Afterlives of Chekhov's Short Stories: A Web of Miracles

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ABSTRACT
The article focuses on certain ways in which Chekhov's short stories have influenced the works of later creative individuals. There is a brief mention of features of Pablo Neruda's poetry, in his *The Book of Questions*, that are reminiscent of features of Chekhov's short stories. The article also mentions Dmitri Shostakovich's "Thirteenth String Quartet," which, to the composer, reminded him of Chekhov's story, "The Black Monk." Bob Dylan based an album of his on Chekhov's short stories. The bulk of the article concentrates on the affinities with Chekhov of a selection of short stories by the North American writers Joyce Carol Oates, Alice Munro, Raymond Carver, John Cheever, and Eudora Welty. Joyce Carol Oates' "The Lady with the Pet Dog" shifts the perspective from Gurov's viewpoint, in "The Lady with the Little Dog," to that of Anna. Alice Munro, in "Walker Brothers Cowboy," displays features that are similar to those in Chekhov's "Beauties." Raymond Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" has connections to Chekhov's "About Love," Eudora Welty, in "A Worn Path," like Chekhov, endows her characters with dignity, despite their flaws. Like Chekhov, Welty does not judge her characters. The article suggests that Welty's "The Winds" is indebted to Chekhov's "The House with the Mezzanine." John Cheever's stories, like Chekhov's, show irresolution. An admirer of Chekhov's drama and of his prose, Cheever, in his story, "The Day the Pig Fell into the Well," reflects themes of "The Cherry Orchard" as well as of Chekhov's stories.
Keywords: Chekhov, Oates, Munro, Cheever, Carter, Welty.

After the death of Charlotte, the spider, in E.B. White's children's book, *Charlotte's Web*, the narrator describes the "miracle of the web." (White, 1952, p.183). We learn that some of Charlotte's spider children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren chose to live in the same doorway in which Charlotte had lived, in the same barn in which Charlotte and Wilbur had developed a deep friendship and had had great compassion for one another. Charlotte's descendants continue to befriend Wilbur.

The web of miracles, the linkages of generations in *Charlotte's Web*, are on parallel tracks with a web in Chekhov's "The Student," which the writer considered to be the favorite story that he had written. The narrator emphasizes the interconnectedness of people from different times. Ivan, a seminary student, thinks,

> The past … is tied to the present in an unbroken chain of events, flowing one out of the other. And he felt that he had just seen both ends of that chain: he had touched one and the other had moved. (Chekhov, 2014d, p. 293)

We can think of a similar web of miracles as we contemplate some of the afterlives of Chekhov's short stories. His creations have formed a web of people – writers and others –, in Russia and abroad, in his time and beyond, who have been profoundly influenced by what he wrote.

It is a testament to the sheer power of Chekhov's short stories that the afterlives reside not

only in later writers' creations, but also in realms other than short stories, including, among many others, music, poetry, a scholarly study of social psychology, and even in one response that was literally out of this world. For prose afterlives, I shall briefly focus on Russia, and then, primarily, on several North American responses to his oeuvre. First, I discuss several non-literary responses, and then turn to a selection of literary resonances, by Joyce Carol Oates, Alice Munro, Raymond Carver, Eudora Welty, and John Cheever.

Dmitry Shostakovich stated that the structure of Chekhov's story, "The Black Monk," reminded him of the sonata form, with its repetitions of a coda. Shostakovich had completed and orchestrated an opera writen by his late student Veniamin Fleishman (who died in 1941), that was based on Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle" and had intended to compose an opera based on Chekhov's story, "Ward No.6." (Bartlett, 2000, pp.199-218).

In 2017, at Princeton University and elsewhere, the Emerson String Quartet, together with a stage director, created and performed a multimedia performance, based on "The Black Monk" and on Dmitry Shostakovich's Fourteenth String Quartet.

Also in the realm of music, Bob Dylan, in a memoir, *Chronicles. Volume One*, declared that one of his albums had been inspired by Chekhov's short stories, although he did not specify which album of his or which of the Chekhov short stories had influenced him. (Dylan, 2004, p. 122). "Idiot Wind," part of the album, *Blood on the Tracks*, emphasizes the loneliness and lack of communication between two people. Many of Chekhov's stories, including "Heartache" and "Vanka," deal with these issues.

The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, in his memoir, wrote that Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov had been important to him. (Neruda, 2001a, p. 210). Neruda's 1973 collection, *The Book of Questions*, published posthumously, displays some of the same features that are familiar to readers of Chekhov's stories. Words evoke a vague, melancholy mood, without the writer's didactically preaching to readers. Neruda ends one of his brief poems with these words: "Is there anything in the world sadder than a train, standing in the rain?" (Neruda, 2001b, p. 3). In this respect, we can think, for example, of the description in Chekhov's story, "Beauties," of the horses that go around and around. This detail emphasizes the atmosphere of the boring monotony of life of the hot August day. Or one can think of the description, in Chekhov's story, "The Lady with a Little Dog," of the disappearance of the noise of the train that the characters think, at the time, marks the end of their brief extramarital affair. Dmitry Gurov has just seen the departure of the train that is carrying his lover, Anna Sergeevna, back to her husband.

One of Neruda's poems ends with these lines: "Why did I return to the indifference/of the limitless ocean?" (Neruda, 2001c, p. 51). In a scene in "The Lady with a Little Dog," as the lovers are gazing at the sea in Oreanda, the narrator speaks of the indifference of the sea: "And in this constancy, in this utter indifference to the life and death of each of us, there perhaps lies hidden the pledge of our eternal salvation, the unceasing movement of life on earth, of unceasing perfection." (Chekhov, 2014c, p. 419). For Chekhov, there is no certainty about the meaning of the indifference. It *perhaps* contains the hidden possibility of our eternal salvation. For Neruda, there is no certainty. He asks but does not answer the question of why he returned to the indifference of the limitless ocean. For both writers, there is indifference, and there is the sense of vastness; "limitless ocean" for Neruda, and for Chekhov, eternal salvation. A thought that "The sea has neither meaning nor pity" is also

repeated in the story "Gusev".

Pam Belluck, in a 2013 *New York Times* article, "For Better Social Skills, Scientists Recommend a Little Chekhov," comments on the results of a social psychology experiment that found that people who read literary fiction were more empathic than those who did not (Belluck, 2013). A Soviet cosmonaut, while in space, felt lonely as he gazed at earth. There was a small library, he said, with books on special thin paper on the spaceship. He stated that when he read Chekhov, he no longer felt lonely.

Among Russian literary admirers of Chekhov, Nabokov commented that it was Chekhov's works that he would take on a trip to another planet. He called Chekhov his predecessor. One example of a resonance of a Chekhov short story in Nabokov's fiction is the similarity of the use of box imagery in his novel, *The Luzhin Defense*, and in Chekhov's "The Man in a Case." In both instances, the protagonists, Belikov and Luzhin, fear features of adult maturity. Belikov's ideal is the coffin, a case ("futliar") of death. He had rejected the possibility of marriage. Luzhin, as a child, ran into the attic, a box-like space, rather than face change, in the guise of school. He retreats into the two-dimensional world of chess. As a chess player, he does not advance beyond a certain level. Like Belikov, Luzhin shows little interest in sex although he gets married. He, too, ends up in a box of death. There are similar details in the two works. We read, for example, about a lady's bicycle, mud-covered galoshes, and a teacher of ancient Greek poetry (Chances, 1987, pp. 135-142).

Certain strands of the web of miracles extend to short stories by North American writers who have indicated the importance of Chekhov for them. Joyce Carol Oates said that she wrote her story, "The Lady with the Pet Dog," not only as an "autonomous" story, a "reimagining" of the Chekhov story, but also as a "testament of" her "love and extreme devotion" to Chekhov. She imagines, she continued, "a spiritual marriage" between him and her (Bellamy, 1972, pp. 63-67).

Oates preserves the basic framework of the Chekhov story: the extramarital affair at a seaside resort, the heroine's sense of shame, the longing of the lovers for one another after each returns to his/her spouse; the man later traveling to his lover's town; the lovers' determination, at the end of the story, to continue their relationship despite obstacles.

Although the framework of the two stories is the same, the time sequence of events is different. Oates places the first scene of her story at the concert at which the man surprises his lover (Anna, the same name as in the Chekhov story) with his appearance. He had correctly assumed that she and her husband would attend. Chekhov's first scene is in Yalta, as he documents Gurov's and Anna's meeting and then becoming lovers. The concert scene comes later, for Chekhov follows the chronological unfolding of events. Chekhov's seaside resort is Yalta; Oates' is Nantucket. Chekhov's Anna lives in a city called S.; Oates' Anna lives in Ohio. The dog in Chekhov's story is Anna's; in Oates', the dog belongs to her lover.

Chekhov's narrative is third-person, but events unfold mostly from Gurov's viewpoint. Oates' narrative is also third-person, but events unfold mostly from Anna's viewpoint. She emphasizes Anna's indecisiveness about continuing the affair. Her Anna, tortured by her unhappiness and by the question of whether or not she should live, cuts her wrist with a razor.

Yet Oates' story as a whole displays the same kind of elements of mood and lyricism as do many Chekhov stories, including "The Lady with a Little Dog." Appealing to many senses, as Chekhov does, she alludes to the sky: to the odor of the car in which her lover is

driving her to the airport; the rhythmic texture of the air. She, like Chekhov, includes some imprecise descriptions: the name of the dog must have been "Ty" (Oates, 1972, p. 400); laughter "seems to eradicate the soul" (Oates, 1972, p. 393). As in Chekhov, there is an emphasis on repetition. Oates repeats the words "still" and "silence" (Oates, 1972, p. 393) for an effect of slowing down, just as Chekhov does.

Canadian writer and winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature Alice Munro stated that she has admired Chekhov since she was a teenager. She greatly appreciated his focus on "…the extreme importance … of ordinary life and ordinary people." She calls "discovering his literary style a revelation." ("90 Things to Know," n.d.). One can detect a link to Chekhov in, for example, her story, "Walker Brothers Cowboy," about an ordinary man, Ben Jordan, forced, during the Depression, to be a traveling salesman in his region of the Lake Huron area. He sells Walker Brothers products such as cough medicine, mouthwash, and tea. His wife, we are indirectly told through details, is dull. She doesn't think that the humorous song that Ben made up about what he sells, is funny. She is indifferent to the singing birds and the tiny fish, "as bright as moons" (Munro, 1997, p. 6) that are in Woolworth's. She often lies down and suffers from migraine headaches. The story, narrated by Ben's young daughter, focuses on a hot, dusty summer day on which Ben takes his daughter and her younger brother with him as he makes his rounds. In the midst of the desolate, dusty landscape, Ben stops the car in order to make an unexpected visit to Nora, someone he has not seen for a long time. In contrast to the description of the narrator's mother, that of Nora is filled with color and life. She changes into a dress with green and yellow flowers. She has a potted geranium. She laughs at Ben's song. She teaches the narrator to dance.

Munro's story displays a Chekhovian feature of sometimes leaving things unsaid. Ben's daughter sees a picture of Jesus' mother, Mary, in Nora's house. She thinks about what her grandmother and aunt used to say about Catholics: "So-and-so digs with the wrong foot." (Munro, 1997, p. 15). Are we, the readers, to surmise that Ben and Nora did not marry because Nora was a Catholic? In true Chekhovian fashion, we don't know, for Munro does not tell us.

Munro contrasts the dreariness of Ben's everyday life, highlighted by the description of the hot, dusty day and the desolate landscape, with the ephemeral moments of vitality embodied in Nora. Chekhov paints a similar picture in "The Beauties." The narrator, on a hot, dusty day, encounters a beautiful young woman who embodies vitality. He encounters another, several years later. Chekhov's first-person narrator discusses two trips during which moments of vibrant beauty appeared against a background of boredom and monotony.

The first instance, when the narrator was in high school, takes place on a hot, dusty day. The narrator has been traveling with his grandfather. They stop, in an Armenian village, to visit a friend of the grandfather's. The narrator suddenly notices the beautiful, vibrant daughter of the grandfather's friend. Her movements are harmonious. This is an ephemeral moment of beauty. The second instance takes place a few years later, when the narrator, already a university student, is travelling on a train. At one stop, there is a strikingly beautiful young woman on the platform. The narrator is struck by her elegant movements, her laughter, and voice. He mentions waltzing. Another train passenger looks at the station's telegraphist and imagines that the telegraphist is in love with the beautiful young woman but is married.

In both stories, the moments of beauty, movement, and colors do not last. For Chekhov's

protagonist, beauty brings a feeling of sadness which he cannot explain. For Chekhov, no one can say what the beauty of the sunset, with its variety of colors, means. For Munro, the moment of enchantment will change "into something you will never know" (Munro, 1997, p. 18). Munro's final sentence, in a separate paragraph, when Ben and his children get closer to home, is "The sky becomes gently overcast, as always, as nearly always on summer evenings" (Munro, 1997, p. 18). Both Chekhov and Munro, without directly saying so, emphasize the transitory moments of vitality and beauty. Neither Chekhov nor Munro gives an indication that the protagonists will attempt to free themselves from the bleakness of their everyday lives in order to pursue a sustained vibrant life.

Munro's story, "Heart Failure," focuses on the Quinn household. Near the beginning of the story, we are told that Mrs. Quinn is dying of a kidney disease that will lead to heart failure. Therefore, the reader assumes that the heart failure of the title of the story refers to Mrs. Quinn's pending demise. Her caretaker, Enid, does not want to overhear what she thinks will be the intimacies between Mrs. Quinn and her husband, Rupert, who will be going away for a few days. The surprise ending curves away from where one might think it will go. The reader realizes, after finishing the story, that heart failure refers to the lack of connection between Rupert and his wife.

This type of structure, with the story curving away from where the reader thinks that it will go – the so-called Chekhovian curve –, is typical of some of Chekhov's short stories. For example, "Sleepy" recounts the overwhelming exhaustion of the thirteen-year-old servant girl, Varka, who is forced to do endless chores and to stay awake at night in order to rock the master's and mistress's baby when it cries. The emphasis of the story is on the state of Varka's mind as she contends with a lack of sleep. Yet the end of the story curves in a different direction. We read that when Varka has smothered the baby, she can fall asleep. Grammatically, the murder does not even take place in an independent clause. It takes place in a subordinate clause.

Like Alice Munro, the American short story writer and poet, Raymond Carver, also admired Chekhov. In an essay, "The Unknown Chekhov," he stated that Chekhov was "the greatest short story writer who ever lived." (Carver, 1992b, p. 146). In a story, "Errand," Carver added two fictional characters, an awkward young hotel employee and a mortician, to a factual retelling of Chekhov's death (Carver, 1987, pp. 30-36).

Carver emphasizes a Chekhovian feature, the lack of a definitive answer, in, for example, the story, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love." (Carver, 2009, pp. 315-322). L. Champion discusses parallels, in these two stories, of Chekhov's and Carver's concepts of love as mystery, and of love as posing, but not answering questions. The characters are discussing the meaning of love. Mel says that he doesn't know anything. There is no conclusion, about what love means, by the end of the story. Another Chekhovian feature in this story is stated by the character, Laura, the wife of Nick, the first-person narrator. She asks, "But who can judge anyone else's situation?" (Carver, 2009, p. 311). She says this after Mel's wife, Terri, insists that her first husband, even though he beat her, had loved her. Chekhov had stated that it is not for writers to provide solutions, to judge, but rather for them to diagnose.

We read that Terri "liked necklaces made of turquoise and long pendant earrings" (Carver, 2009, p. 310). The eminent Chekhov scholar Aleksandr Chudakov pointed out that Chekhov often added details that were irrelevant to the main plot action. As an example, he wrote that

Gromov, a character in "Ward No.6," likes to read while lying down. Chudakov called this an example of "accidental wholeness" ("sluchainostnaia tselostnost"), Chekhov's realistic description of life that includes random details as well as significant events (Chudakov, 1971, pp. 138-187).

There are other similarities of Carver's story with a particular Chekhov story, "About Love." Terri's description of her first husband's abusive behavior toward her being linked to his love for her is like the relationship of the cook, Nikanor, and the servant, Pelageya, described by the Chekhov story's protagonist, Alekhin. Nikanor beats her, yet she loves him. Love is a mystery, we read, that poses questions, but offers no answers.

In "About Love," Alekhin relates the story of his love for a friend's wife, Anna Alekseevna, a love unstated until the final moments before she and her husband move to another province. Alekhin, near the end of the story, regrets everything that had kept them from declaring their love. Earlier, we read that he is not living a fulfilling life. He had finished the university but had returned to work on his noble estate in order to help pay off his father's debts. In the Carver story, Mel is a cardiologist, but says that he would have liked to be a medieval knight. Terri remarks that people fought about the same things then as they do now. Laura says that nothing has changed.

In both stories, the sun plays a role in the room in which the conversations are taking place. By the end of the Carver story, the room, earlier illuminated by the sun's sparkle, is dark. No one makes a move to turn on the light. Carver says nothing about what this means. In "About Love," rain has kept the protagonists inside, as Alekhin tells his story. Near the end of the story, the sun comes out, with the "mill-pond shining in the sunshine like a mirror." (Chekhov, 2014b, p. 378). Chekhov says nothing about what this means. In both stories, this detail, in true Chekhovian fashion, sends vague reverberations to the rest of the story, but nothing is stated outright.

Carver's story, "A Student's Life," displays another common theme in Chekhov's work, that of the lack of communication. A typical story, in this respect, is Chekhov's "Heartache." The cabdriver, Iona, tells the sad story of his son's death to every passenger. No one empathizes with him. He finally tells his horse, who breathes on her master's hand. Carver's story recounts the attempts by Nan, to connect with her husband, Mike. For instance, she asks him to list what he likes and dislikes. His response is to leave him alone. The story ends with her on her knees, praying to God to help them. Carver implies, but does not say directly, that this is a bad marriage.

Chekhov's stories were of immense importance to the American writer, Eudora Welty. Her essay, "Reality in Chekhov's Stories," pointed to his treatment of everyday life, and to his honest portrayal of the contradictory, and the transient, the ephemeral. (Welty, 1978, p. 63). She explains that although he does away with a formal plot, these "structureless" stories reflect "another kind of structure," one that was "open to human meaning" (Welty, 1978, p. 74). These precise features are what we see in her stories. In an episode of everyday life in "A Visit of Charity," (Welty, 1998a, pp. 137-143), 14-year-old Marian can earn points as a Campfire Girl, by visiting residents in the Old Ladies' Home. One of the two elderly women in the room to which she is directed, is nasty. The other asks for money. Marian runs off, retrieves the apple she had hidden under a bush, flags down a bus, and bites into the apple. The story presents one transient moment in the characters' lives. This is a slice of everyday

life, but it also shows life's contradictions. Marian does what she is supposed to by paying the visit. She even brings a potted plant, which would earn her an additional Campfire Girl point. She is fulfilling the letter of the law by going to the Old Ladies' Home, yet she displays no compassion for the residents. The residents, too, are not nice. These are not ideal people. We see people with their real human qualities.

They are flawed, yet Welty, like Chekhov, does not condemn imperfect human beings. In this respect, we can think of "The Lady with the Little Dog," in which Chekhov does not condemn Gurov and Anna for their adulterous relationship. He presents two human beings who happen to fall in love with people who are not their spouses.

Welty, like Chekhov, endows her characters with nobility, with dignity, despite their flaws. In "A Worn Path," (Welty, 1998b, pp. 171-179), we follow Phoenix Jackson, an elderly Black woman, during the Christmas season, as she physically struggles through treacherous terrain on her way to town. Along the way, she falls into a ditch and can't get out. A kind young white hunter rescues her. She sees that a nickel had fallen out of his pocket. He had helped her, perhaps had saved her life, yet she does not do the morally decent thing. She remains silent and keeps the coin.

Welty shows the complexities of life, but she does not judge. The hunter had assumed that she was going into town to see Santa Claus. She was going in order to get medicine for her grandson, who had swallowed lye, and for the last two or three years, his throat had not healed. With the nickel that the hunter had dropped, and with another nickel that a medical attendant gives her, she decides to buy her grandson a small paper windmill. We see, therefore, her humanity, her caring, and her extraordinary spirit and willpower, as she refuses to let the ravages of old age deter her.

An additional aspect of this story can be linked to readers of Chekhov short stories. Welty powerfully conveys the texture of old age, with Phoenix's diminishing physical strength on her way to town. Chekhov's story, "A Boring Story" concerns an older man who is acutely aware of his declining powers.

We can also see Chekhovian elements in Welty's story, "The Winds." (Welty, 1998c, pp. 252-267). She intermingles dream, past, and present. There is a storm during the night. Josie, a young girl, and her brother, Will, are awakened by their father in order to be safer downstairs than in their upstairs bedrooms. Josie dozes off from time to time, and we glimpse pieces of her dreams and pieces of her past. This is the same kind of technique that Chekhov uses, for example, in "Sleepy" and in "Gusev," in which the dying Gusev, on a ship, from time to time lapses into memories of scenes from his past life in his village.

Within "The Winds," Welty shares another feature in common with Chekhov. The story is heavily saturated with details that appeal to the senses. We read about the sounds of children's laughter, the sounds of windows closing; the sound of a bed squeaking on its wheels; the sounds of Will's Tinker-Toy tower coming apart (Welty, 1998c, pp. 252-3); the winds' changing into songs (Welty, 1998c, p. 259). There is the smell of Josie's mother's verbena sachet (Welty, 1998c, p. 252); the smell of hyacinth (Welty, 1998c, p. 259); the matting on the floor that smelled of its stains and dust (Welty, 1998c, p. 253); the pillows that smelled of stones (Welty, 1998c, p. 253); the sound of the rain. There is an appeal to sight. A sheet of music "gleamed faintly like a shell in the shimmer and flow of the strange light" (Welty, 1998c, p. 253); the color of daylight (Welty, 1998c, p. 263); the falling leaves (Welty,

1998c, p. 267); the description of stone dragons (Welty, 1998c, p. 260).

The heavy appeal to the senses is reminiscent of Chekhov's stories. For example, in "The House with the Mezzanine," the first-person narrative of an artist's memory of his bygone love for Zhenia, a young woman, we read about the sound of the humming stove; the rustling sound of leaves; the song of an oriole; the smell of pine needles; the loud voice of Zhenia's sister, Lida. We read about the windows lighting up in a storm; the evening shadows on the blossoming rye; the glittering of a bell tower's cross that was reflecting the setting sun; the flickering of bright golden light (Chekhov, 2014b, pp. 327-342).

Some readers might say, legitimately, that an intermingling of dream, the past, and the present, and the appeal to many senses appear in much literature, not just in Chekhov. Yet in the case of "The Winds," the appeal to the senses is combined with a Chekhovian understated tone, with emphasis upon atmosphere, and with lyricism, with musicality. Welty writes, "… the coolness of the whisper would stir the grains of sand within" (Welty, 1998c, p. 256); and "…the remembered color of the daylight turning" (Welty, 1998c, p. 263). In Chekhov's "The House with the Mezzanine," we read, "…somewhere high in the treetops did the golden light quiver and shimmer like a rainbow in the spider webs." (Chekhov, 2014b, p. 327).

Novelist and short story writer John Cheever, in a lecture praising Chekhov, spoke of "…the genius of Chekhov…" in bringing "…a new and thrilling element to the universality of loneliness" in his works (Cheever, 2009c, p. 992). He spoke about Chekhov's "…mastered irresolution" in his stories. (Cheever, 2009c, pp. 989). These are both striking features in, for example, Cheever's story, "A Vision of the World." (Cheever, 2009a, pp. 615-621.) The nameless narrator's nameless wife tells him that she feels as if she were a TV sitcom character, in black-and-white, whom anyone could turn off. Her husband's reply, that this a new kind of sadness, does not console her. He does not assuage her feelings. The narrator writes that the only reason he does not leave his wife is his attachment to the garden and the house. We can surmise that his attitude has been conveyed to his wife, but Cheever does not directly tell the reader.

In terms of irresolution, we learn that as the husband was gardening, he found a can with a note in it: Nils Jugstrum promises to hang himself if he has not become a member of the Gory Brook Country Club by age twenty-five. As the narrator and his wife are dining at the country club, he checks the list of members. Jugstrum's name is not there. We never find out the reason for the omission. Did Jungstrum hang himself?

Cheever, in his Chekhov lecture, says that Chekhov's concerns are not historical, but rather are focused on the characters as individual human beings. This feature describes, for example, Cheever's story, "The Day the Pig Fell into the Well." (Cheever, 2009b, pp. 264-284). The story's focus is on the Nudd family at their house at Whitebeach Camp. The timeframe includes the Wall Street crash, the Depression, and World War II, which fact we learn in a single sentence that emphasizes the unchanging nature that Mrs. Nudd sees from the porch. The effect of World War II on the family appears in the story, for Hartley, one of the Nudd children, dies in the Pacific, yet we read only about a memorial service held for him, three years later, not even at the Nudd family's suggestion.

We read about Hartley's sister Esther and her lazy days playing tennis with Russell Young, the son of the owner of the local hardware store. We read about a Nudd son, Randy, and about his having won a pig in a raffle. We read that he had wanted to build a pen for

the pig, but distracted by his decision to drive off to pick up Pamela, the young woman he eventually marries, he did not build the pen. The pig escaped through a door that had been left open, jumped into the well, and drowned. We learn about Randy and Esther's difficult sister, Joan, who constantly complains.

Cheever's story displays other Chekhovian elements. There is the sense of regret, of dissatisfaction, when a character thinks about his/her past. Mrs. Nudd bemoans losses in her life and wonders what went wrong (Cheever, 2009b, p. 283). One example of this in Chekhov's oeuvre is his story, "A Lady's Story," which emphasizes the specialness of summer. The narrator, Natalia Vladimirovna, reminisces about the magical events during a summer, nine years ago, when Peter Sergeich declared his love for her. She comments about the social disparity between them. During the summer, she remarks, the class differences didn't matter. She is an aristocrat, and he, the son of a deacon. She then talks about their meeting during winters, in town, when the summer magic had worn off, and when the social disparities created a wall between them. She has regrets about her life. She thinks that her life has perished. (Chekhov, 1986, "Lady's").

In "The Day the Pig Fell into the Well," the summers are described as "…a seasonal paradise in which the strong and the weak, the sick and the poor, lived together peaceably" (Cheever, 2009b, p. 266). This allows Russell to be accepted into the Nudds' daily routine, in spite of the social disparity between him and the Nudds. Just as Natalia Vladimirovna has regrets about her past, Mrs. Nudd expresses similar feelings.

In Cheever's story, the "web of miracles" with Chekhov extends not only to his stories, but to his plays. Cheever's lecture on Chekhov mentions "The Cherry Orchard" and "Uncle Vanya," so we know that he was familiar with these plays. When we think about "The Day the Pig Fell into the Well," we can note a resonance of Russell with Lopakhin. They are both of a different social status than the aristocratic families with whom they interact. Lopakhin is involved in the project to cut down the cherry orchard in order to build summer cottages. Russell is involved in the project of cutting down three acres of trees in order to make way for developers' plans to build summer cottages for tourists.

In "Uncle Vanya," Vanya regrets his past. Mrs. Nudd, like Vanya and Natalia Vladimirovna, regrets her past. Mrs. Nudd bemoans the losses in her life and wonders what went wrong. (Cheever, 2009b, p. 283). In "Uncle Vanya," we read Sonia's powerful speech, in which she urges endurance. In Cheever's story, right after Mrs. Nudd wonders what went wrong, she demonstrates resilience, as she cheers up, retelling the incident of the pig. The Nudd family then goes into the house. The last sentence of the story is "The room with the people in it looked enduring and secure, although in the morning they would all be gone" (Cheever, 2009b, p. 284). This ending combines Mrs. Nudd's and Sonia's resilience and endurance with the sense of departure that we see in "Uncle Vanya" and "The Cherry Orchard." And of course, there is, in the ending of Cheever's story, the flavor of so many Chekhov works, such as "The Beauties," that sense of the ephemerality, the transience of life.

We have examined the web of miracles that connects Chekhov's short stories to realms other than short stories. In music and poetry, including works by Bob Dylan, Dmitry Shostakovich, and Pablo Neruda, the influence of Chekhov's short stories can be felt. We have also touched upon the importance of Chekhov's short stories for a study of social psychology. We have then turned to an exploration of selected short stories by certain North

American writers who considered Chekhov as important to their creative process. It would be fruitful to contemplate ways in which the stories of Oates, Munro, Carver, Welty, and Cheever are similar to one another in the ways in which they fold Chekhovian features into their creations. All of these writers wrote short stories. Chekhov's advice to writers who sought it was to shorten their stories. Carver is described as a minimalist, although he never categorized himself as such. In the present, we can follow one trajectory of ever-increasing reduction of the length of a story. There is flash fiction, a genre of stories that contain only a few lines.

And we can wonder whether there will, at some point in the future, be a major genre called twitter fiction...

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