Chekhovian hero: An approach to mood

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THE CHEKHOVIAN HERO:
AN APPROACH TO MOOD

by

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I. Introduction: The Hero as a Literary Type

This thesis examines a selected number of Anton Chekhov's mature works with an aim to fulfill two objectives: to define the peculiar characteristics of his hero type as a variant of the Russian hero of failure, or "superfluous man," appearing in the early nineteenth century; and secondly, to show -- through the consideration of such questions as who he was, what he did, what he believed in and longed for, and the exact nature of his failure to meet life -- the direct influence of this particular hero upon the famous "Chekhovian mood."

While most critics make some general reference to the stylized treatment which Chekhov gives to his characters, they emphasize rather the mood that Chekhov gives to his stories and plays, a mood composed of disillusionment, poverty, cold, shadow, sorrow, and occasionally tears through laughter. It is my belief that such emphasis is wrongly placed, pointing up as it does one merit of the work at the expense of a greater one. It would be the same thing as praising Marlowe for his mighty line at the expense of the very Faustus who speaks it. Moreover, by implication, this emphasis misrepresents Chekhov's own main interest in his characters and the whole process of his art as I understand it. For the question arises: What constitutes the greater influence, mood on hero or hero on mood? Is the Chekhovian
mood precipitated by or created by a character or is the character an outgrowth, a product of a mood? For Chekhov has created both a particular character type and a particular mood. Where was his main interest? It is the contention here that the hero, despite his seeming lack of individuality, creates for the reader this distinctive impression which is called "mood," and which has become so noteworthy in Chekhov that all readers recognize it immediately. In short, Chekhov's major interest was his hero.

In any consideration of the hero and his place in literature, one is immediately confronted with several general questions, none of which can be solved with simple answers. Has the function of literature been to set up images of a hero to fire the imagination and inspire identification? Are heroes -- in the epic sense -- exemplary? Taking western literature as an example, in what sense are Othello, Lord Jim, or Camus' Stranger, "exemplary"? What do we do when we understand them? Do we identify ourselves with them? Do we, as Aristotle 2500 years ago suggested, admire these heroes, pity them, learn from them, emulate them? By exemplary we do not always mean those characteristics which portray the most admirable qualities in man and in his behavior. Surely Othello cannot be commended for all of his actions as such, and yet he may qualify as an exemplary character, e.g., in his admission of his "sin." Chekhov, in following the same pattern, presents heroes who are not to be especially emulated or even
particular admiration, but who may deserve the reader's pity and sympathy.

In more recent years, as the discussion of the hero continues, André Malraux has said "It is not certain that our civilization can rediscover the heroes and found on them its exemplary image of man." Apart from the roles which heroes do or do not play in the fate of culture, one may inquire whether or not the "exemplary image" may properly appear in literary works. Albert Camus, in *The Rebel*, may have been completing Malraux's thought when he said that the aim of the world's great literature "seems to be to create a closed universe or a perfect type. The West, in its great works, does not limit itself to retracing the steps of its daily life. It ceaselessly presents magnificently conceived images which inflame its imagination and sets off, hot foot, in pursuit of them." In Russian literature the type of the hero has enjoyed a peculiar role. The celebration of what Rufus W. Mathewson calls the "emblematic" hero has been a tradition in Russian imaginative literature dating far back into antiquity. As such, this hero is one who serves as a pattern of behavior either to be emulated or abhorred, as the case may be. Russian literature, probably more than any

1 "Man's Quest," *Time*, LXVI, No. 3 (July 18, 1955), 29.
other of the world's great literatures, has perpetuated this celebration to so great an extent that it continues to be an important point of concern in present day Soviet literature. The oral and written traditions of early Russian literature produced a variety of men as images of virtue. They have ranged from the bogatyr who was the hero of such oral epics as the bylina about Ilya Muromets, to the martyred saint in the Legend and Passion and Eulogy of the Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb, the cossack bandit-revolutionary in Tale of Eraslan Lazarevich, the peasant-fool in Tales of the Drunkard, and the benevolent (or terrible) tsar-despot in Tale of the Wallachian Governor Dracula. Together these characters have been looked upon as symbols intended to give comfort, instruction, and inspiration to their audience and thus, to give purpose and meaning to experience. Since virtue may serve numerous masters, these images were created to echo the prevailing dictates of political, social, religious, and moral interests. These interests have either conformed with approved practice and philosophy or have been rebellious and critical of approved convention. This is not to say that similar types of heroes have not served similar purposes in other literatures. Outside Russia, one need only look at the works of Charles Dickens or Sinclair Lewis, Albert Camus or Ernest Hemingway, to find examples of heroes who represent in their own ways the different attitudes toward the world in which their authors wrote.
Up to the nineteenth century the hero of Russian literature was of the type which is common to the morality plays of early England. He was simplified to the point of representing one idea, or one virtue. In fact, Russian tradition up to that time was distinguished by the absence of any other approach to the character of the literary hero. Since there was no indirect, psychological analysis in the presentation of tragedy, Russian heroes were attractive, uncomplicated representatives of specific points of view. It was not the hero's purpose to instruct society by the example of his defeat or ignominious death but to instruct it by way of his miraculous or deserved success, either by earthly or spiritual standards.

But beginning in the nineteenth century, all facets of Russian culture were influenced by the accession of western models and standards. Russian literature reflected this new influence in shifting the emphasis on the hero to a more recognizable human type. This shift established requirements of realism which considerably lessened the previous generally black-white interpretation of character and made the hero more fallible, more uncertain, more human. Though hero images were still sought, questions concerning the nature and destiny of this image were given greater emphasis. As the interest and consideration of writers and critics were increasingly absorbed in these questions, the separation between thematic preoccupations and the
actual spiritual life of nineteenth-century Russians became noticeably less. The one became fused with the other so that the literary hero came to stand as a reflection of the spiritual history of the actual man of society, a unique feature in literary experience. One result was the birth of the Russian novel of character.

The novel of character was well designed to direct attention to the moral responsibilities of individuals. From the time of Pushkin and Lermontov, it was hero-centered. It displayed a rudimentary plot structure which directed the interest and attention directly to the hero. Pushkin's Onegin, the hero of his verse-novel *Eugene Onegin*, and Lermontov's Pechorin, the central figure of his novel *A Hero of Our Time*, established an ancestral family tree for many literary protagonists in the succeeding years of the century. There are innumerable illustrations of protagonists who demonstrate the author's intensive effort to center his moral quest in the person of his hero. Perhaps the most prominent may be found in Dostoevsky's Myshkin, Raskolnikov, and the Karamazovs; in Tolstoy's Pierre and Prince Andrei; and in Turgenev's whole gallery of faltering heroes. The novelist, in generalizing through his creation, presented his own ideas concerning human experience. Whether

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3 It is interesting to note that Lermontov named his hero Pechorin purposely to suggest a similarity to Pushkin's Onegin. Both names originated from sister rivers in the north of European Russia, the Pechora and Omega. For Russian readers these names are particularly well known. (Private conversation with Dr. Peter P. Lapikan, Assistant Professor of Foreign Languages, Montana State University, May 10, 1960.)
hopeful or despairing, these ideas were reflected in the fate of the literary figure.

Politically minded critics, such as the outspoken Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolay Dobrolyubov, and Nikolay Chernyshevsky, of the nineteenth century, continually quarreled about the kind of significance that should be invested in the figure of the literary hero. In most cases, they left little doubt as to exactly what the hero should mean to the individual reader, to society, and to the nation. No longer satisfied with the general presentation of virtue, the critics through the discussion which they generated in literary circles sought to establish a new hero, one of fundamentally different character, and one who stood for a positive reflection of new social, political, moral, and religious change. In order to effect such a change, there had to be a definition of the hero as he existed, an isolation of fundamental characteristics, characteristics which in turn had to be modified. To realize a hero, as Dobrolyubov described him, who when "he reached the height of his moral and intellectual power would be a disciplined, dedicated, one-man revolutionary movement, incapable of compromise and indifferent to personal defeat," the nineteenth century critics attacked the hero who had been dominating the literary scene, the hero type that has come to be known as the "superfluous man."

The "superfluous man" was the name given to one important character type recurrent in nineteenth-century
Russian literature. In fact, there is a sense in which the history of the "superfluous man" is co-extensive with the history of the Europeanization of Russia. For thirty or forty years the "superfluous man" was perhaps the most dominant figure in the literature of Russia. The term, first used by Pushkin to describe his hero Eugene Onegin and popularized by Turgenev in the title of his short story *The Diary of the Superfluous Man* (1850), denotes a hero who is sensitive to social and ethical problems, but who fails to act, partly because of personal weakness, partly because of political and social restraints on his freedom of action.

Seen as one of the types which for a century were of importance in Russian literature, this hero was consistent in his habit of failure despite some individuality and the varied aspects of his behavior. As a man of hope he was successful in his search for annihilation. As a man of hope and good intentions he failed, in spite of himself, to live as he planned or to fulfill the apparent promise of his life. Both these sub-types are characterized by a disastrous alienation from other human beings and from purposeful activity. For the radical critics, particularly Belinsky, Dobrolyubov, and Chernyshevsky, it was the inactivity resulting from this maladjustment which linked all these figures, disparate though they were in character and in motivation.

The "superfluous man", it must be kept in mind, did not represent retrogressive values; rather he opposed them
inadequately, he was their victim, not their advocate. All the men of this label shared a common disposition for daydreaming, rationalizing, and passivity. Their humanitarian longings had no relation to their everyday lives, or if they did, those longings existed in a dream-life beyond any actual realization. They varied in temperament, but they were equally inefficient and socially worthless. As variations on the single theme, the heroes were sometimes mild, submissive young men unable to cope with life and therefore doomed to be unhappy; or they were well-bred and sensitive intellectuals whose inner riches were wasted either because they were unable to carry out their plans or because they could not find any outlet for their energy. Many reasons were advanced for the fatal self-absorption and the paralysis of will which afflicted these unhappy men, not the least of which were the multiple pressures arising from the feudal environment of early nineteenth century Russia. In an atmosphere of tyranny and stagnation they would reach the point of formulating their code of dissent, only to have exhaustion or self-deception prevent them from acting. Their intentions often remained uncorrupted, but they were never tested by use. Serfdom was in its death agony, and the "superfluous men," who had filled a genuine need by questioning or standing aloof or preaching, were not felt to be adequate to the task of moving society forward to the new order. This inadequacy is not only a commentary on the literary hero, of course, but on that segment of the literary
profession who persisted in creating the type.

Thus, from the straightforward, uncomplicated hero of earlier Russian literature, whose exemplary characteristics were both idealistic and affirmative, the nineteenth century developed the more complex, realistic and negative, the "superfluous man." Though the causes for such a development are beyond the limits of this investigation, suffice it to say that such a man was indeed the product of his times, a product of social and political upheaval when insecurity and shifting values were the only constants in such an atmosphere.4

The hero of Anton Chekhov's later stories is a very peculiar variant of the superfluous man, or the hero of failure. That he was intended to be so we have Chekhov's own words. One of his most explicit statements about his intentions appears in a letter dated December 30, 1888, written to Alexei Suvorin, the editor of the powerful, conservative St. Petersburg newspaper, New Times.5 In this letter, Chekhov presents his understanding of the various characters created in his early play Ivanov. The producers of the play considered the lead character a superfluous man in the Turgenev tradition, but Chekhov points out that there are differences between the Turgenev tradition and the hero

type in Chekhov's own stories. Ivanov shares with the
superfluous man of Turgenev the background of an upperclass
gentleman, a university man. He had a strong bent for dis­
tractions; in his youth he exhibited an excitable and
fervent nature. By the time he reaches thirty, however, he
begins to feel weariness and ennui. Though he feels physi­
cal weariness and boredom, he does not understand what the
trouble is and what is happening. And here the difference
between the Turgenev and Chekhov characters becomes apparent.
In the following excerpts from the letter Chekhov comments
on this difference.

When narrow and unconscientious people find them­
selves in such a situation, they usually place
the blame on their environment, or enter the
ranks of the unwanted and unneeded Hamlets, and
then their minds are at rest... But Ivanov, who
is straightforward, openly declares to the
doctor and audience that he does not understand
himself...

The change taking place within him outrages his
integrity. He seeks reasons from within and
doesn't find them; he begins to seek outside
of himself and finds only an undefined feeling
of guilt. This feeling is Russian. If someone
dies in a Russian's house, or falls sick, or if
somebody owes him money, or if he wants to make
a loan -- The Russian always feels a sense of
guilt...

To exhaustion, boredom and the sense of guilt
add still another enemy. That is solitude...
People are not concerned with his feelings
and with the changes occurring within him.
He is lonely... There is nowhere to go. Hence
he is continually tormented by the question of
what to do with himself.

Now for the fifth enemy. Ivanov is tired,
doesn't understand himself, but life is not concerned with these things. It sets its legitimate demands before him and he -- like it or not -- must solve the problems...Such people as Ivanov do not settle questions, they are crushed by them. They are at their wit's end, throw up their hands, their nerves are on edge, they complain, commit stupidities and in the last analysis, in giving way to their loose, flabby nerves, the ground slips from under their feet and they join the ranks of the "broken" and "misunderstood."

Disillusion, apathy, nervousness and exhaustion are the inevitable consequences of inordinate excitability, and this characteristic is inherent in our young people to an extreme degree...

Thus, Chekhov distinguishes his particular character as one who incorporates not only the Turgenev qualities, which have been mentioned previously, but adds to them an acute sense of guilt, intense loneliness, and a failure to understand himself combined with an inability to accept an explanation for his difficulties based on his environment. One critic refers to Chekhov's variant as the "Moody Man." 6

Chekhov's hero, of all the "superfluous men" to which he is kin, is the unwilling victim of his environment. Like the "superfluous men," he suffers from its impact, is stifled by its tedium, but is too ineffective or undecided to rebel against it. Chekhov's stories contain many instances of persons, both men and women, who recognize acutely the triviality and boredom in their lives, and who wish to replace it with purpose and accomplishment. Yet they remain as they are, resigned to and enmeshed in the infinite web of

6 Mark Slonim, Modern Russian Literature: From Chekhov to the Present (New York, 1953), p. 64.
their day to day habits and associations, watching their lives being worn away into nothing -- and for nothing. These people have no force, no real energy, no determination.

For the most part, the Chekhovian hero belongs to that part of the educated society regarded as the intelligentsia, specifically that section of the intelligentsia whose minds had been overdeveloped at the expense of their hearts. Since he does not know what to do, he accepts as inevitable his status; and in the end his zeal for pursuing any activity, however it may have flared for a moment, is soon turned to fatigue. Life for this man is a tangle of lies, lies of convenience, lies of pride, lies of self-delusion, all destined to make of the character himself a moral cripple. And always, in whatever the surroundings, in whatever the situation, this hero remains alone, walled into himself and away from others, by a lack of understanding and sympathy. Time and again the moment of misery goes unnoticed and unshared because of his inability to receive or give the necessary sign of encouragement and interest. Loneliness, futility, and despondency -- these are the outstanding traits of these heroes of what we may regard to be Chekhov's more mature works.

The total body of Anton Chekhov's writing may be divided into two sections, not only in time, techniques and length, but in mood as well. In 1880, Chekhov began his literary career as a means of raising funds to support himself and
his family while pursuing his medical studies. During this period he wrote very short sketches for the comic weeklies and various periodicals which asked nothing more than that their readers be entertained. Most critics agree that these stories were never taken too seriously by the author himself. For example, Renato Poggioli says that they were designed to be of an ephemeral character only, to give cheap and easy laughter. What distinguishes Chekhov's early works is their relative lack of quality. They show all the signs of having been written quickly with small regard for style. Containing little originality of approach, the pieces are full of the common place and reflect the current taste of the average reader in the streets.

In the later years of Chekhov's life (1894-1904), he became occupied mainly with a series of works, plays as well as stories, that were evidently intended to constitute a kind of analysis of Russian society. These are the works that have established his reputation for mood. In 1885 Grigorovich, the veteran writer of the realistic renaissance and a man for whom Chekhov had great admiration, wrote to Chekhov begging him not to continue to waste his talents on the comic fragment and sketch but to turn to more serious literary work. Nor was Grigorovich's the only voice to give this advice. Chekhov's friend Alexis Suvorin, influential editor of the New Times for which Chekhov had written, held

the same opinion as Grigorovich. The light-heartedness, carelessness, and lack of respect for his materials of the early work were all admitted by Chekhov, and from the time of the publication of his second collection of stories (Motley Stories) in 1886, his work assumed a different form. From the sketch he went to the short story and then on to the povesti, a form, particularly favored by Russian writers, that can be defined as a long short story presenting a continuity of events accompanied by extensive characterization. The povesti approaches the form of the novelette or novella. It was in these later stories that Chekhov attained the level of what Matthew Arnold called "high seriousness."

One critic, Irene Nemirovsky, says

He took a reverse road to that one usually travelled by writers...Instead of going outwards from himself to others, it was from the external world that Chekhov started, to end up with himself...His critics and biographers were to say of him that between 1886 and 1889, he changed, becoming another man and another writer. But in reality he had not changed: all he had done was to get to know himself.

During this time he came to realize the true importance of the writer's role, the nature of his "mission," as Grigorovich put it, and the fact that art and literature created in a country like Russia, was rich in consequences.

8 Slonim, op. cit., p. 57.
10 Ibid., p. 87.
In the later stories of Chekhov, the melancholy accents become more perceptible, the comic figures more often betray a pathetic touch, the humor is relegated to the background or quieted, while the themes of futility and gloominess more often dominate. In the lives of ordinary people, surrounded by drabness and triviality, the narrowness of their daily lives assumes tragic tones. Cold, damp air along a never ending path through a gloomy countryside, curtained by drizzling rain and mists; miserable people huddled within themselves, comforted only by thoughts of happier moments or deadened by futility for the days ahead; the endless struggle of day to day toil, while adversity, disappointment, and sorrow remain always near -- here are the ingredients of the "mood" stories of Chekhov's later years. Still, despite the apparent pessimism of such an outlook, Chekhov does not leave his readers with an outright impression of pessimism, but weaves through these stories a fragile thread of hope. Life not only should be better, but can be better and Chekhov interjects this positive outlook repeatedly through the seemingly unrelieved gloom which penetrates his stories. The mood itself, and these variations upon it, Chekhov creates mainly by his peculiar treatment of his heroes, in which his main interest rests.

To give support to this theory, I have attempted to analyze the heroes of eight of the longer stories selected from the period between 1889 and 1904, the last fifteen years
of Chekhov's life, the years in which his skill, his reputation, and his most serious work reached maturity. The stories chosen from this period mark intervals evenly distributed throughout these years. Although this study is limited primarily to eight short stories, I have drawn incidentally upon a large number of Chekhov's works available in English translation, including the plays *The Sea Gull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1897), *The Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904).

A selection of only eight stories slighting, it is true, a whole body of Chekhov's writing, which includes many stories and especially the plays, wherein no one character is prominent -- works devoted to the portrayal of groups. Yet the stories chosen here, with their highly emphasized heroes, deal in their own way with these individuals as representatives of their classes. For purposes of this study, however, it is their individuality, Chekhov's own major interest in these heroes, that is emphasized. The eight heroes chosen are these:

- Anna Akimovna from *A Woman's Kingdom*
- Yahov Ivanich Terehov from *The Murder*
- Misail Alexeyich from *My Life*
- Bishop Pyotr from *The Bishop*
- Nadya Shumin from *Betrothed*
- Sergey Vassilitch Nikitin from *The Teacher of Literature*
- Nikolay Stepanovitch from *A Dreary Story*
To achieve the two main objectives — definition of character and the bearing of characterization upon the creation of moods, the thesis proper has been divided into three major sections. Chapter II discusses the heroes from the standpoint of who they are — with the emphasis on such external characteristics as age, appearance, family background, economic and social status. Chapter III considers the interaction of external and internal factors upon what these men and women do with their lives — their intellectual capabilities, their training, their day to day occupations, and their psychological reaction to those occupations. Chapter IV investigates the internal nature of the heroes in respect to how they feel about themselves and what they are doing — the conflict between what they want and hope for and their failure to attain it. In summary, Chapter V analyzes the Chekovian mood in relation to the method of characterization; that is through his characters, which constitute his main interest, Chekhov creates the particular mood by which his works are known.

11 Full bibliographical and documentary data on these characters and the stories in which they appear is cited in detail as Addendum No. 1 on the final page of this chapter.
Addendum No. 1


Andrey Yefimitch Ragin from "Ward No. 6" (1892), in The Horse-Stealer and Other Stories, tr. Constance Garnett (New York, 1921), pp. 29-112.

These particular translations were chosen on the basis of general availability, popularity and merit, at least as the latter is represented in the better reviews. Editions of Chekhov's works above together with all other editions used in this study are cited again with full bibliographic information in Section I of the Bibliography appended. Throughout the thesis references to the eight main stories are cited intertextually by story title and pagination of the editions above; references to all other works are cited in full in footnotes.
II. The Hero as a Physical Entity

Anton Chekhov is remembered for his ability to capture the complete attention of his readers and engross them in the fragmentary situations that together make up the total picture of that portion of life about which he writes. One of the most powerful effects of his writing on his audience is the sense of intimate knowledge and understanding of people and situations which he induces in his readers. It is this sense of intimacy and sympathy which accounts for the impact of a Chekhov story, an impact that lingers in the memory of the reader long after the details have been forgotten.

Chekhov has never been highly praised for his ability to create particular individuals. For this fact one could offer many conjectural explanations, perhaps most obviously that his characters cannot be clearly seen as physical beings. It may be argued that very often great writers, Shakespeare, for instance, succeed in creating the most strikingly memorable characters without ever delineating them in any great physical detail. But such writers let the reader know these characters intimately as highly individualized personalities; in their inner natures they are unique personages. As much cannot be said of Chekhov’s characters, who, though internally examined too, are not outstanding and unique individuals, but vague and shadowy average men, all of a very particular and single type.
Thus, although Shakespeare and Chekhov are perhaps alike in their neglect of physical detail, they differ widely in the actual characters they create; each of Shakespeare's is a distinct individual while Chekhov's are unparticularized members of one type. It is the type alone that is special. And it is a consideration of this very particularly delineated type that is the primary interest of this study. In Chekhov's works, one will never find a Raskolnikov or a Pierre or an Onegin, characters endowed with exact and concrete attributes that remove them from the common mass. To Chekhov, such attention to the demands of external character drawing was unnecessary. To him the individual as a whole was important, but of that individual, most particularly his soul. Yet his individuals are portrayed in the most vague of concrete terms. They are given the very minimum of physically descriptive details. As a result, the Chekhovian characters blur together into a group of people, physically indistinguishable from each other.

However, this mass of characters exerts a peculiar hold on the imagination of the reader. Even though the individuals within the mass are barely recognizable to the sight, together they produce a definite impression composed of specific qualities. These qualities, upon closer examination, exist not in the external but rather in the internal makeup of the various individual.

From the external viewpoint, and taken as a whole, Chekhov's short stories of his mature period portray a social
phenomenon: the difficulty of adjustment of social classes, and individuals within those classes, to a new environment. In many of the stories there is a household or a community which is intended to be significant in the life of some social group: the new factory owners in A Woman's Kingdom; the half-literate countryman, fundamentalist and independent in The Murder; the Tolstoyan intelligentsia in My Life; the professional churchmen in The Bishop; and in Betrothed, the old-fashioned provincial household and the revolt against it of the new generation. However, in portraying this society, Chekhov has relied upon individuals within these groups who exhibit fundamental similarities. Even though they contribute to a larger significance in the shifting social structure of nineteenth century Russia, Chekhov sees them first as separate souls, each with his own particular place in life. It is not that these individuals are all part of a social upheaval which constitutes their unity of character, but that they are united by some trait or group of traits which exists within them as they are distinct entities in that upheaval.

Characterization may be created in two ways. It may be created directly through such details as physical features, age, parental background, and social and economic influences; or it may be created through a psychological analysis of the individual. It is the contention here that Chekhov uses the indirect psychological method to describe what he feels to be the most vital reality of the individual.
Chekhov is concerned with the human soul and its existence in the world. The various characterizations of the heroes and heroines under analysis here show that to know the soul of a person does not necessitate a knowledge of age, appearance, or status.

The eight characters in the stories I have chosen -- including Nikolay Stepanovitch, Andrey Yefimitch, Anna Akimovna, Sergey Vassilitch, Yahov Ivanich, Misail Alexeyich, Bishop Pyotr, and Nadya Shumin -- represent a range in age between the youthful twenty-three years of Nadya (Betrothed) and the weary sixties of Nikolay Stepanovitch (A Dreary Story) and Bishop Pyotr (The Bishop). Although Bishop Pyotr is not given a specific age, it is stated that at 32 he was made rector of the seminary and that following eight years abroad he was made a suffragan bishop (The Bishop, p. 352). By allowing for the implied years in between, one would guess him to be in his early sixties, or late fifties at least. Nikolay Stepanovitch himself states that he is sixty-two (A Dreary Story, p. 132). Anna Akimovna (A Woman's Kingdom, p. 1) and Nikitin (The Teacher of Literature, p. 239) are portrayed as being twenty-six. This age is equalled vaguely by Misail Alexeyich (My Life) who states that he is over twenty-five, and that his sister is twenty-six (My Life, pp. 160, 164). One does not gain the impression, however, that he is over thirty. Yahov Ivanich's cousin (The Murder) is reported to be about forty-five and
Yakov himself to be ten years his senior, which would make
him about fifty-five (The Murder, pp. 130, 140). The age of
Andrey Yefinitch (Ward No. 6) is undetermined throughout the
story. He had been at the hospital for about twenty years
and one may assume that if he were in his twenties or perhaps
early thirties when he finished his studies in the medical
faculty, he would have been between forty and fifty at the
time of the story.

As for physical delineation, the reader finds himself
provided with very little direct assistance when he attempts
to visualize, positively, the heroes and heroines in Chekhov's
stories. All the persons are given the briefest of
descriptions. If details are given at all, they are in-
complete and shadowy, allowing for considerable variation
between the imaginations of any two readers. The two women,
Anna Akimovna and Nadya Shumin, are left inconspicuous by
the author. Since they are said to be attractive, one might
expect the author would see fit to describe the nature of
their attractiveness. However, Chekhov says little more
than that they are handsome. Nadya Shumin is described as
tall with a good figure, and is said to give the appearance
of radiant good health. Anna Akimovna is plump and fresh
and is seen as beautiful to those people around her. They
are impressed by her air of elegance. Beyond these sparse
statements the reader is given no details about their
figure, their height, their hair, or their facial features.
No mention is made of their mannerisms or the tone of their voice. Only indirect reference is made to their clothing. Anna is said to have a beautiful new dress to wear on Christmas Day, and because she is the wealthy owner of the mill one may assume by implication that it would be of fine fabric and fashionable design. Anna Akimovna is referred to by her lawyer friend in the only real description of her that appears in the story. Yet it is a description which says more for the impression she gives to him than for her actual appearance. Lysevich, in speaking of her, says:

I adore her...I love her, but not because I am a man and she is a woman. When I am with her I always feel as though she belongs to some third sex, and I to a fourth, and we float away together into the domain of the subtlest shades, and there we blend into the spectrum... (A Woman's Kingdom, p. 24).

One understands here that Anna is not being seen and interpreted through her physical qualities but through her spiritual being, which creates an essence apart from the limitations of her sex. She is good-natured and considerate of those around her, and particularly is she capable of great sympathy and understanding for the members of her household as well as for the families and workers connected with her mill.

In the same way Nadya is not a woman who is presented pictorially. Whatever she is physically is not the issue in the author's mind. One does know that she is ordinarily high-spirited and gay in behavior and that her fiancé is
proud of her. Only when the fact that she is a woman affects her outlook on life and her emotional reaction to her situation does her sex receive any particular emphasis in the story.

It is interesting to note that lesser women within the two stories are more graphically described in contrast to the heroines. In *A Woman's Kingdom*, Anna Akimovna's maid Masha, is given many lines of description throughout the story, so that one knows that she is quite beautiful with an abundance of magnificent red hair and a complexion that goes with it harmoniously. She is small and slender. Walking with little steps, her whole mode of action is one of delicate grace. Besides being physically beautiful, Masha is clever, gentle and devoted. Although general statements are made of her as well, it is still much easier to picture Masha than her mistress. The reader is already sufficiently familiar with a red head's complexion to have some idea what to expect when he reads the statement that Masha had a complexion that "goes with her hair." It could, of course, be marred by a crowd of freckles but from the context of the story, as Anna Akimovna is describing the attributes of the young lady, one gathers from the warmth of her speech that Anna's admiration is based only on an example of perfect beauty.

In *Betrothed* such minor characters as Nadya's grandmother and mother are both pictured more clearly than is
Nadya herself. The grandmother is said to be very stout. She is a plain old lady with bushy eyebrows and a little moustache. From the fact that she often speaks loudly and with great authority, one can imagine her general deportment as one of determination and domination. The mother is a fair haired woman, small, tightly laced in, and appears quite young and spirited. Although Chekhov has been sparing in these descriptions, he has still given more attention to the appearance of the lesser characters than to the protagonists. Not only will this attention to minor characters be noticed in these two stories but in several others as well. In this way Chekhov has divided his people into two groups -- those whom the reader knows through the graphic details of their physical being and those who are known through their emotions or thoughts. In each case the two methods of description are rarely developed to an equal extent within the same character. As a result, the psychology of the primary character is thrown into sharp relief against individuals who are made real in an entirely different way. With the protagonists the reader's attention is focused on a thinking, feeling individual, set in an atmosphere that is considerably simplified by descriptions which deal with the more concrete and visual facts. Of the eight stories, only *A Dreary Story* contains anything like an attempt to create a visual as well as a psychological picture of the hero. But it should be remembered that it is the chief
character, Nikolay Stepanovitch, who gives the reader whatever details are to be gained about his appearance and status and as such they are highly subjective and even then are far from complete.

Chekhov has given more attention to the heroes of his stories than he has to the two women mentioned. Yet in the case of the men as well, the information is scanty and comes to the reader piecemeal. Of the six men three of them are known to be tall and strongly built. Two of them are physically weak and are living out the last days of their lives. From all other indications it may be assumed that they are withered and slight. Bishop Pyotr is described in the following manner after his illness has progressed almost to its end:

After an hour or so of haemorrhage the bishop looked much thinner, paler, and wasted; his face looked wrinkled, his eyes looked bigger, and he seemed older, shorter, and it seemed to him that he was thinner, weaker, more insignificant than anyone, that everything that had been had retreated far, far away and would never go on again or be repeated. (The Bishop, p. 359).

Bishop Pyotr and Nikolay Stepanovitch are men battling the infirmities of old age, and each one of them is facing the imminence of death. Nikolay Stepanovitch is aware as he goes about his usual duties that he has only six months longer to live, while the Bishop, though he knows he is ill, evidently does not see in the illness any mortal consequence. What the reader knows of the latter is limited
almost exclusively to the symptoms and effects of the illness. He is afflicted with increasing weakness and aches throughout his whole body. His breathing is labored, his throat is parched and each day he is feverish. Unable to sleep well, he compounds his illness by lack of rest.

In this infirmity Nikolay Stepanovitch shares the same hazards. He says of himself that if he were to describe the present manner of his life he would have to give a foremost place to the insomnia from which he has suffered during the past months, with the result that he too is considerably weakened and left a prey to depression and a general feeling of illness. Nikolay Stepanovitch goes further than any of the other characters in describing himself. Neither Misail Alexeyich nor Nikitin refer to themselves directly. Nikolay Stepanovitch reveals himself to be a man of a stooped, narrow physique, a bald head, false teeth and a tic douloureux.

He says too that his general expression is sad but that when he smiles his face is marked by a web of "aged-looking, deathly wrinkles." Since he is a teacher and his voice plays an important part in his profession, it is not surprising that Nikolay would mention that his voice has become harsh, dry, and monotonous with his advancing age and increasing illness.

Chekhov's total comment about Nikitin is contained in an observation by one of Nikitin's acquaintances that, despite his moustache and beard, Nikitin appears very young.
His appearance is much younger than Nikitin would prefer, as it turns out later in his own reaction to the observation. There is no indication of his height, strength, or build, or of the color of his hair, eyes, or complexion. Nor are any clues given so that these details may be deduced.

The reader is told of Misail Alexeyich by the character himself. He is tall and strong, strong enough for manual labor, which interests him more than intellectual pursuits. He mentions in a passing comment on his age that his hair is greying slightly at the temples. The reader is told about Misail's clothing but no extensive detail is given about Misail himself. The reader knows that despite the economic and social position of Misail's father, Misail himself is poorly dressed throughout the story except for the pair of blue serge trousers which he reserves for special occasions.

Clothing is mentioned specifically in reference to the characters of Andrey Yefimitch Ragin and Yavors Ivanich Terekov. Andrey Yefimitch, a big man with large hands and feet, the heavy coarse face of an overfed, intemperate innkeeper with small eyes and a large red nose, is dressed in a wrinkled old suit and a soft, unstarched shirt. His whole appearance is one of complete carelessness. Even though Andrey Yefimitch is large, he walks softly, almost cautiously. His voice, coming from so large a man, is pitched in a high, soft tenor range.
In contrast to the rumpled, neglected appearance of Andrey Yefimitch, Yahov Ivanich is always clean and neat in his manner of dress. He wears either a long jerkin of good cloth or a black sheepskin coat and, peculiarly enough, galoshes even when the weather is dry. Yahov Ivanich is another tall man, very handsome with his long beard hanging nearly to his waist, though his bushy eyebrows give his face a stern, even ill-natured, expression.

These men, as well as the women mentioned previously, are also set off by minor characters who are given more detailed descriptions. Several of the patients of Andrey Yefimitch are pictured more graphically than is Andrey himself. Such a description appears in reference to one patient, a gentleman by birth, and about the age of thirty-three:

I like his broad face with its high cheekbones, always pale and unhappy, and reflecting, as though in a mirror, a soul tormented by conflict and long-continued terror. His grimaces are strange and abnormal, but the delicate lines traced on his face by profound, genuine suffering show intelligence and sense, and there is a warm and healthy light in his eyes. I like the man himself, courteous, anxious to be of use, and extraordinarily gentle to everyone except Nikita... (Ward No. 6, p. 32-33).

Again, in The Teacher of Literature, Nikitin's sister-in-law Varya is introduced as:

It was always Varya who started the arguments at tea; she was good-looking, handsomer than Masha, and was considered the cleverest and most cultured person in the house, and she behaved with dignity and severity, as an eldest daughter should who has taken the place of her
No such completeness of detail is to be found in Chekhov's main characters. There is no tracing of the lines of suffering and unhappiness upon their faces, no interpretation of behavior and manner. It is impossible to visualize the appearance of any of these characters by such features as build, height, coloration, expression or manner. Such terms as "sickly-looking," "a lady," "no longer quite young," only add to the indistinct impression left with the reader. Yet the characters do have individuality. That they are different from the minor characters who are endowed with a greater degree of physical detail is evident, but this difference cannot be said to exist merely in appearances. The depiction of these heroes and heroines rests on other features than the mere physical. The backgrounds of Chekhov's heroes and heroines are equally various. They represent several different origins. Three of them are the children of the intelligentsia, two of them come from parents belonging to the lower working class, two were small property owners belonging to the middle class. Though one, Nikolay Stepanovich, remains a mystery as far as parental status is concerned, it is probable that he came from a class which would be able to give him the necessary economic and social standing to reach his eventual eminence.

Of the three whose fathers were of the intelligentsia,
Misail Alexeyich's was an architect for the town in which he lived. His wife had died several years before, but he remained in his large house with his daughter acting as his hostess and housekeeper while he was responsible for designing all the homes and governmental buildings of the town. At the beginning of this story, Misail Alexeyich lives with his father and sister and after a quarrel within the family over the son's occupation, the latter moves out of his father's house to live across town with his old nurse. Bishop Pyotr's family had belonged to the clergy since the Christianization of Russia, or so it was said. His father had been a deacon, his grand-father had been a priest, and his great-grandfather had been a deacon. The Bishop's mother, now an elderly woman living with her daughter and son-in-law, had lived in the same poor village from the time she was sixteen to the age of sixty. She had had nine children and now had forty grandchildren. The family, at the time Bishop Pyotr was a youth had been a happy one; all his memories were filled with his mother's tenderness and devotion to him and the deep interest of all the family in the church.

The father of Andrey Yefimitch had been a doctor of medicine and a surgeon, and under the influence of the ideas of the sixties had strongly objected to his son's leanings toward the church. Since the sixties were filled with a movement advocating active social service, of
casting away the meditative, critical and inactive spirit that had spread through the intelligentsia, the reader may visualize Andrey Yefimitch's father as rejecting any contemplative withdrawal from positive activity in the world of society. Andrey states to his postmaster friend Mihail Averyanitch that his father "made him" go into medicine rather than allow him the intellectual life he might have followed.

Anna Akimovna and Nikitin had both had very poor childhoods, and in the case of the latter, a very unhappy one. While Nikitin had been orphaned --- one never learns anything about his family --- Anna Akimovna had lived with her parents in the squalid workingmen's tenements. Her uncle, the owner of the mill in which her father was employed, owned a beautiful big mansion. Her father and uncle had never gotten along very well with each other because of her father's happy, carefree, and haphazard attitude toward money, respectability, and power. It was this lack of seriousness which alienated his brother's trust and formed such a direct contrast to the miserly, relentless, and pious character of the mill owner. Eventually, as the years went by, the uncle relented in his attitude toward his relatives and saw to it that Anna Akimovna was educated by a governess, that she was brought up as an elegant lady, and that she was made his heir to the mill as well as his private property.

Great-grandmother Terekhov, referred to in *The Murder*,
had built the tavern which passed down through the succeeding generations of her family, resting finally in the hands of her great-grandson Yahov Ivanich. The Terekhov family had always been extremely pious and given to independent thinking on matters of faith. It was not surprising then that each generation had discovered its own direction, and that it was in many cases different from that of the generation previous. The great-grandmother had been an Old Believer while her son had become orthodox, eventually refusing meat and imposing silence upon himself in his old age. His two sons had been orthodox as well, but their sons, the generation of Yahov Ivanich and his cousin Matvei, had battled their own way to faith, Matvei through extreme practices of worship to orthodoxy and Yahov Ivanich from orthodoxy to services independent of the supervision of the church. After Yahov's wife had died, he continued to live in and run the tavern with his sister, his daughter, and his cousin, Matvei.

It was Nadya's grandmother, too, who owned the property which supported her grand-daughter, her daughter-in-law (Nadya's mother), and herself. Except that Nadya's mother had not loved him, Nadya's father is never mentioned in the story. The other member of the household was the son, Sasha, of a distant relative of the grandmother. It was the grandmother who was the person of most importance in the household, not only because she provided for them all, but because
it was she who was the more forceful of the individuals under her roof.

Some parents of this group of eight characters belong to the intelligentsia, but the majority of the parents belong to two different classes. Here again, the bond between the characters is not to be found in similarity of family position, even though some few such ties do exist. Any close comparison must rest on a more fundamental basis. If it does not exist in physical appearance, age, or parental background, it must be sought elsewhere.

In economic status one at last discovers some common elements. From an economic standpoint, all of the eight characters are financially independent, and if not in a state of affluence at the time, the reader meets them, at least they have known comfort and security in the past, either through their own efforts or the efforts of their families before them. Nikitin has had to fight his way up from the poverty of his childhood but through the years he has made his own way to his high school position as literature teacher. As he explains it, he has worked hard for his rewards and gains and he feels that he justly deserves to enjoy them as they come to him. Whatever happiness is contained within these rewards, it is rightly his to taste to the full. Anna Akimovna, though familiar with poverty in the early years of her life too, was raised out of the misery of want and hard work to a position of wealth and position
as owner of her uncle's mill. She has risen from a common millworker's daughter to the Lady Bountiful of the very friends and fellow workingmen of her father. She is looked upon with a mixture of awe and resentment. With money and influence at her disposal she is cut off from the ordinary cares of everyday survival and need entertain no thought for the necessities of life. She may well be the wealthiest of all the characters in this group.

Certainly more rich than his neighbors is Yahov Ivanich. Matvei, his cousin, speculates with his cohorts on the value of the property which Yahov administers and which he, Matvei, feels is rightly half his. They conclude that it is no little amount, despite the frugal behavior of Yahov and his sister. Yahov Ivanich is disliked by his neighbors and the friends of his cousin not so much for his money in the face of their debts and needs, as for the fact that he believes differently than they do, that he is strong-minded and independent in his practices of worship and his thought. Among the folk of the community the Terekhov's are known as the "Godlies" and the people spare no opportunity to taunt and ridicule these "Godlies," who appear so strange and remote from them.

Bishop Pyotr and Andrey Yefimitch are comfortably supported by the institutions with which they are affiliated. Both live in quarters provided by those institutions, the Bishop living in the Pankratievsky Monastery and Andrey
Yefimitch staying at one of the cottages connected with the hospital. Since the church provides for the Bishop's earthly needs he is not concerned with them in the least. And of course, the position of suffragan bishop is of enough influence, not only within the church but within society as well, to insure great respect and awe among all who come in contact with him. Andrey Yefimitch has provided for all his needs to a sufficient degree so that he need not worry about a judicious adherence to a faithful administration of his medical duties. In the course of the story, he apparently remains free from the threat of removal from his position, barring of course the very situation which rises to hound him to ruin.

Nadya, though dependent upon her grandmother is able to find the means to leave her home to pursue her own life. How this is possible is never made absolutely clear, but it may be assumed that the grandmother may still have contributed to at least part of her support. The grandmother owns rows of shops in the market place, and owns as well the old-fashioned house and garden in which her family lives. Hers was a respectable provincial family, able to entertain their friends graciously, and respected enough socially to have matched Nadya to the son of the village priest. Dependent for a time too was Misail Alexeyich who finally broke from the financial ease he had known while living with his father to earn his own way in the world of the common workman. Unable to hold a job -- or at least the type of job which
his father had chosen for him -- he lost all financial
security as well as social standing with his removal from
his father's house and influence. Of all the eight, Misail
Alexeyich loses heavily in his rebellious action; he is
often penniless and hungry and for a long time is scorned by
society because of his lack of steady employment, his playing
of billiards in the cheapest taverns, and several appearances
before the police -- all this, incidently, before he could
make his own way.

As the hero of A Dreary Story, Nikolay Stepanovitch
once enjoyed a revered position and the economic security
which accompanied it, even though he and his family are at
the time the story begins besieged by humiliating and degrad-
ing debts. They live in a constant effort to feign an air
of luxury and liberality in the presence of guests and chance
visitors. But in the actual course of the story at least
the social position of the family remains secure. Nikolay
Stepanovitch is well known and highly respected by the most
aristocratic persons, having been intimately acquainted with
distinguished men of learning for twenty-five to thirty
years. The professor is a man of wide fame, yet unable to
pay the back wages of the footman.

These eight protagonists represent in equal numbers
both the gentry and the middle class. The mill owner (Anna),
the high school teacher (Nikitin), the tavern owner (Yahov),
and the shop owner (Nadya's grandmother) all belong to the
middle class; while the Bishop (Pyotr), the doctor (Andrey),
the painter (Misail), and the medical school professor
(Nikolay) belong to the gentry class. Although each of the
eight shares with the others relative freedom from financial
worries and each of the eight is well established, the
characterization of them on this basis alone is not such that
they are unmistakably of one type.

In fact, none of these criteria -- age, physical fea-
tures, heritage, or economic status -- establish any real
homogeneity among these characters; nor do these criteria
allow the reader to visualize the characters in any detail.
Compared to the minutely detailed characterizations of such
Russian contemporaries as Turgenev and Tolstoy, or such
western European ones as Zola and Dickens, Chekhov con-
tributes virtually nothing toward the pictorialization of his
characters. Tolstoy was particularly able in the expression
of external appearances. It was typical in him to reveal
through external appearance many psychological processes,
so that physical traits correspond to traits of soul and
mind.

A delicate, attractive figure symbolizes the
esthetic sensitivity of his female characters;
the well-rounded head, the strong back and
shoulders, stand for the more complete, rounded-
off male character; the puffed-out chest betrays
inward hollowness, hasty movements indicate
mental restitiveness; a lax body of a woman re-
presents a soul lost in the duties of daily life.12

12 As pointed out by Rene Fueblop-Miller, Fyodor
Dostoevsky: Insight, Faith, and Prophecy (New York, 1950),
p. 64.
Turgenev's method of characterization was referred to by Henry James:

An idea with him is such and such an individual, with such and such a nose and chin, such and such a hat and waistcoat, bearing the same relation to it as the look of a printed word does to its meaning.  

These two novelists, Tolstoy and Turgenev, chronicle every feature of their figures, every daily activity, and that expose every moment and detail of their lives to the public scrutiny of the reader. Chekhov, by contrast, does not depend upon such a particularized view to place before his audience characters equally alive and seemingly individual. His methods do not involve the listing of physical features, the cataloguing of personal belongings, the diary-like accounts of each day's passing, the scrutinizing of environmental and heritary influences. In comparing various protagonists, one finds that Chekhov does not give adequate detail for such comparison. When similarities may be found, based on a common physical trait or activity of some kind, it may also be discovered that other traits seem to negate any attempt to class the figures within a single type.

Such a lack of conformity, based on physical, social, and economic factors, does not form the true basis for similarity among Chekhov's protagonists. Yet a pronounced similarity does exist and impresses itself on any reader

13 Quoted by Fuelep-Miller, p. 74.
who reads these particular stories. Since the source of this kinship does not make itself known in the usual methods of factual characterization, it must rest in other aspects of the character -- perhaps either, in the situations in which the characters are to be found or in their relationship to that situation, a relationship created by their inner personality.
III. The Hero in His Environment

In saying that the mature stories of Anton Chekhov are distinctive in their revelation of a particular mood, one implies that that mood is composed of elements common to all the works. It is in fact the total contribution and integration of these elements which compose the general quality called mood. Characterization, if it is to contribute directly to the creation of a particular mood, will exhibit mutual components in all the stories distinguished by that mood.

To show that characterization is used as a primary source of influence upon the creation of the Chekovian mood, the eight stories in this study have been analyzed in order to isolate the common elements, distinctive and unique, from which the mood of the stories arises. So far this analysis has dealt with the external features of characterization—age, physical appearance, and social and economic status—and it has been found that such external treatment has been minimized by the author to include only the most sketchy details. It is obvious that the strength of the characterization lies in a method independent of such considerations.

As has been said before, one may conclude that since Chekhov's characters represent a variety of physical types and descriptions, Chekhov considered such information of little importance to his main purpose. He was interested primarily
in communicating to the reader, if not the sense of conventional heroes and villains in conflict, or standard images, the pattern of human existence lived with mounting tension. This tension is an internal condition, going on within the individuals themselves and determining not only their adjustment to or acceptance of their physical world but their ability to adjust to that world. It is a tension which concerns the soul first of all, and affects, or is affected by, the environment insofar as that environment represents the source of conflict. It should be kept in mind that the significance of the environment lies not so much in its physical reality as in its psychological impact upon the protagonist.

Chekhov's world is predominantly that of the middle-class in the late nineteenth century Russia. In his tales the characters most commonly are troubled intellectuals who talk incessantly about their ideals and their vices, their longings and frustrations. They are men whose will-power often falls short of the hopes and ambitions they have entertained for themselves; they are women fresh from reading the sermons of Ibsen, the New Women whose experiments in social freedom or sexual equality leave them touched with disillusionment. For the typical Chekhov tale or play is about people who find themselves in a trap, or a box. There is the woman who hopes to improve her lot by leaving her dull husband and going off with her lover to some resort. There is the couple who hope that life will be better in the
country than in the city; or the sisters who plan to escape from the provinces and go to Moscow. But nothing happens, or at least nothing happens as they planned; and the whole world still seems to make no sense to them. They continue to be tormented by their doubts, and above all by an atmosphere of suspense, of waiting for something, which reflects the era in which Chekhov wrote, the last decades before the great Russian revolution.

What a man does with his life is dependent upon many influences -- his family background, his response to his surroundings, his own desires and aptitudes, the desires and demands of those persons around him, and certainly the element of chance or accident. All act and interact upon the individual as he moves toward the choice of his life's work. To analyze fully each of these generalized influences is impossible here, but one must be aware always that Chekhov's protagonists, as they appear in these particular stories, are portrayed after this process of assimilation has taken place.

The reader is introduced to five out of the eight protagonists after they have found themselves unable to break away from the unhappy consequences of the lives they lead. The heroes of Ward No. 6, A Dreary Story, The Bishop, The Murder and the heroine of A Woman's Kingdom have been trapped by their occupations and environments and have little choice except to regret that they are not able to pursue their
most intense desires. Nikolay Stepanovitch (A Dreary Story) and Bishop Pyotr (The Bishop) are already old men at the beginning of their respective stories and now they realize that even though their lives have been successful and full of activity, they have not known true happiness. With life coming to an end, there is no chance of their finding, or setting out all over again to search for, that happiness. Andrey Yefimitch (Ward No. 6) and Yahov Ivanich (The Murder), having pursued their everyday routines through many years, all the while aware of their dissatisfaction and doubt, are presented in situations which are created by the mismanagement of their lives and which eventually bring about their ruin. Although still young, Anna Akimovna (A Woman's Kingdom) is already helpless to change the course of her life, and can escape only through her imagination. The other three characters are presented in various stages of revolt against the regimen of their daily lives. Nadya Shumin (Bethrothed) appears in a quandary throughout the major portion of her story, but by its end she has come to a decision which promises her freedom. The reader is introduced to Misail Alexeyich (My Life) as he makes his break from his father's house and the parental expectations of his future, and from then on follows the course of his search for acceptance and happiness in an unfamiliar mode of life. The third story of this group, the account of Nikitin's marriage (The Teacher of Literature) and his eventual outburst
against it, reveals a gradual disillusionment with a teacher's way of life and the increasing realization that only through revolt can he escape such a life. Regardless of their acceptance or rejection of the course of their lives, all of the eight protagonists find enough wrong in their existence to be thrown into a state of dejection and disgust. This state or condition remains the crucial point in a consideration of their environment.

It might have been possible that all of these eight people would end in the same occupational pigeon hole, but Chekhov has not let this be the case. Again, the similarity does not exist in the particularities of an exact activity for among this group of people there is a doctor, a clergyman, two teachers, a student, a laborer, a mill owner, and a tavern owner. As a result of such differences in occupation one would expect that their training would be dissimilar as well. Yet here, they deserve a closer look. The doctor, the clergyman, the teachers, and the student have all had more than a minimum education. With the exception of one of the teachers, all have been to the university and it is possible that he might have gone too, though the nature of his teaching duties in the high school would not have required that of him. Even the mill owner has been tutored by governesses. While Chekhov does not mention the nature or extent of the education, it would probably consist of more than the usual grade, school-high school
activity. Though the laborer and the tavern owner probably had the least formal education of the group, even they have had some specific training. So here, out of eight people, at least six of them are well educated.

Education has left a particular mark on those who were exposed to it and who profited by it, so that these six at least have certain abilities and sensibilities in common. In the first place, they share a kind of enthusiasm or desire which encourages them to go on with their intellectual pursuits. Just how far this interest and predilection has been carried is evident in their subsequent restlessness and dissatisfaction. They have learned to expect more from their lives than their everyday activities have provided. Those who have been highly educated have discovered that they miss the humanizing influence of other people, that their specialized activities have cut them off from the joys and sorrows of the average person. In addition, their education has either made these characters dissatisfied with the lack of intellectual stimulation around them and in some cases (My Life, The Teacher of Literature) made them disgusted with the theorizing of the intelligentsia and their lack of constructive activity.

Mikhail Alexeyich, Nikolay Stepanovitch, Andrey Yefimitch and Nadya Shumin are active in the exercise of their intellect. These characters take great interest in reading and in discussing points of philosophy, ethics and theology.
Nadya, though she is eager to enjoy such pursuits, is young and acquainted with them primarily through the influence of Sasha (her friend who also lived with Nadya's grandmother). Sasha, in urging Nadya to break away from the family's influence and expectations for her future by going to the university, is similar in his ideas to the student Pyotr Sergeyevitch Trofimov, of *The Cherry Orchard*. In Trofimov's conversations with Anya, he speaks eloquently and idealistically of breaking with the past, saying

...It is clear that to begin to live in the present we must expiate our past, we must break with it; and we can expiate it only by suffering, by extraordinary unceasing labour..."

Sasha urges Nadya, in much the same way as he pleads with her to leave the "stagnant, grey, sinful" life around her to "help transform the unthinking animal crowd into individuals who know what they are living for." (*Betrothed*, p. 367).

But while Nadya Shumlin is being encouraged to explore new worlds, to use her mind to transform her life and the lives around her, the three men mentioned above have already experienced and found enjoyment in the pursuit of the "wider" world. Indeed, it is just because of this enjoyment that they find themselves at odds with their everyday lives. They are beginning to discover that their knowledge

of a more intellectual world only intensifies their dissatisfaction with the narrow, mundane activities which demand their attention.

Andrey Yefimitch, the doctor in charge of Ward No. 6, loves intelligence and honesty with great devotion. To him the intellect is the most important thing in life, to be developed and cherished above all other things. He says of it that

"...everything in this world is insignificant and uninteresting except the higher manifestations of the human mind. Intellect draws a sharp line between the animals and man, suggests the divinity of the latter, and to some extent even takes the place of the immortality which does not exist. Consequently the intellect is the only possible source of enjoyment..." (Ward No. 6, p. 54).

To add enjoyment to his life, Andrey Yefimitch applies his mind to the reading of many books on philosophy and history. Wishing ardently for the stimulation of conversation with kindred souls, and finding none around him, he has to be content with his books. Significantly enough, he finds nothing in his profession to encourage him to read its professional journals regularly. As a result, he keeps up with only one medical journal. Science, he is reported to have said, does not really interest him; his natural bent is in neither the direction of science in general nor in medicine in particular.

On the other hand, Nikolay Stepanovitch is interested only in science. He believes it to be the most important
and essential thing in the life of man. He has no interest in philosophy or theology; all his energies go into the teaching of and the encouragement of interest in science. He is as dedicated to the subject as Andrey Yefimitch is uninterested in it. Misail Alexeyich, though not enthusiastically committed to any particular study, has an interest and leaning toward intellectual pleasures which he names as the theatre and reading. He has often imagined himself a teacher, a doctor, or a writer, but as dreams they have never been realized. On one occasion he comments that though he has been employed in so-called intellectual jobs, he believes that he has probably never encountered real intellectual work. He is not sure that he would have recognized it had he been faced with it, nor is he sure that he is capable of such work.

In these four people, there is a common predilection for reading and thought. By training and natural preference they have been used to dealing with ideas. Although their interests are not in accord -- science vs. philosophy, for instance -- the nature of these interests is such that they require a contemplative and inquiring mind. And this is what each of these people can share with the other. The reader learns through concrete statements about the interests of the characters, even though four of them are not discussed in the exact context of their intellectual preferences.
One of these four, Anna Akimovna, the rich heiress, reads and enjoys stimulation ideas and philosophical conversation. She discusses with her lawyer friend the meaning and purpose of living and looks forward to their occasional discussions of literature. In a scene with Lysevlokh in which he is describing the details of a novel by Maupassant, it turns out that she has already read it and is familiar with it. But she is enthralled by his manner of bringing the words alive again, in adding color and vivacity to the story that she had read. Of the other characters, similar hints must be noticed in order to gain some insight into their intellectual pursuits. For example, Bishop Pyotr, being ill and tied down to a tight schedule of ecclesiastical duties, cannot pursue his personal pleasures, whatever they may be. Chekhov does not mention what they would be, now that Pyotr is a Bishop. Yet the reader knows that in the past he has been a teacher of Greek and has been a devoted student and teacher for many of his earlier years. It is also known that while abroad, the Bishop had had time to read and write, things long since denied him because of the pressure of his religious duties.

Yakov Ivanich is probably the least inclined of all toward any intellectual pursuit beyond the study of the Bible. In this he excels, but his fanatical obsession with order for the sake of order bespeaks more for a limited mind rather than one which welcomes new and different ideas. Nikitin is
another character who would break with the intellectual life and find a place for himself in the laboring forces. In this respect he is akin to Misail Alexich.

In varying degrees then, it may be said that the characters under consideration are able to enjoy intellectual pleasures of some description. Whether they have had extensive scholastic training or not, they have all been familiar with books and reading. Ideas which deal with philosophy, science, literature, and theology are not foreign to them, even though individually they may be more familiar with one field than another.

With the suggestion of kinship in matters of the mind, one arrives at a consideration of what these people do with their minds. What have they chosen as their work and just how successful have they been? If all these characters had chosen the same job or the same situation, this fact would strengthen their perceived similarity. But again it must be remembered that they represent several situations, several occupations, and as will be seen, several reactions toward their situations. Though it cannot be said that the situations in themselves permit the drawing of any generalization about the group, it can be said that such a basis exists within the individuals themselves.

Unfortunately for their subsequent peace of mind nearly all of these people are spending their days at work not of their own preference. Andrey Yefimitch had had intentions
of going into the clergy when he finished high school.  
But instead, he trained himself in medicine, giving in to 
the insistence of his father, who was influenced by the 
idea of activity being dedicated to the good of society, an 
idea very strong in the sixties. Medicine as an occupation 
was thought to be more in keeping with the idea of "being a 
citizen," of working for the people in an active, construc-
tive way rather than withdrawing into the contemplative life 
of the clergy.  

Following his medical training, Andrey Yefimitch was 
made responsible for a county hospital. When he took over 
his duties at the hospital he worked zealously to keep up 
with the work. He spent many long hours seeing each patient, 
prescribing medication and performing surgery. Even before 
his coming, the hospital had been plagued by flagrant 
irregularities and malpractices, in addition to the presence 
of unbelievable filth and stench in the wards, insects and 
rodents that crawled everywhere, a desperate lack of surgi-
cal equipment and theft from patients by the superintendent 
and the housekeeper. Most of these irregularities and 
negligence failed to upset Andrey Yefimitch, however, and 
though he did ask the nurses and attendants not to sleep in 
the wards, much remained the same after his arrival. Be-
cause of the increasing burden of work and the continued 
lack of assistance, even in the face of such desperate need 
for it, the doctor came to the point where he seldom visited
the wards -- seeing patients only for very short periods, during which he confined himself to asking only brief questions and mechanically prescribing the administration of castor oil or volatile ointment. He had long since given up any private practice of his own and rarely had anything at all to do with surgery. His activity throughout the story is typified by an inevitable feeling of monotony and the uselessness of trying to keep up with his duties. Foremost in his mind is the thought of escaping to his own quarters to pursue his favorite reading. His days are one long attempt to stay clear of the demands of the hospital and to preserve his quiet schedule of reading and thought. Only in conversation with one of his friends, and later, with one of his patients does he make any departure from his usual habits.

Similarly, Bishop Pyotr, the ailing cleric, has long been committed to a rigidly set routine of habit and duty. Because of his disregard of reading, and consequently of all his school work, Bishop Pyotr as a child up to the age of fifteen had been a great source of concern for his family. Illness and his underdeveloped state prompted them to consider discontinuing his schooling and placing him in a shop instead. But by the time he was in his mid-twenties, the Bishop had already attended the seminary, had taught Greek for three years there, and had gone on to become a monk. For a short time before taking his degree at the
seminary, he had been a school inspector. At thirty-two, he had become rector of the seminary and not long after, he was consecrated archimandrite. Illness forced him to heed the medical advice to live abroad in a warmer, less severe climate. While living in the south, he conducted services in a new church, and was allowed time enough to read and even to write. He was always to look back on these eight years as peaceful, happy times, reminding him of the way his life might have been.

After Bishop Pyotr was recalled to Russia and made a suffragan bishop, he found himself buried in mountains of paper work involving the rating of and ranking of lesser clergymen. Besides this he had increased duties -- special services, visitations, the receipt of petitions and charities, over and beyond the regular services prescribed by the church. More and more the Bishop now feels cut off from personal contact with other people because of the position and power which he holds. More and more he has become convinced that he would much rather have remained a lowly parish priest. He would gladly exchange the remote and lonely life of a bishop for the human contact and friendship so much a part of the life of a priest. It is his position and rank which hold him prisoner.

This same prison of rank has confined Anna Akimovna as heiress and mill owner. The daughter of a workingman, born to the ways of poverty and human struggle, Anna was taken by
her uncle to be educated as a lady. Her life, as the heir of her uncle, is confined to the austerely beautiful house on the hill where she distributes gifts and money to the poor and accepts the visits and greetings of workers, school boys, relatives of the household, old friends of her uncle, petitioners, and officials of the business. She knows herself to be completely unprepared to run her uncle's business. She has no interest in nor understanding of it, though she feels akin to the workers and their difficulties. She is perfectly aware of the fact that she is being cheated by many of the people in managerial positions under her, as well as by her legal advisors. But she is used to it and because she does not know how to correct the situation, how to choose worthy people to fill the positions and oversee the work, she is forced to overlook it. Each day finds her wandering from room to room, wondering what to do with herself. Knowing that she is without real use to anyone, she wishes fervently that she had been able to remain in the working class where she could have married and had a family like other women. This seems denied her by the fact that she is wealthy and stationed above the people who appeal to her the most. Hers is the uneasy position of being a possessor of wealth but at the same time being a member of a poorer class by heritage. She feels this discrepancy and is aware that those around her are scornful of her because of it.

Yahov Ivanich is scorned by those who knew him too,
but he is not protected by a position which would encourage others to conceal their scorn in shows of humility and awe. As the proprietor of the tavern along a virtually abandoned post road, Yahov provides tea, hay, oats, and flour to the peasants and local landlords. He also sells spiritous liquors on occasion but has to be circumspect in doing so since he does not have the required license. The business exists almost by itself, with the casual supervision of Yahov's sister and daughter, because Yahov himself is completely absorbed in carrying out the rituals of the church. He is obsessed with the idea of order, not order for the purpose of increasing his own effectiveness in the eyes of the church or even for the meaning which the ritual contains within it, but order for the sake of order alone. A man with strong convictions, he has made himself a subject of ridicule among his neighbors and has encouraged by his attitude their increasing hostility toward him. When Yahov Ivanich begins to waver in his convictions, when he becomes a prey to recurring doubts and has to strive constantly with himself to remain steadfast in his religious practices, he faces defeat and ruin. Like the four persons mentioned before, he eventually recognizes the choice he made in his past life and the fact that he has misjudged its significance.

The following three characters are likewise determined by and dissatisfied with their surroundings but carry their dissatisfaction one step further to actual revolt. They too
are controlled by tradition, family expectations, and training, like the figures above. At the time the reader is introduced to the three, they have realized just how confined they are by external limitations and are in the process of gathering their courage and determination to revolt against those limitations. In one case (*My Life*) the decision is made early in the story and the reader follows the struggle of Misail to adjust to and win acceptance in others to his new way of life. In the second case (*Petrothed*), Nadya Shumin's mental distraction and confusion about what she must decide to do with her life involve the reader as well throughout the greatest part of the account. In *The Teacher of Literature* a young man achieves what he believes to be his greatest happiness, and then through the course of the story experiences with Nikitin the final rejection of that happiness. In all three stories the same despondency and restlessness that mark the other stories appear again, but in these three move the characters on to revolt against their environments. Not only is the spirit of revolt here, as in some of the other stories, but the act as well.

Nikitin has been teaching literature in the high school for the past two years. Before that he had been a poor struggling student living in cheap rooms, with no money and no relations to whom he could look for support or assistance. But as a teacher he lives with a secure income in one of the best provincial towns. After his marriage he considers
himself completely happy with every possible comfort that a man can hope for. Everything about his life pleases and satisfies him; he is content to savor his happiness with each passing day. But the spell is broken when he acknowledges that he is saturated with his happiness, that it is pallid and stifling. He wants to break away to an entirely different kind of life in which he can become completely engrossed. In addition to not understanding children, he has no ability to teach nor does he teach the right things. He is not interested in his subject; he does not understand the significance of what he teaches. These facts weigh heavily on Nikitin until he can think of nothing but escape.

Whereas Nikitin is filled with only the desire to be free of a life that seems so incongruous with his "passionate, poignant longing to be in that other world, to work himself at some factory, or big workshop, to address big audiences, to write, to publish, to raise a stir, to exhaust himself, to suffer," (The Teacher of Literature, p. 270) Misail Alexeyich and Nadya Shumin translate that desire into action and make the break from the social demands on their lives to follow their own preferences. Misail Alexeyich, the son of nobility, is expected to go into some government office or some equally respected profession. His educational training had not been very complete; he is removed from school, after the fourth class, and coached for the fifth class in an effort to get him through. His
attempts to find a suitable situation result in the same outcome. At the suggestion of friends and relatives he has served for a time in a pharmacy, in the army, and in various government offices but he is uninterested and resentful and does not stay long in any one place. His activity in scholastic and official spheres has required neither mental application, talent, special qualification, nor creative impulse. It seems to him that such activity is a waste of time for him. His father's efforts to convince him of his rightful responsibility to the family in taking such office jobs is of no avail, and Misail finally renounces his inheritance and responsibility to his father in order to take up his life as a laborer. At least by working in a physical capacity he can contribute something constructive to the life around him, something that might counteract the inefficiency, dishonesty and indifference of the intellectuals in his town. With this idea and purpose in mind Misail Alexeyich, after trying various jobs, including a brief period as a farmer, becomes finally a painter and contractor. By the story's end people of the town have grown used to him in his role as workman and no longer think it strange for a man of his rank to be seen "carrying paint and putting in windows."

Similarly, Nadya Shumin's decision made as a revolt against her betrothal, is accepted by her family once the initial shock is over, yet she feels constrained not to bring
added embarrassment to her grandmother and mother by appearing in public and again arousing gossip. Up to the time she takes Sasha’s advice on the eve of her wedding to leave home for the university, Nadya has allowed herself to follow the accepted pattern of all provincial daughters. At twenty-three she was engaged to the son of the village priest. With the approbation of both the families and their confident expectations, she had gone through the usual activities of a young woman about to marry. She had entertained her fiancé and his father each day, had been gracious, attentive, respectful, and decorously expectant. She had visited her future home with her young man, moving from room to room, inspecting each bit of furnishing, listening quietly, dutifully, to his enthusiastic comments. She had watched the preparations for her wedding taking place, had even been caught up at times in the mounting activity as the day came closer. But she begins to realize that something is wrong, that she is pretending expectation, pretending approval, pretending love. Her life, always anticipating marriage, is suddenly suspended in a precarious balance. What she thought she had always wanted is close at hand. Yet she does not want it now in this way. In fact she dreads it. This moment of indecision frightens and disturbs Nadya, and it is Sasha who fills it with alternative suggestions. Realizing finally that she has only a moment to decide, she chooses the hope Sasha holds out to her, and knowing full well that
she is taking a course which will shut out any hope of return to her present life, she rides off to the university.

Misail Alexeyich and Nadya are two of Chekhov's characters who turn wishes into deeds. Able to foresee and recognize the inherent boredom and futility, the waste and unhappiness which the present course of their lives will lead to, they reject it while there is still opportunity. They succeed, albeit not without sorrowful consequences, in taking another course more sensible and meaningful to them. The fate of Nikitin is left unanswered. Is he beyond the point of choosing another life or has he arrived at the moment when that decision must be made? The story does not go beyond this question but the nature of the choice is made clear, even though Nikitin might continue to live with the wrong one for the rest of his life. The point lies not so much in which way Nikitin chooses to live his life but in the fact that he finds himself in a position where he must make a choice.

Such a decision, for Nikolay Stepanovitch, has been made long ago; its validity has been substantiated throughout the long years of his teaching. Teaching has been his whole life. Once having chosen it as his profession, he prepared for it at the seminary and at the university. That he was a gifted lecturer was evident in the fame and widespread respect which he had gained. He had been named chevalier, privy councillor and been raised to the rank of
general. A member of every Russian university and three foreign universities as well, he is now emeritus professor in the medical sciences. He is highly respected and continually sought after by students and younger professors for his advice and assistance. Lecturing has always, until the advent of his illness, been highly enjoyable to him, and he had excelled in the ability to hold the rapt and enthusiastic attention of all his students. It is certainly not dissatisfaction with his work, nor the realization that what had once been within his power and is now rapidly slipping away because of his illness, which makes the last days of Nikolay Stepanovich miserable. It is rather an awareness that he lacks a proper measure of humaness which torments him.

These eight individuals are all intelligent human beings, given to intellectual pursuits and stimulated by books and learning; they have chosen work -- or work has been chosen for them -- which is in conflict with their desires or aptitudes. Depending upon the urgency of the conflict, it has been resolved by revolt or allowed to remain alive in the form of knowing dissatisfaction and despondency.

Though one cannot say that a repeated pattern emerges from what these people do any more than it emerges in what they look like, there does occur a reaction in the lives of these individuals which appears to be a consistent theme through all eight of them. That theme revolves around a
basic restlessness and disappointment in their lives. They have expected and anticipated certain dreams to be fulfilled and have lived to see them waste away in the lives they live. They wait and hope, until even hope seems useless. They find themselves longing for useful, productive activity, activity which will be humane and real and rewarding to the spirit. But life as they have either lived it or as it appears in the future, does not offer this promise. Only these two characters who seek an entirely new course of existence entertain any hope of finding happiness, but had they remained as they were, they too would have been bored and disillusioned. Chekhov does not isolate the man or woman from what he or she is doing since the emphasis of the story is not placed on what is being done, but rather on how the person reacts to and is influenced by the situation. The situation becomes important only as it calls forth a particular emotional response within the individual.

The interplay of external influences and the internal responses to those influences has created within these eight characters tensions and conflicts resulting in unhappiness of one kind or another. Those external influences have been discussed as education and training, parental expectations, occupational choice and the subsequent work. As far as education is concerned, the majority of these people are well grounded in formal academic training. While none, save perhaps one (Nikolay Stepanovitch, A Dreary Story),
could be considered brilliant, all are fairly intelligent, alert individuals whose minds are capable of entertaining thoughts beyond the mundane affairs of day-to-day existence. To most of them, parental authority and expectations are synonomous with tradition and the pressures of society and often run contrary to their personal ambitions and desires. As a result, these characters have chosen or have had chosen for them the occupation they should follow. Running contrary to their interests and abilities, the work has only proved boring, bewildering, and frustrating. Small wonder that the work itself ceases to be anything but a trap to individuals who are miscast in it or have failed to find there the ultimate hope of happiness.

The response to these external forces has, to a man, been negative. Whether the rebellion has been passive or active, these eight characters have rejected the lives which they lead by seeing in them the emptiness and waste which they contain. They are not deluded forever by material success and accomplishments, but know that life means, and should mean, more than wealth or fame or a "happy" marriage. Because of their acute sensitivity, they are able to see the discrepancy between what is and what should be or what they want to be. They have aspired to greater things, different goals, only to find that somewhere along the line those goals have eluded them. It is this common response to life—
whatever type of life it may be -- which may be called the unifying element of these eight individuals. It is a negative response, a crying out against the present course of life, not against life itself, but against the direction which it takes.

It is characteristic of Chekhov that his protagonists should not always be aware of the source of their dissatisfaction, not always be aware of the fact that they wish to break away from their present way of life. Had they always experienced this awareness, reality in Chekhov's stories would have been a mere over-simplification of the way life actually is. Chekhov has said\(^{15}\) that the obligation of a writer is to present a situation realistically, truthfully, and correctly, and that the most important task is in the presentation of the situation, not in the solving of the problem or problems arising from that situation. Consequently, Chekhov rarely solves the dilemma of his characters but merely presents the situations in which they exist. Here is the situation, here is the problem, and here is the individual in respect to that problem. Whether the individual will recognize his plight, will accept (even grudgingly) or reject it, or will be oblivious of it until it is too late to avoid the defeat that engulfs him -- all this depends on the individual's nature. But within each of these

\(^{15}\) Letter to A. S. Suvorin, dated October 27, 1888, appearing in Anton Chekhov, The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov, p. 57.
individuals is some measure of rebellion, some degree of resistance, and some quantity of negation. All may be found in each of these eight individuals investigated here. This basic characteristic either manifests itself overtly through a particular situation or is emphasized by that situation.
IV. The Hero Viewed Through His Soul

In his innumerable pictures of provincial Russian life, Chekhov shows a gallery of ordinary people doing ordinary things. Their days and nights revolve around monotonous activities which they pursue with empty regularity. All are sick to death of the same emptiness, the same routines, the same ideas and thoughts, the same words and gestures. And the Chekhovian heroes feel they will exist as non-entities after death just as they have in life: they do not profess, by virtue of towering moral struggles or violent pursuit of absolutes, the claim to immortality of a Hamlet, a Faust or a Don Juan. They feel no excitement in spending a rainy evening playing whist, or bickering with their wives or pursuing useless discussions about education and municipal affairs with local intellectuals. Chekhov shows how the weight of habit transforms life into a series of conditioned reflexes.

There is not a great soul among any of these Chekhovian characters. None is capable of heroic action, none can speak with firmness or authority. But they all suffer because their sensibilities are far from dead; they feel finely, if not greatly. And a complacent bourgeois who now and then strays in among Chekhov's characters, to accentuate their failure, serves as well to raise the question: What is the meaning of life?
Most of these characters are at a loss as to what to do with their lives though they are disgusted with the ends they have been pursuing. They are generally so passive that they appear to be complete failures. Yet because many have managed to attain an enviable social position, their failure is not so much a lack of material success as a lack of successful living. They all suffer from neurasthenia and deficiency of will power, the overall effect being one of acute unhappiness. In one way or another, these characters are all unhappy and the fault lies as much in their temperament as with their environment.

Nikolay Stepanovich (A Dreary Story) comes to the conclusion that he has never been really happy and that he knows nothing about life. His family and his home are completely strange to him; he remembers all that they had once meant to him, but he is unable to connect his present relationship with them to his former devotion. A sense of futility and despair envelops him completely and he knows himself to be a failure despite the fame and success that he has attained. His story is not the tragedy of old age but the tragedy of a life without central values. He cannot even stand by his ward in her time of need; painfully aware of what he cannot do, he fails with the one person who still means anything at all to him.

Anna Akimovna (A Woman's Kingdom), in an attempt to enter into the lively informal talk of the servant women
gathered in the kitchen, confesses her love for one of the foremen in her mill. Her mood is destroyed by the comments of her footman who treats her confession as a joke. He is amused at the idea of the foreman dining with her upper class friends in the elegance of her dining room. And in an instant Anna's illusion is shattered. She feels the pity of it and is disappointed with herself and with the footman. She cries for her lost happiness of but a moment ago, realizing that all her hopes for happiness are doomed. Only in her imagination may she enjoy any happiness of marriage; she is reminded of the dictates of reality by the amusement of a footman.

While Anna is only too aware of the course of her life, Andrey Yefimitch (Ward No. 6) is a long time in realizing the nature of his life though he finally comprehends the reason for his failure to achieve true happiness and contentment. Part of that realization comes through a statement made to him by one of his mental patients:

...in fact, you have seen nothing of life, you know absolutely nothing of it, and are only theoretically acquainted with reality; you despise suffering and are surprised at nothing for a very simple reason: vanity of vanities, the external and the internal, contempt for life, for suffering and for death, comprehension, true happiness... (Ward No. 6, p. 75).

Nikolay, Anna, and Andrey live out their unhappiness with increasing discouragement and hopelessness. As the nature of their lives becomes more clear to them, they
suffer more acutely from the implications that what they have become can never be changed simply because they are as they are. Whatever form their attempts at escape may take, the result is always the same; they find it impossible to disengage themselves from their inevitable misery and boredom. Their cry is summed up in Olga's attempt at hopeful-ness in *Three Sisters*:

The music is so gay, so confident, and one longs for life! O my God! Time will pass, and we shall go away for ever, and we shall be forgotten, our faces will be forgotten, our voices, and how many there were of us; but our sufferings will pass into joy for those who live after us, happiness and peace will be established upon earth, and they will remember kindly and bless those who have lived before. Oh, dear sisters, our life is not ended yet. We shall live! The music is so gay, so joyful, and it seems as though a little more and we shall know what we are living for, why we are suffering...If we only knew—if we only knew...

"If we only knew!" -- this desire to know and understand life haunts all of Chekhov's characters. Despite the thread of hope that Olga clings to in her picture of times to come, in the assurance that life is not yet over, she like all the other characters knows that that hope is to be known by her only in a life to come. Life for her is hopeless, is sure to continue in unhappiness and suffering. Yet she continues to hold to the idea that surely there will come a time when suffering and unhappiness will end.

Much of the cruelty or vice in the lives of the characters stems from boredom and shallowness. Victims of triviality

16 Anton Chekhov, *Three Sisters* in *Four Great Plays* (New York, 1958), p. 188.
and emptiness, these characters often try to break this terrible monotony of their lives by inflicting pain and discomfiture on those around them, always in a desperate effort to escape from their own vacuity. The timid petty clerk appearing in Two in One assumes a dominating, officious attitude toward his fellows once he leaves the office where he works as the most insignificant of flunkies. Anna Akimovna attempts to escape boredom by assuming the lowly status of her servants and her aunt and by joining the crowd in the servants quarters for games of "kings" and discussions about marriage. But it is only a temporary escape and she is again reminded that her life must exist in the upper halls, not among the crowd in the kitchen. Her task is the handing out of charities in an unfeeling, nonchalant manner as though she had no real interest or sympathy for the misery of her workers who come to plead for her assistance.

One senses the same monotony in the conversation which Kuligin, the self-satisfied but amiable schoolmaster (Three Sisters) has with his wife who is gradually becoming bored with him:

Kuligin: Today is Sunday, the day of rest, therefore let us rest, let us enjoy ourselves each according to his age and station...Masha, at four o'clock we are due at the Headmaster's...

Masha: I'm not going.

Kulgin: Dear Masha, why not?

Masha: We'll talk of it afterwards... (angrily)
Very well, I'll go, only leave me alone, please...

Kulgin: And then the evening we'll spend at the
headmaster's. In spite of his ill-health,
this man tries above all things to be
sociable. An excellent, lofty person-
ality... 18

This passage reveals the tragi-comedy of the relations be-
tween these two persons, as the wife's boredom is thrown
into relief by her husband's complacency and dullness.
There is something merciless and blindly cruel in people's
misunderstanding of their fellows' sensibilities, and Chekhov
never loses sight of the fact. When this cruelty is carried
to an extreme, one has an Ivanov 19 whose greatest ambition
is to be a hero, to be generous, honest and less stupid,
but who after five years of marriage to a woman for whom
he feels no love or pity -- just a void and weariness --
abandons her, deceives and insults her, eventually becoming
responsible through his negligence for her death. Nikitin
(The Teacher of Literature) who feels the same restraint
and boredom in his marriage, cries out in a frenzy of
frustration:

18 Anton Chekhov, Three Sisters in Four Great Plays,

19 Anton Chekhov, Ivanov in Plays, tr. Marian Fell
(New York, 1913), pp. 73-153.
Where am I, my God? I am surrounded by vulgarity and vulgarity. Wearisome, insignificant people, pots of sour cream, jugs of milk, cockroaches, stupid women...There is nothing more terrible, mortifying, and distressing than vulgarity. I must escape from here, I must escape today, or I shall go out of my mind... (The Teacher of Literature, p. 274).

As was mentioned earlier, though these characters do not feel on a grand scale, they are extremely sensitive to the callousness, vulgarity, and thoughtless cruelty that merely disquiet most people. Misail Alexeyich (My Life) is keenly aware of the sordid misery which surrounds his fellow workers and which is consciously ignored and minimized by the class to which his father belongs. Andrey Yefimitch (Ward No. 6), when he is made aware of the conditions suffered by his patients, as he himself becomes one of them, is appalled and frightened by the extremities of cruelty to which boredom and lack of humanity can drive the attendants and officials of the hospital. Anna Akimovna too feels the cruelty of indifference and knows herself forced by her position to make the same show of indifference simply because it is expected of one with her wealth and power. But none of these characters can be reconciled to what they find in their lives; and because of their dissatisfaction, they are constantly tormented by the world around them.

Because of their boredom, many of Chekhov's characters resort to the fabrication of a world of lies that grow and grow to entangle them ever more deeply, just as for the same cause their cruelty overtakes their sense of decency. In
The Cherry Orchard Ranevskaya, in an effort to escape the reality around her, talks about her numerous lovers in highly romantic terms, even though they seek her only for her money. Andrey Yefimitch, of Ward No. 6, has constructed a complacent explanation for his inability to rectify the miserable conditions of his hospital.

I serve in a pernicious institution and receive a salary from people whom I am deceiving. I am not honest, but then, I of myself am nothing, I am only part of an inevitable social evil: all local officials are pernicious and receive their salary for doing nothing...And so for my dishonesty it is not I who am to blame, but the times...If I had been born two hundred years later I should have been different... (Ward No. 6, p. 60).

But such an explanation is built on lies and is manufactured to excuse his own negligence. Andrey Yefimitch would deceive himself about the nature of his responsibility for the misery and cruelty that exist in the reality he passes off as mere chance.

Morality and Logic don't come in, it all depends on chance. If anyone is shut up he has to stay, and if anyone is not shut up he can walk about, that's all. There is neither morality nor logic in my being a doctor and your being a mental patient, there is nothing but idle chance... (Ward No. 6, p. 63).

Whether the characters live by truth or by falsehood, they exist in their world alone. Lack of understanding and of communication is a central fact of their lives. People turn to each other in times of need and misery and find their fellows wrapped up in their own concerns. Seeking
to communicate their innermost thoughts and emotions, they are either unable to impart these thoughts, or on doing so, find that their confidant is incapable of receiving and appreciating what they say. The entire story Grief (or Misery, or Heartache, as it is sometimes translated) is based on the vain attempt of a grieving father to pour out his sorrow over the death of his son to the various passengers occupying his cab. Concerned with their own troubles and occupations, they meet the old man's tentative comments with impatience or preoccupation. And so in the animal heat of the stable, the bereaved father tells his grief to his feeding nag, the only living being who seems to lend an ear to his unhappy tale.

Bishop Pyotr (The Bishop) is desperately lonely; his only confidant is a septuagenarian monk, for despite the bishop's pleasant nature he inspires fear -- even his own mother feels awkward in his presence and recovers a sense of intimacy with him only when he falls seriously ill. The old man Sorin, in The Sea Gull walks perpetually among the other characters, but is alone, as in fact each one of them is essentially alone. He talks of wanting to live in town but is misunderstood by those around him, particularly by the doctor who looks on his craving for diversion as a mere triviality:

Sorin: I want to give Kostya a subject for a story.

It ought to be called "The Man who Wished" — L'homme qui a voulu. In my youth I wanted to become a literary man — and didn't; I wanted to speak well — and I spoke horribly badly... and I would go plodding on and on, trying to sum up till I was in a regular perspiration; I wanted to get married — and I didn't; I always wanted to live in town and here I am ending my life in the country — and so on...

Dorn: To be expressing dissatisfaction with life at sixty-two is really ungracious, you know.

Sorin: What a persistent fellow he is! You might understand that one wants to live!

Dorn: That's just frivolity. It's the law of nature that every life must have an end.

Sorin: You argue like a man who has had enough. You are satisfied and you are indifferent to life, nothing matters to you. But even you will be afraid to die...  

That no one individual can wholly and continuously understand the mood of another, because he is more particularly concerned with his own, is a favorite theme of Chekhov's. Indeed, one suspects that Chekhov must have been aware that the mutual reluctance of his characters to appreciate or understand each other's attitude or feeling inevitably enhances the sympathetic understanding and the sensibility of the audience. Thus, the servant-girl Dunyasha (The Cherry Orchard) greets her young mistress Anya, who has just arrived from Paris, with the exciting news that she has

21 Anton Chekhov, The Sea-Gull in Four Great Plays, p. 47.

been proposed to, saying:

...I must tell you at once. I can't bear to wait a minute.

Anya: What now?

Dun: The clerk Epikhodov proposed to me after Easter.

Anya: It's always the same with you... (Puts her hair straight) I've lost all my hairpins...

Dun: I don't know what to think about it. He does love me, he does love me!

Anya: (Looks into her room, tenderly) My room, my window; just as if I'd never gone away. I'm home! Tomorrow I shall get up and run into the garden...23

Nikitin (The Teacher of Literature) meets the same kind of preoccupation and misunderstanding when he hurries home after his engagement to announce the glad news to his old colleague. But all the colleague says is that the girl in question had been his pupil at the high school, that she had not done badly in geography but was weak in history, and moreover, had not been attentive in the classroom.

Most of Chekhov's main characters are really reciting monologues. No one listens to anyone else. And to the reader of the stories, or the audience of the plays, the voices of individuals echo in an atmosphere of isolation and intense loneliness. In The Sea-Gull Masha talks of her unrequited love, but nobody cares. The actress talks of her

23 Anton Chekhov, The Cherry Orchard in Four Great Plays, p. 66.
successes all through the scoring at a card party, but nobody cares. Vanka, the nine-year-old boy, in the story by the same name, writes a letter to his old grandfather, telling of his loneliness and the general abuse he suffers; then, hopefully he addresses his letter simply "To Grandfather, in the Country" and mails it without a stamp. In *The Grasshopper* the husband, a brilliant doctor, comes to tell his wife, while she is dressing for the theatre, that he has grounds for thinking that the readership in general pathology is likely to be offered to him.

It was evident from his beaming, blissful face that if Olga Ivanovna had shared with him his joy and triumph he would have forgiven her everything; both the present and the future, and would have forgotten everything, but she did not understand what was meant by a "readership" and by "general pathology"; besides, she was afraid of being late for the theatre, and she said nothing. He sat there another two minutes, and with a guilty smile went away...24

The tragedy of this story depends upon a woman's realizing too late that her husband was a man of genius.

The reader feels that each individual, no matter how sprightly he may be in his talk, is essentially alone. The individual seems to echo a thought that Chekhov jotted down in his own notebook: "As I shall lie in the grave alone, so in fact I live alone."25

Nikolay Stepanovich, when his ward Katya, the only person still near to him, begs him to help her, can only

speak of trivialities, can only deal with insignificant details until he watches her leave him, her despair matching his, her loneliness and need echoed by his own.

Let us have lunch, Katya.

No thank you...

I don't like Kharkov...it is so grey here--such a grey town.

Yet, perhaps...It's ugly...I am here not for long, passing through. I am going on today.

Where?

To the Crimea--that is, to the Caucasus.

Oh! For long?

I don't know... 

(A Dreary Story, p. 218-19)

At a time when the reader knows fully that Nikolay Stepanovitch wished to say: "Then you will not be at my funeral," the precious last moments are passed with non-essential chatter. What Nikolay should have done, should have said, he cannot bring himself to do.

In Chekhov's day, the idea of moral inertia was not particularly popular in literature, for contemporary Russian critics urged that literature should be concerned with energy and action. Moreover, Russian literature traditionally represented morality as positive action. Yet Chekhov, in his stories, presents situation after situation in which the major characters do not take positive action. Whatever moral act they perform is more often performed, as R. M.
MacIver explains, not because the character is the way he is but because he happens to be where he is. Such a morality is based on habit or biology, on the unspoken social demand which the character does not have the strength of will to refuse. No question of courage or choice is involved in this type of action, and although the heroes are seldom praised for living according to the morality based on this kind of action, they are severely criticized when such morality is broken. Nadya Shumin (Betrothed) and Misail Aleyevich (My Life) are both victims of such criticism when they do not act according to the social demands made upon them. Nadya brings disgrace and embarrassment upon her mother and grandmother by running away from her marriage only to find that her presence is a source of difficulty to them when she returns to visit. She realizes that she is cut off from their world by what she has done and returns gladly to the new world she has found in St. Petersburg. Misail Aleyevich finds himself scorned and ridiculed by his former friends, and disowned by his father, for breaking with traditional social demands. But for the most part, moral inertia, the not making of moral decisions, constitutes a large factor in the lives of most of these Chekhovian protagonists.

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The final impression left by most of these stories is the sense of temporary possession of a temporary existence. It is as if all of the characters hasten to express their worthless individualities, since it is all they have, and are aghast that they should have so little to express: the expression of their individuality is all there is. Chekhov's later stories are distinguished by their themes of boredom and futility, of mutual isolation and the incommunicability of deep human feelings. The lament of lost youth or lost hopes and ambitions becomes the common outpouring of Chekhovian grief. His characters are the victims of an inner corrosion — an eating away of ambitions, of energies, of talents, and most important, of the ability to love. Part of this inner corrosion is due to neurotic egotism and preoccupation in the self. But part is also due to the passage of time; time itself permits a gradual corroding to take place without the hero's knowledge. He is made aware of the process only by chance circumstances, which release traits of unpleasant self-awareness, but only when it is too late for self-awareness to be of any use.
V. The Hero as a Key to Mood

Chekhov's tales seem suspended in an atmosphere that relegates ideas to a position of secondary importance. Picture a chilly autumnal twilight in a drizzling rain; a road that is long, desolate, soggy and full of mire and along which moves a struggling gaunt old horse harnessed to an open farm cart; miserable people huddled on the straw in the back of the cart, each drawn inward with his own futile thought of former days of warmth and comfort; a coachman whose whip slices the cold air; and gloom that intensifies as the darkness settles over the empty countryside -- in such a scene one recognizes, on a descriptive level, what is known as the Chekhovian Mood. This is the mood in which Chekhov's characters are portrayed and in which they try to live -- characterized by loneliness, futility, and despondency.

Russian life as we come to know it in Chekhov's works exudes this mood. But though Chekhov has been known as a key portrayer of Russian society during the late nineteenth century, and his works have been said to mirror Russian life, he does not attempt to reveal this life on the grand scale of Tolstoy. One never meets intimately large crowds of characters, never ranges great distances across the land to encounter different families, cities, and situations. Rather

27 Slonin, Modern Russian Literature, p. 6061.
Chekhov limits himself to a single drawing room or to the mind of one small boy. He singles out the particular to represent the general and makes his stories a microcosm of a larger world. The little scene portrayed in Chekhov's stories, and in his dramas as well, is Everyman's world. It is the scene of "realistic" tragedy, not tragedy in the widest, most universal sense, but tragedy which falls short of great catastrophe and death. This tragedy is not the grand scale kind found in Oedipus the King and Hamlet, but is less than grand, in keeping with the everyday experience of all men as they live and feel it.

Chekhov's emphasis on the tragic rather than the comic places him among the many writers who interpreted life of the later nineteenth century in the same manner. He presents the spiritual errors of daily experience which lead to the constant falsifying of social relations and human intercourse. Though it is true that he was aware of the ludicrous as well as the tragic aspects of man's folly and futility, the degree of humor that runs through all his serious stories and dramas is inevitably overcast by a persuasive irony that never allows the reader to forget how pathetically ineffectual his characters are and how sadly wide, how absurdly wide, is the gulf between their aspirations and their performance. The predominant effect is generally one of gloom.

Though it is the contention of this thesis that Chekhov's characters are his main interest and his chief means of
creating mood, he of course employs other means, some of
them quite standard and ordinary. By carefully choosing
his details, he gains poetic suggestiveness in garden scenes
at twilight and darkened rooms in winter. His seemingly
plotless actions contribute, by their apparent lack of form,
a deepened sense of the fluidity of life, the endless coming,
mixing, going, the final inconclusiveness of life. The
aptness of Chekhov's unobtrusive detail, in both his short
stories and his plays, has been noticed by almost all the
critics. Particularly distinctive is the significant
triviality, the decisive incongruity. The inharmonious de-
tail is not only true to life but is poignant as well; it
is exemplified by the little things that usually go unnoticed
in ordinary realism, but that may touch off thought and
feeling about very large matters -- the nature of man, of
his society, of his relation to the universe.

Failure of communication, gradual frustration, enervating
despondency, final hopelessness, and the transiency of life
are all presented in terms of the human soul, especially
when it is misunderstood, misjudged, and mistreated by
another soul. For the human soul is Chekhov's main concern.
Endowed with keen psychological and ethical insight, Chekhov
was able to probe into the soul of his characters and expose

28 See, for instance, Herbert J. Muller, The Spirit of
them with understanding and sympathy. With an ability to lay bare but not to preach, he treated his characters with a rare humanity.

Such qualities as these reinforce the inescapable mood of melancholy: a general impression of futility pervades the stories and accentuates the weariness and passivity of the heroes. This impression, compounded as it is of loneliness, futility, failure in communication, misunderstanding, frustration, and hopelessness weighs upon the reader's consciousness. He comes away with the feeling that life is a sorry affair in Chekhov's world and that sorrow extends beyond the world of fiction. Contained within these stories, with their atmosphere of longing, regret, failure, suspense, and frustration, are the universal elements of all lives in all countries in all times. They are elements common in every human soul. And Chekhov is writing of life from the standpoint of the soul. Depression and weariness of soul transform even the most pleasant of physical surroundings into something drab and irritating. Even the most glorious spring morning becomes dull before the heart that is heavy with some misery or disappointment. In placing so many of his stories in weather and settings which are distinctively unpleasant, unpleasant in their lack of human warmth, if in no other sense, Chekhov reinforces the gloomy climate of the soul. The physical world with its cold, damp misery
intensifies and accentuates the cold misery of the inner man, but it is always the man that remains of first importance. The long, desolate, monotonous road traveled by the cart is the same sort of road followed by the human heart. Cold air and a settling gloom surround the spirit just as the travelers are surrounded. The descriptions of natural phenomena and landmarks may just as well be the descriptions of the terrain of the inner man. Melancholy springs first from the source of all human actions, the heart, soul and mind of man, and from man pervades the world around him.

The melancholy tone of the stories is only occasionally lightened by a more optimistic tone. Some of the stories contain characters who voice the theme of hope, hope that is based on work and more work, always with the idea that although life is hopeless now, future generations will know happiness. Such passages of hope always have ironic overtones; still, they seem to reflect Chekhov's own hope and his essential humanistic faith. 29 Hope, though it is strongly challenged by melancholy and despair, takes from these stories the charge of complete pessimism. In the group of eight stories being analyzed in this study, two of them, Betrothed and My Life, are both unique in the very element of hope and the general trend of optimism which is particularly evident in their conclusions.

29 Muller, op. cit., p. 286.
Throughout the major portions of their stories, Nadya and MisaIl both struggle with the same kind of doubt and discouraging reality in their existence. They have been able to foresee that they are in danger of launching their lives along a road of futility and boredom and recognize that the moment to escape such a future is in their hands. These two stories, unlike the other six, picture the protagonist at the moment of decision, not years after that moment has been passed. The story of Betrothed hangs in a balance as Nadya considers and deliberates, but as she hastily packs her belongings and prepares to leave with the student, Sasha, the mood of the story becomes positive, active and almost happy. For Nadya herself is happy and relieved and goes into the new world with anticipation and wonder, despite her regret at what her actions will cost her family and herself as well in her relations with them. Nor is the mood of My Life one of complete gloom. Although MisaIl breaks with his father and his social status early in the story, the story itself is an account of his difficulty in establishing himself in a new environment and among a new level of society. MisaIl is besieged with difficulties, but he is not regretful of his break with his former life nor of the path which he has chosen. It is his basic satisfaction which gives the story he tells a different atmosphere from that, say, of Ward No. 6 or A Woman's Kingdom.

By way of the character's reaction to his situation,
then, the story assumes its particular mood based on that reaction. Since they are most concerned with an analysis of the human soul, the most characteristic of Chekhov's stories lack purely narrative interest. They no more bear retelling than does an elegiac poem. Nothing thrilling happens in them, nor are the few reflective passages particularly compelling. Some of the tales, having neither beginning nor end, are, as Galsworthy put it, "all middle like a tortoise." Others have a static quality, only slight progression. Instead of moving toward a definite conclusion, they are just as likely to trail off or drop to an anti-climax. And yet they manage to seize hold of the imagination.

As Chekhov's style matured, plot was often reduced to mere situation which serves as an excuse for the release of moods and feelings. The moods may be happy or unhappy, but generally they are vague, spontaneous, often irrational, sometimes with little apparent relation to the events of the tale as such. Although Chekhov's stories have been described as "slices of life," such a label is misleading. Chekhov seeks to define the essence of a character in terms of his leading emotion, rather than by merely depicting a naturalistic scene. His characters, if separated from their emotions and moods, are weakly depicted and difficult to remember. But despite their varied backgrounds, their sundry occupations, and their lack of physical similarity,
they are unified by the common nature of their temperament. And it is the emotions and moods inherent in temperament which more than any other factor influence and delineate the general mood of the stories themselves.

With these qualities in mind it is evident that the nature of the characterization is inseparable from the mood of the story. The world of the story is a world created within the mind and emotions of the characters themselves. Because these characters are preoccupied with their own misery and futile existence, the whole story deals with that preoccupation and the effects of that concern. The view of their world which the reader receives is through the screen of that same misery and futility. The atmosphere then is one created by the soul and mind of the character as he struggles to find the purpose and meaning in his existence. Chekhov has used mood to supply the one side, and the most important side, of his characterization, leaving the other, the more physical details of the character relatively unexplained. But just as physical appearance is often reflective of the inner, psychological temperament of some writer's characters, so is the mood of a whole story reflective of the inner life of the Chekhovian hero. By being dependent upon characterization, mood is conceived and presented without invention and contrivance; cleverly maneuvered plots and other superficial devices are absent. As a result, the whole work exhibits the impact of a direct experience.
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