So often you hear of people getting ill from the milk or catching infections from horses or cows. When you come down to it, the health of domestic animals must be as well cared for as the health of human beings."

Chekhov comments: "She now repeated the veterinary's words and held the same opinions about everything that he did. It was plain that she could not live even for one year without an attachment." After a time, Olenka's emptiness and need to cling began to upset Smirnin:

When he had visitors, his regimental colleagues, she, pouring the tea or serving supper, would begin to talk of the cattle plague, of the pearl disease, of the municipal slaughterhouses. He would be terribly embarrassed and when the guests had gone, he would grasp her by the arms and hiss angrily: "I've asked you before not to talk about things that you don't understand. When veterinaries speak among themselves, please don't butt in! It's really annoying."

She would look at him amazed and alarmed and ask, "But Volodichka, what shall I talk about?"

The relationship came to an abrupt end when the veterinary left, left forever, with his regiment, which was moved to some remote place, it may have been Siberia. And Olenka remained alone.

With Smirnin gone, Olenka's great emptiness once more becomes apparent: "She looked apathetically at the empty courtyard, thought of nothing, and later, when night came, she would go to bed and dream of the empty courtyard. She ate and drank as though involuntarily." Olenka finds herself incapable of performing even the simplest of independent thought processes:

Above all, and worst of all, she no longer had any opinions whatsoever. She saw objects about her and understood what was going on, but she could not form an opinion about anything, and did not know what to talk about. And how terrible it is not to have any opinions! You see, for instance, a bottle, or the rain, or a peasant driving in a cart, but what is the bottle for, or the rain, or the peasant, what is the meaning of them, you can't tell, and you couldn't, even if they paid you a thousand rubles. When Kukin was about, or Pustovalov or, later, the veterinary, Olenka could explain it all and give her opinions about anything you like, but now there was the same emptiness in her head and in her heart as in her courtyard.

Once again Olenka feels the lack of sense of self, the impoverishment of ego: "there was again emptiness and once more she was possessed by a sense of futility of life . . . She needed an affection that would take possession of her whole being, her soul, her mind, that would give her ideas, a purpose in life, that would warm her aging blood."

Smirnin returns one day, accompanied by his wife and ten year old son Sasha. Olenka invites them to move in with her. When Smirnin agrees, Olenka starts to feel more like her old self again. "The old smile had come back to her face, and she was lively and spry, as though she had waked from a long sleep." But it is only upon meeting Sasha that Olenka starts to be able to think again, to have an opinion:

. . . in the evening, as he sat in the dining room doing his homework, she looked at him with pity and tenderness and whispered: "My darling, my pretty one, my little one! How blond you are, and so clever!

"An island," he was reciting from the book, "is a body of land entirely surrounded by water."

"An island is a body of land . . ." she repeated, and this was the first opinion she expressed with conviction after so many years of silence and mental vacuity.

She now had opinions of her own.

She moves Sasha into a room closer to her own, and lavishes attention on him. "Please leave me alone!" he says.

On his way to school, she cannot tear herself away from him, and follows after, noiselessly: "'Sashenka!' she calls after him. He turns around and she thrusts a date or a caramel into his hand. When they turn into the school lane, he feels ashamed at being followed by a tall, stout woman; he looks round and says: 'You'd better go home, Auntie; I can go alone now.'"

Despite his rejections (or perhaps because of them) she experiences an entire transformation of self. "How she loves him! Not one of her former attachments was so deep; never had her soul surrendered itself so unreservedly, so disinterestedly, and with such joy . . ." And now she has something to talk about once again: "She talks about the teachers, the lessons, the textbooks—saying just what Sasha says about them."

One evening, Olenka is awakened by a loud knock at the gate. She fears that a telegram from Sasha's mother, asking that her son be sent to Kharkov, is being delivered. She takes this fantasy badly: "She is in despair. Her head, her hands, her feet grow chill and it seems to her that she is the most unhappy woman in the world." But this feeling passes, for soon "voices are heard: it's the veterinary returning from the club." Olenka is relieved. "Well, thank God!" she thinks.

"Little by little the load rolls off her heart and she is again at ease." Olenka returns to bed and thinks of Sasha who is fast asleep in the next room and sometimes shouts in his sleep: "I'll give it to you! Scram! No fighting!"

To what may one attribute Olenka's constant search for new objects with whom to identify? Deutsch considers that the multiple identifications of the "as if" person are acts of restitution to form an ego in order to make up for the absence of one. In the case histories she presents, no constant mothering figure is present, and therefore the formation of the ego is defective since no internalized object is present.

Olenka's mother is not mentioned at all in "The Darling," and we are told that the father was her first object of love. But on the two occasions that he is described, he is portrayed as a defective individual: "Her Papa . . . was now ill and sat in an armchair in a darkened room, breathing with difficulty." Later in the tale, after Smirnin's sudden

departure, Chekhov says that "Now she [Olenka] was quite alone. Her father had died long ago, and his armchair stood in the attic, covered with dust and minus one leg."

With a mothering figure (the father) who is perceived as defective and never properly internalized, Olenka's plight was to remain dependent on chance male objects to enable her to feel a sense of self. With the departure of these objects, her feeling of emptiness becomes profound, and thinking itself becomes impossible. Olenka has a dream, while married to Pustolavov, the lumber yard manager. It is of

. . . whole mountains of boards and planks, of endless caravans of carts hauling lumber out of town to distant points. She would dream that a regiment of beams, 28 feet by 8 inches, standing on end, was marching in the lumberyard, that beams, logs, and slabs were crashing against each other with the hollow sound of dry wood, that they kept tumbling down and rising again, piling themselves on each other. Olenka would scream in her sleep.

The regiment of beams, standing upright, could represent the men who have been or are about to enter into or pass out of Olenka's life. They crash against each other, displacing one another. All that remains of her relationships is so much dead wood which gets carted away in endless caravans. The dream depicts Olenka's futile search for an object.

Critical Essay #7

Helene Deutsch has described a personality type which she designated the "as if" personality. These individuals exhibit a defective capacity to relate to others. Rather, they have pseudoaffective relationships through identification with, and mimicry of others.

Olenka, the heroine of Chekhov's "The Darling," is presented as an individual with the "as if" condition.

Such behavior is thought to reflect a defective ability to invest emotional interest in others, due to deprivation during the period of most intense early dependence.

Strong persisting needs for love, and a precarious sense of self, contribute to a tendency towards an imitative mode of behavior.

Source: Michael A. Sperber, "The 'As If' Personality and Chekov's 'The Darling,'" in *Psychoanalytic Review,* Spring 1971, pp. 15-21.

Critical Essay #8

In the following essay, Lynd mentions "The Darling" as an example of Chekhov's ability to portray unpleasant situations in sympathetic fashion.

. . .There has, I think, never been so wonderful an examination of common people in literature as we find in the short stories of Chekhov. His world is populous with the average man and the average woman. Other writers have also put ordinary people into books. They have written plays as long as *Hamlet,* and novels as long as *Don Quixote,* about ordinary people. They have piled such a heap of details on the ordinary man's back as almost to squash him out of existence. In the result the reader as well as the ordinary man has a sense of oppression. He begins to long for the restoration of the big subject to literature. Henry James complained reasonably enough of the littleness of the subject in *Madame Bovary.* He regarded it, indeed, as one of the miracles of art that so great a book should have been written about so small a woman. *Tom Jones,* on the other hand, is a portrait of a common man of the size of which few people complain. But then *Tom Jones* is a comedy, and we enjoy the continual relief of laughter. It is the tragic realists for whom the common man is a theme so perilous in its hints of dulness. It is a theme, I admit at once, which they were bound to treat. It is frequently their obsession with the case of the futile and philoprogenitive average man which has driven them into tragic realism. The problem of the novelist of contemporary life to whom the millions of ordinary people are more intensely real than the few magnificent personalities is how to portray the ordinary people in such a way that they will become better company than they are in real life. Chekhov, I think, solves the problem better than any of the other novelists of ordinary people. He sees, for one thing, that no man is ordinary when once he is seen as a person stumbling towards some goal, just as no man is ordinary when his hat is blown off and he has to scuttle after it down the street. There is bound to be a crisis in his life at some time or other. Chekhov will seek out the key situation in the life of a cabman or a charwoman, and make them glow for a brief moment in the tender light of his sympathy. He does not run sympathy as a 'stunt' like so many popular novelists. He sympathises merely in the sense that he understands in his heart as well as in his brain. He has the most unbiased attitude, I think, of any author in the world. Mr. Edward Garnett, in his introduction to Mrs. Garnett's new translation of Chekhov's tales, speaks admirably of his 'profundity of acceptation.' There is no writer who is less inclined to use italics in his record of human life. Perhaps Mr. Garnett goes too far when he says that Chekhov 'stands close to all his characters, watching them quietly and registering their circumstances and feelings with such finality that to pass judgment on them appears supererogatory.' Chekhov's judgment is at times clear enough—as clear as if it followed a summing-up from the bench. He portrays his characters instead of labelling them; but the portrait itself is the judgment. His humour makes him tolerant, but, though he describes moral and material ugliness with tolerance, he never leaves us in any doubt as to their being ugly. His attitude to a large part of life might be described as one of good-natured disgust.

. . . But though he often makes his people beautiful in their sorrow, he more often than not sets their sad figures against a common and ugly background. In Anyuta, the

medical student and his mistress live in a room disgusting in its squalor . . . And if the surroundings are no more beautiful than those in which a great part of the human race lives, neither are the people more beautiful than ordinary people. In 'The Trousseau,' the poor thin girl who spends her life making a trousseau for a marriage that will never take place is ridiculous as she flushes at the entrance of a stranger in to her mother's house:

Her long nose, which was slightly pitted with smallpox, turned red first, and then the flush passed up to her eyes and her forehead.

I do not know if a blush of this sort—a blush beginning in the nose—is possible, but the thought of it is appalling.

The woman, in 'The Darling,' who marries more than once and simply cannot live without someone to love and be an echo to, is 'not half bad' to look at. But she is ludicrous even when most unselfish and adoring—especially when she rubs with eau-de-Cologne her little, thin, yellow-faced, coughing husband with 'the curls combed forward on his forehead', and wraps him in her warm shawls to an accompaniment of endearments. "'You're such a sweet pet!" she used to say with perfect sincerity, stroking his hair. "You're such a pretty dear!'"

Thus sympathy and disgust live in a curious harmony in Chekhov's stories. And, as he seldom allows disgust entirely to drive out sympathy in himself, he seldom allows it to do so in his readers either. We feel that his world may be full of unswept rooms and unwashed men and women, but the presiding genius in it is the genius of gentleness and love and laughter. It is a dark world, but Chekhov brings light into it. There is no other author who gives so little offence as he shows us offensive things and people. Here is a writer who desires above all to see what men and women are really like—to extenuate nothing and to set down naught in malice. As a result, he is something of a pessimist, but a pessimist who does not despair. I know no writer who leaves one with the same vision of the human race as, to use a Scriptural phrase, the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

We are now apparently to have a complete edition of the tales of Chekhov in English from Mrs. Garnett. It will deserve a place, both for the author's and the translator's sake, beside her Turgenev and Dostoevsky. In lifelikeness and graciousness her work as a translator seems to me to reach a high level. Her first two little volumes confirm one in the opinion that Chekhov is, for his variety, abundance, tenderness and knowledge of the heart of the 'rapacious and unclean animal' called man, the greatest short-story writer who has yet appeared on the planet.

Source: Robert Lynd, "Robert Lynd Looks at Chekhov as Story Teller," in *Chekhov: The Critical Heritage,* edited by Victor Emeljanow, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981, pp. 150—52. Originally published in *New Statesman,* November 18, 1916, pp. 159-60.

Critical Essay #9

In the following essay, Tolstoy asserts that while Chekhov created the character of the Darling as a negative example for modern women, he nonetheless composes a sympathetic portrait.

There is a story of profound meaning in the Book of Numbers which tells how Balak, the King of the Moabites, sent for the prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites who were on his borders. Balak promised Balaam many gifts for this service, and Balaam, tempted, went to Balak, and went with him up the mountain, where an altar was prepared with calves and sheep sacrificed in readiness for the curse. Balak waited for the curse, but instead of cursing, Balaam blessed the people of Israel.

Ch. xxiii., V. 11: "And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether.

" 12. And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?

"13. And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me into another place . . . and curse me them from thence."

But again, instead of cursing, Balaam blessed. And so it was the third time also.

Ch. xxiv., V. 10: "And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse my enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times.

"11. Therefore now flee thee to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hast kept thee back from honour."

And so Balaam departed without having received the gifts, because, instead of cursing, he had blessed the enemies of Balak.

What happened to Balaam often happens to real poets and artists. Tempted by Balak's gifts, popularity, or by false preconceived ideas, the poet does not see the angel barring his way, though the ass sees him, and he means to curse, and yet, behold, he blesses.

This is just what happened to the true poet and artist Chekhov when he wrote this charming story "The Darling."

The author evidently means to mock at the pitiful creature—as he judges her with his intellect, but not with his heart—the Darling, who after first sharing Kukin's anxiety about his theatre, then throwing herself into the interests of the timber trade, then under the influence of the veterinary surgeon regarding the campaign against the foot and mouth disease as the most important matter in the world, is finally engrossed in the grammatical questions and the interests of the little schoolboy in the big cap. Kukin's

surname is absurd, even his illness and the telegram announcing his death, the timber merchant with his respectability, the veterinary surgeon, even the boy—all are absurd, but the soul of The Darling, with her faculty of devoting herself with her whole being to any one she loves, is not absurd, but marvellous and holy.

I believe that while he was writing "The Darling," the author had in his mind, though not in his heart, a vague image of a new woman; of her equality with man; of a woman mentally developed, learned, working independently for the good of society as well as, if not better than, a man; of the woman who has raised and upholds the woman question; and in writing "The Darling" he wanted to show what woman ought not to be. The Balak of public opinion bade Chekhov curse the weak, submissive undeveloped woman devoted to man; and Chekhov went up the mountain, and the calves and sheep were laid upon the altar, but when he began to speak, the poet blessed what he had come to curse. In spite of its exquisite gay humour, I at least cannot read without tears some passages of this wonderful story. I am touched by the description of her complete devotion and love for Kukin and all that he cares for, and for the timber merchant and for the veterinary surgeon, and even more of her sufferings when she is left alone and has no one to love; and finally the account of how with all the strength of womanly, motherly feelings (of which she has no experience in her own life) she devotes herself with boundless love to the future man, the schoolboy in the big cap.

The author makes her love the absurd Kukin, the insignificant timber merchant, and the unpleasant veterinary surgeon, but love is no less sacred whether its object is a Kukin or a Spinoza, a Pascal, or a Schiller, and whether the objects of it change as rapidly as with the Darling, or whether the object of it remains the same throughout the whole life.

Some time ago I happened to read in the *Novoe Vremya* an excellent article upon woman. The author has in this article expressed a remarkably clever and profound idea about woman. "Women," he says, "are trying to show us they can do everything we men can do. I don't contest it; I am prepared to admit that women can do everything men can do, and possibly better than men; but the trouble is that men cannot do anything faintly approaching to what women can do."

Yes, that is undoubtedly true, and it is true not only with regard to birth, nurture, and early education of children. Men cannot do that highest, best work which brings man nearest to God—the work of love, of complete devotion to the loved object, which good women have done, do, and will do so well and so naturally. What would become of the world, what would become of us men if women had not that faculty and did not exercise it? We could get on without women doctors, women telegraph clerks, women lawyers, women scientists, women writers, but life would be a sorry affair without mothers, helpers, friends, comforters, who love in men the best in them, and imperceptibly instil, evoke, and support it. There would have been no Magdalen with Christ, no Claire with St. Francis; there would have been no wives of the Dekabrists in Siberia; there would not have been among the Duhobors those wives who, instead of holding their husbands back, supported them in their martyrdom for truth; there would not have been those thousands and thousands of unknown women—the best of all, as the unknown always are—the comforters of the drunken, the weak, and the dissolute, who, more than any,

need the comfort of love. That love, whether devoted to a Kukin or to Christ, is the chief, grand, unique strength of woman.

What an amazing misunderstanding it is—all this so-called woman question, which, as every vulgar idea is bound to do, has taken possession of the majority of women, and even of men.

"Woman longs to improve herself"—what can be more legitimate and just than that?

But a woman's work is from her very vocation different from man's, and so the ideal of feminine perfection cannot be the same as the ideal of masculine perfection. Let us admit that we do not know what that ideal is; it is quite certain in any case that it is not the ideal of masculine perfection. And yet it is to the attainment of that masculine ideal that the whole of the absurd and evil activity of the fashionable woman movement, which is such a stumbling-block to woman, is directed.

I am afraid that Chekhov was under the influence of that misunderstanding when he wrote "The Darling." He, like Balaam, intended to curse, but the god of poetry forbade him, and commanded him to bless. And he did bless, and unconsciously clothed this sweet creature in such an exquisite radiance that she will always remain a type of what a woman can be in order to be happy herself, and to make the happiness of those with whom destiny throws her.

What makes the story so excellent is that the effect is unintentional.

I learnt to ride a bicycle in a hall large enough to drill a division of soldiers. At the other end of the hall a lady was learning. I thought I must be careful to avoid getting into her way, and began looking at her. And as I looked at her I began unconsciously getting nearer and nearer to her, and in spite of the fact that, noticing the danger, she hastened to retreat, I rode down upon her and knocked her down— that is, I did the very opposite of what I wanted to do, simply because I concentrated my attention upon her.

The same thing has happened to Chekhov, but in an inverse sense: he wanted to knock the Darling down, and concentrating upon her the close attention of the poet, he raised her up.

Source: Leo Tolstoy, "Tolstoy's Criticism on 'The Darling,'" in *"The Darling" and Other Stories,* translated by Constance Garnett, Macmillan, 1916, pp. 23—28.

Adaptations

The Short Story Collection: Classic Short Stories includes Chekhov's "Lady with a Toy Dog" and was recorded on audiocassette by Recorded Books in 1998. It is narrated by George Guidall and Frank Muller.

Topics for Further Study

Critics have long debated Chekhov's perspective on women, especially as portrayed in his short story "The Darling." In your own view, what does this story seem to "say" about women's role in Russian society? How would you compare and contrast this perspective with his short story "The Lady with the Dog"?

Chekhov is as well known for his plays as he is for his short stories. His greatest plays include: *Uncle Vanya* (1896), *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), *The Seagull* (1896), and *Three Sisters.* Choose one of these plays to read. What, in your assessment, is meant by the common remark that the message of Chekhov's plays is simply "You live badly, ladies and gentlemen." To what extent are his plays, and this message, meaningful to the contemporary audience?

Great Russian writers of the nineteenth century include Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, and Maxim Gorky. Choose one of these writers to learn more about. What is the significance of this writer to Russian literature of the nineteenth century? In what ways does this writer use "realism" to convey a political or social message?

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of much social and political change in Russia. Learn more about major events in Russian history during this period. What was the role of literature and the arts in Russian society and politics during this time?

Chekhov's plays are still commonly performed on the stage. Find out more about recent productions of his plays. Based on written reviews of these productions, how do contemporary productions of his plays seem to interpret his words for the modern stage? In what ways do the actors, director, or other elements of the production make the play meaningful to a contemporary audience?

Stanislavsky's Moscow Arts Theater performed many of Chekhov's plays. Learn more about Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theater. In what ways did Stanislavsky's innovative acting techniques influence Russian drama in the nineteenth century? In what ways is this influence still relevant today?

Compare and Contrast

1890s: Russia is under the reign of the czars Alexander III (1881-1894) and Nicholas II (1894-1917). Russia is in the midst of social unrest, as a series of massive strikes take place between 1885 and 1903, culminating in the failed revolution of 1905-1906. In 1917, however, socialists succeed in waging a revolution that profoundly changes the social and political structure of the nation.

1990s: When Gorbachev came into power in 1985, he instituted the policy of "glasnost" (openness) in contrast to the oppressive atmosphere of Soviet Russia. Since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the Soviet Union, or United Soviet Socialist Republic (U.S.S.R.), has been restructured, leading to a wide range of social, economic, and political reforms. Russian political structure has changed from communist to a form of democracy, headed by a president and a prime minister.

1890s: The experimental Moscow Art Theater, formed in 1898 and made up primarily of amateur actors, becomes synonymous with the plays of Chekhov, as they put into production the acting techniques developed by Konstantin Stanislavsky.

1990s: The Stanislavsky Method, also referred to as Method Acting, is a profoundly influential acting style both on stage and in film, throughout the world. The Actor's Studio, founded in 1947 in New York City and devoted to teaching the methods of Stanislavsky, is especially influential in the training and style of American screen actors.

1890s: Anton Chekhov's short stories represent a transitional stage between the "golden age" of Russian literature, dominated by Russian realism, and the "silver age" of symbolism, as influenced by French artists and writers. Because of strict state-sponsored censorship, political views can only be expressed indirectly through such forms as literature; writers thus come to shoulder the burden of political thought through their works of realist fiction. Chekhov's stories, however, while realist, eschew the direct political and philosophical message of such writers as Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

1990s: As a result of Gorbachev's policy of glasnost (openness), extreme state censorship of literature under Soviet Russia has been lifted, ushering in a new era in Russian literature. Uncensored Russian literature becomes available to the Russian public. Exiled writers and their work are welcomed back into the nation. Literary experimentation, such as postmodernism, emerges in the context of these new freedoms.

1890s: The intelligentsia in Russia refers to both a political perspective and a social milieu. The intelligentsia is a group of revolutionary radicals who value the expression of socialist ideals above all else in literature. Writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov disdain the intelligentsia for their narrow-minded evaluation of all literature on the basis of its revolutionary implications.

1990s: In modern English usage, the intelligentsia refers to a more general class of intellectuals who value knowledge and learning in both social style and political stance.

What Do I Read Next?

The Seagull (1896) is one of Anton Chekhov's most celebrated plays. It concerns two actresses and two writers confronting a generation gap that was caused by changes in Russian society.

The Essential Tales of Chekhov (1999) is a compilation of Chekhov's most celebrated short stories. The introduction by the editor of the work, Richard Ford, discusses the significance of Chekhov's short fiction to contemporary readers and writers.

Chekhov, the Hidden Ground: A Biography (1998), by Thomas A. Eekman, is one of the two most recent biographies of Chekhov.

Anton Chekhov and His Times (1995), edited by Andrei Turkov, includes letters from Chekhov, as well as excerpts of reminiscences about Chekhov by his contemporaries.

The Itinerants: The Masters of Russian Realism (1996), by Yelena Nesterova, is a study of Russian Realist art, particularly painting, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Women in Society: Russia (1994), by E. M. Kotliarskaia, is a study of the social conditions of women in Russia.

What Life Was Like in the Time of "War and Peace": Imperial Russia, AD 1696-1917 (1998), by the editors of Time-Life Books, is part of a Time-Life series. It covers Russian history and society in imperial Russia up to the revolution of 1917.

Notes from the Underground (1864), by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, is a novella by one of the greatest Russian writers; it has had a vast influence on Western literature.

The Death of Ivan Ilytch (1886), by Leo Tolstoy, is considered by many to be the greatest novella in Russian literature. It concerns the expressions of a dying man.

My Childhood (1913-14) is by Maxim Gorky. Gorky, a friend and literary successor to Chekhov, was the founder of socialist realism in Russian literature; this novel is the first in his autobiographical trilogy.

Further Study

Adler, Stella, *Stella Adler on Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekhov,* Knopf, 1999.

Stella Adler is one of the founders of the New York Actor's Studio, which taught the acting techniques innovated by Stanislavsky. Stanislavsky, in his time, was a founder of the Moscow Art Theater where many of Chekhov's plays were produced. In this book, Adler discusses the works of three of the great playwrights of the nineteenth century.

Bonazza, Blaze Odell, *Russian Authors,* Mayflower, 1981.

This book consists of a collection of short stories by famous Russian authors.

Brooks, Jeffrey, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917,* Princeton University Press, 1985.

This work includes a history of literacy, printing, reading habits, and popular culture in Russia from the emancipation of the serfs to the Russian Revolution.

Gorky, Maxim, *Reminiscences,* Dover Publications, 1946.

This book is made up of reminiscences of Chekhov by his contemporary author and close friend Maxim Gorky.

Hosking, Geoffrey A., *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917,* Harvard University Press, 1997.

Russian history, society, and philosophy up to the revolution of 1917 are included in this text.

Lincoln, W. Bruce, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia,* Viking, 1998.

This book is a history of Russian art in society and politics.

Rayfield, Donald, *Anton Chekhov: A Life,* Holt, 1998.

This is one of the two most recent biographies of Chekhov.

Sanders, Edward, *Chekhov,* Black Sparrow Press, 1995.

This is a unique biography of Chekhov, written in verse form. It focuses on the intellectual milieu of nineteenth-century Russia in which Chekhov wrote.

Service, Robert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia,* Harvard University Press, 1998.

This book is a comprehensive history of Russia in the twentieth century, with illustrations.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

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□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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