THE CONCEPT OF TOSKA IN CHEKHOV'S SHORT STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Jason Scott Jones: The Concept of Toska in Chekhov's Short Stories
(Under the direction of Radislav Lapushin)

This thesis examines Anton Chekhov's literary conception of *toska* through close reading of two short stories entitled, "Misery" (1886) and "The Student" (1894). "Misery" elucidates the complex nature of *toska* and its features while "The Student" maintains the characteristics of *toska* yet redirects it towards a specific and productive end. Both works present *toska* as a powerful, permanent force that cannot be dispelled, but "The Student" shows how a character's acceptance of *toska* leads to his realization of the "truth and beauty" of human life and a resulting optimism based on this successful redirection. This thesis as a whole serves to shed light on the concept of *toska* in Chekhov's literary oeuvre and attempts to supplement the existing literary criticism of this phenomenon.

To my grandfather, thank you for the stories.

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INTRODUCTION

In Fyodor Sologub's 1907 novel entitled, "The Petty Demon" (Мелкий бес), the word *toska* (translated below as "melancholy") is used multiple times in varied ways within the same short, poetic passage:

> Oh, deathly melancholy, echoing over fields and villages, over the vast expanses of my homeland! A melancholy embodied in wild commotion, a melancholy that devours the living word with its vile flame, reducing a once-living song to demented wailing! Oh, my beloved Russian song of old, can it be that you are really dying…? (138-139)

> О, смертная тоска, оглашающая поля и веси, широкие родные просторы! Тоска, воплощенная в диком галдении, тоска, гнусным пламенем пожирающая живое слово, низводящая когда-то живую песню к безумному вою! О, смертная тоска! О, милая, старая русская песня, или и подлинно ты умираешь?. . (135)

It seems that in the passage above, *toska* is a complicated term that is used in a complicated way. In the narrator's view, it is a deathly force that covers the land, something that devours the "living word" (живое слово), and contributes to the destruction of a Russian song's soul. The novel, in which this passage is contained, is abundant with numerous examples of this word and additionally, *toska* figures prominently as a significant thematic element in it. This novel is just one representative example of the intriguing nature of *toska*. Given that this word contains a multiplicity of meaning, as evidenced above, how can it be defined?

A quick and simple search for the word using the online translator Multitran provides a long list of nouns including: melancholy, anxiety, grief, yearning, boredom, depression, longing, ennui, sorrow, sadness, dismay, and the blues. Looking up the definition for this same word in

the Oxford Russian dictionary will yield the following: melancholy, anguish, pangs, depression, ennui, boredom, longing, and nostalgia. According to this definition, *toska* is used to express one's homesickness (тоска по родине) or one's pangs of love (тоска любви).

In his *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language* (*Tolkovyy slovar'*), Vladimir Dal' defines *toska* as "a constraint of the soul, a yearning of the spirit, an agonizing sadness" (стеснение духа, томление души, мучительная грусть) as well as "a soulful anxiety, unrest, fear, boredom, grief, sadness." (душевная тревога, беспокойство, боязнь, скука, горе, печаль) According to the definition by Dal', *toska* is a noun but also appears in verbal form as *toskovat'* (тосковать), in adjectival form as *tosklivyy* (тоскливый), and in participial form as *toskuyushchiy* (тоскующий). A man and a woman who experience *toska* are defined as *toskovatel'*(тоскователь) and *toskovatel'nitsa* (тосковательница), respectively. People can feel *toska* out of boredom, idleness, sadness, and pain. In addition, those with *toska* over a long period of time are called *toskun* (тоскун) or *toskun'ya* (тоскунья). The entry in the *Explanatory Dictionary* by Dal' is a substantially long one with many superb examples of how *toska* can be used in Russian speech.

In his translation of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Vladimir Nabokov provides several entries in his commentary relating to *toska*. In volume two of the work, he defines *toska* as follows:

> No single word in English renders all the shades of *toska*. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody or something specific, nostalgia, lovesickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom, *skuka*. (Nabokov, 141)

In a succeeding entry, Nabokov writes, "The vocabulary of ennui also includes *toska* (a preying misery, a gnawing mental ache)." (156) Nabokov's commentary on *Eugene Onegin* is an excellent source of information about *toska* and several more entries located within his text are devoted to explaining the word. In summary, the entries provided above from the dictionaries as well as from Dal' and Nabokov attest to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the meaning of *toska*, making the translation of the word all the more difficult for the English translator.

Because of this difficulty of translation, there are multiple interpretations of the word *toska*. Jonathan Flatley relates that *toska* "is a famous 'untranslatable,' a word that Russians feel is somehow essentially Russian, that says something about Russian-ness itself […] there is something in *toska* that describes the feeling not only of missing something but of being oneself the one that is missing, of feeling oneself absent, lost, missed." (94) Flatley continues: "*Toska* also has a sense of duration- it is felt over a period of time; it is a state of being." (94) Sheila Fitzpatrick defines *toska* as a yearning sadness or simply a yearning which "is an emotion with a long pedigree in Russia, going back to the 'superfluous man' theme of nineteenth century literature." (367) Echoing Flatley's remark about the alienating effects of *toska*, she also mentions that "*toska* and alienation- the feeling of sadness associated with being outside a community whose members are presumed to be happy, or at least capable of happiness- are closely related." (Fitzpatrick, 369) In Sara Dickinson's preface to the book entitled, *Melancholic Identities, Toska, and Reflective Nostalgia*, she understands *toska* as "a state of 'anguish' or 'longing' that can exist without any precise object" and correlates it to her concept of something called "reflective nostalgia" or as she puts it, "[a] longing for something elusive and ineffable to which full or direct access is impossible" (7). In her article on the Russian and English emotions of "fear" and "pity," Valentina Apresjan provides the meaning of *toska* as yet again "a kind of

yearning for something which the experiencer knows to be unattainable." (88) However, she goes even further and says that *toska* "is conceptualized as some kind of persistent tiresome pain which incessantly torments the experiencer, so that he can have no spiritual peace or rest […] this pain is not sharp; rather, it is deep and incessant, not allowing one to forget about it. The feeling of *toska* is likened to this kind of pain on the spiritual level." (Apresjan, 88-89) Finally, in Ogarkova, Fontaine, and Prihod'ko's case study of *toska*, the authors use a statistical approach in looking at the word:

> *"Toska* is a salient emotion term in the Russian language. Several studies report its high frequency in Russian corpora, 59 tokens per million words as contrasted to 14, 12, and 9 usages per million of its English translation equivalents *yearning, longing and pining*[…]In addition, relevant corpora searches show that *toska* is more frequent than other SADNESS words in both Russian and English." (5)

Moreover, the authors comment that it is difficult to render *toska* into other languages, including English and French, because "one of the studies reports over 20 of its contextual translations in English." (Ogarkova et al., 5) Therefore, its meaning can be approximated. At the same time, a contestation arises between lexicographers and semanticists over the meaning of *toska*, one position being that *toska* is "a 'mixture,' or 'blend' of sadness and anxiety" and the other being that *toska* is "essentially a SADNESS word in Russian." (Ogarkova et al., 7) Not only is *toska* frequently used but its meaning is still hotly debated among experts. In short, it seems, according to the above authors, that *toska* involves a kind of yearning on the spiritual level, that it can be characterized as a condition or state which can last for some time, and can be painful to the experiencer.

Now that the notion of *toska* in general has been introduced, the question may be posed: why Chekhov? Or rather, what is the relationship between this author and the concept of *toska*?

First of all, *toska* is a recurring concept in Chekhov's body of work. *Toska* and its lexical derivatives appear 15 times in stories published between 1880 and 1882, then 28 times in stories from 1892 to 1894. Regarding individual stories by Chekhov, *toska* and its derivatives are numerous. Secondly, for Chekhov, *toska* is an especially significant concept in his oeuvre as well as an important theme. It is my contention that *toska* is integral to understanding Chekhov's literary world and his literary world can be better understood by looking closely at his idea of *toska*. Because of the significance of *toska* and his assumed pessimism that can be easily associated with it, the author received much negative critical reception in his time. Ivan Bunin wrote concerning this: "For a long time […] nobody called Chekhov anything but a 'gloomy' writer […] a man who looked at everything with hopelessness and indifference." (*The Selected Letters*, 5) Chekhov was labelled as a pessimist by his contemporary critics as Bunin writes, "I remember, for instance, that he was once annoyed by reading in a book that he was indifferent to questions of morality and society, and that he was a pessimist." (*Reminiscences*, 102) Not only was Chekhov called this by his critics, but his works, according to Bunin, were "constantly attacked" (*Reminiscences*, 101) and Russian critics themselves "would neither understand him [Chekhov] nor approve of him." (*Reminiscences*, 101) Chekhov and his assumed pessimism still fascinated readers during his time. Referring to the protagonist of his short story "Toska" (mostly translated as "Misery"[1]) which I will discuss in detail, Lydia Avilova, a contemporary of Chekhov, writes in 1889: "How I cried over Iona, who shared his grief with his old horse because no one wanted to listen to his troubles anymore…Why was it precisely now, when Chekhov decided to write about such a thing, that everyone started to find him interesting, began reading everything he wrote, and not without a few tears to boot?" (*About Chekhov*, 77) Thus,

[1] To avoid future confusion, I'll use "Misery" for the title of the story and "toska" for the concept.

there was something appealing in his apparent pessimistic outlook that warrants a deeper study of the author's concept of *toska*.

Chekhov's collection of published fiction numbers in the hundreds of stories so it may seem daunting to attempt to analyze his conception of *toska*. However, in numerous Chekhov stories, *toska* proves to be an oft-occurring, thematically significant, and varied concept. As evidence of this, in two novellas entitled "The Steppe" (1888) and "Ward No. 6" (1892), Chekhov portrays *toska* in several different ways. In "The Steppe", Chekhov vividly shows how *toska* applies to nature as well as people in this story. In this tale of a long journey across the Russian steppe, *toska* is found within a description of the hills: "the sun-baked hills […] seemed now endless, petrified with dreariness." (*Early Short Stories*, 510) (Загорелые холмы […] представлялись теперь бесконечными, оцепеневшими от тоски...) (7: 16-17[2]) Instead of relegating *toska* to the description of the individual, Chekhov metamorphoses the hills of the steppe into something seemingly human and animate. This stylistic technique is mentioned by Radislav Lapushin in that "by way of poetic correspondences, he [Chekhov] consistently blurs the borderline between animate and inanimate, human and non-human." (*"Dew on the Grass"*, 206) Later in "The Steppe", *toska* appears yet again in a new form. The character Konstantin, who tells a personal story about his wife with whom he is madly in love, reveals his intense love-sickness and yearning for her using the word *toska*. However, in this case, Chekhov uses the word paradoxically, in that Konstantin suffers for this young beauty, but he does so happily and earnestly. After hearing his story,

[2] All parenthetical citations in the text consisting of volume number and page number separated by a colon refer to the following source: Chekhov, Anton. *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy i pisem v tridtsati tomakh.* Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1982.

> Everyone by now thoroughly understood that he was in love and happy, poignantly happy (счастливый до тоски) […] he could not find a place for himself, and did not know what attitude to take to keep himself from being overwhelmed by the multitude of his delightful thoughts. (*Early Short Stories*, 575)

> Все теперь отлично понимали, что это был влюбленный и счастливый человек, счастливый до тоски […] он не находил себе места и не знал, какую принять позу и что делать, чтобы не изнемогать от изобилия приятных мыслей. (7: 77)

Although experiencing *toska*, it appears that Konstantin seems genuinely happy despite this strong feeling of passionate yearning and longing for his young wife. These two examples of *toska* from Chekhov's "The Steppe" encapsulate the word's complexity of meaning and its multifaceted nature.

In Chekhov's "Ward No. 6", which was published four years later, *toska* appears again and is shown in new ways by the author. In an early conversation between Andrei Yefimych and Ivan Dmitrich, the latter says that "Christ responded to reality by weeping, smiling, grieving, being wrathful, even anguished (тосковал)." (*Stories*, 199) (Христос отвечал на действительность тем, что плакал, улыбался, печалился, гневался, даже тосковал.) (8: 102) Later in the story, *toska* appears in the voice of the narrator, who is describing Andrei Yefimych's current state of mind and body. Now that Doctor Ragin is forced to remain in the asylum as a patient, he feels "sick of it to the point of anguish" (*Stories*, 216) (ему надоело до тоски) (8:120) and questions whether anyone could live in such a place for a long time. In both examples, the individual experiencing *toska* is yearning for freedom or an end to his present suffering. Unfortunately for them, Chekhov's characters usually do not find an escape from *toska*. It is also interesting to see that *toska* appears in both the character's and the narrator's speech. Apparently, Chekhov's artistic conception of *toska* is not only found in the plane of character dialogue but in that of the narrator's speech as well.

As seen above, *toska* has a varied and significant presence in Chekhov's stories; therefore, a more detailed investigation is needed to determine how *toska* is portrayed. Given Chekhov's consistent use of the word, an examination of a small sample of texts may reveal broader trends. Following this, I suggest that there are two stories in particular which are pivotal to our understanding of the concept of *toska* in Chekhov. The first story, "Misery" (1886), mentioned above, illuminates the nature of *toska* and the features associated with the concept while the second story, "The Student" (1894), shows how *toska* retains its characteristics as explored in "Misery," but is redirected towards a specific and productive purpose. By narrowing the focus on these two stories and reading them closely, the author's conception of *toska* can be deciphered and extended to other Chekhov stories. Savely Senderovich comments on the importance of reading Chekhov's text closely: "Chekhov's brevity is the correlative property of a very intensive text […] the minutest components of the texts are heavily charged with meaning […] Chekhov's texts therefore command very attentive readings." (3) My analysis of *toska* in "Misery" and "The Student" will hopefully shed new light on the author's conception of this notion in his oeuvre.

CRACKING THE WHIP: THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF *TOSKA* IN MISERY

As discussed in the introduction, the word *toska* has no single definition or explanation. Corollary to this, as a concept in Chekhov's literary world, the meaning of *toska* is manifold and multi-dimensional. However, closely reading Chekhov's short story entitled "Misery," wherein *toska* is the center of the work, gives a clearer idea of Chekhov's own conception of this word. As I intend to demonstrate, the most appropriate place to begin an analysis of *toska* is with this story because it might serve as a starting point for my analysis. Furthermore, "Misery," as Elena Siemens points out, "performs an explanatory function" (267) with respect to the concept of *toska*. Along these lines, I view this story as both starting point and vehicle for the explanation of this concept.

"Misery" depicts several hours in the life of a Russian cabman named Iona. Iona is grief-stricken because his son has recently passed away and he attempts to communicate his sadness to his cab fares. However, the cabman is unable to establish the communication he desires with his fares because they do not listen to him properly and are already preoccupied with their own personal affairs. This problem is compounded by the inability of Iona to clearly articulate and express himself about his loss. At the end of the story, having no one else to turn to for a chance to share his grief, he talks to his cab horse. The horse seems to listen and understand Iona as the cabman opens up and tells his horse all about what happened to his son.

In spite of the importance of the concept, the word is not mentioned until the second half of the story. Yet, Chekhov alludes to the concept before the narrative begins by making it the

title of his work. Immediately following the title, the author inserts an epigraph which contains the word *pechal'* (grief, sadness): "To whom shall I tell my grief?" (Кому повем печаль мою?[3]) By making *toska* the title and subordinating *pechal'* to the epigraph, Chekhov is simultaneously making the reader aware that these two concepts are distinct from one another and implying that *toska* will be his primary focus. As evidence of this, *toska* appears six times throughout the story whereas *pechal'* appears only once. Chekhov puts an emphasis on the former rather than the latter because *toska* is a more complicated concept, which requires further narrative exploration and textual dedication. After the epigraph, the story opens thus:

> The twilight of evening. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs, shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the sledge-driver, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular snowdrift fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off. . . His little mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is probably lost in thought. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the familiar gray landscapes, and cast into this slough, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing uproar and hurrying people, is bound to think.[4] (125)

> Вечерние сумерки. Крупный мокрый снег лениво кружится около только что зажженных фонарей и тонким мягким пластом ложится на крыши, лошадиные спины, плечи, шапки. Извозчик Иона Потапов весь бел, как привидение. Он согнулся, насколько только возможно согнуться живому телу, сидит на козлах и не шевельнется. Упади на него целый сугроб, то и тогда бы, кажется, он не нашел нужным стряхивать с себя снег... Его лошаденка тоже бела и неподвижна. Своею неподвижностью, угловатостью форм и палкообразной прямизною ног она даже вблизи похожа на копеечную пряничную лошадку. Она, по всей вероятности, погружена в мысль. Кого оторвали от плуга, от привычных серых картин и бросили сюда в этот омут, полный чудовищных огней, неугомонного треска и бегущих людей, тому нельзя не думать... (4: 326)

[3] Chekhov takes this opening line from a Russian religious poem entitled "The True Story of Joseph's Lamentation" (Плач Иосифа и быль).

[4] I use Constance Garnett's translation of "Misery", as found in *Early Short Stories: 1883-1888*, 125-130.

Although the word *toska* is not found in the first paragraph, its presence is still felt in the description of the environment and its effects on the cabman and his horse. Siemens writes that "in reading the opening description, we learn a number of key parameters of 'toska'." (268) She notes that one of these parameters is color, in particular the color white, manifested in the image of the snow.[5] Indeed, I would argue that in the opening paragraph, *toska* is most tangibly perceived via this poetic image of the snow. I would also argue that the snow serves as a vehicle for *toska*. As will be demonstrated in greater detail later, similar to the snow, *toska* is pervasive as it affects everything in the environment. In the paragraph above, snow already covers Iona and his horse, hinders their movement, renders them isolated, and makes them appear less than their actual selves. This snow, as an instrument of *toska*, directly affects Iona and his horse in several ways.

First of all, the snow physically affects Iona in that it alters his bodily shape, forcing him to bend his body (согнуться) into an uncomfortable position. Later, when Iona and his horse remain idle again and the snow covers their bodies, the cabman resumes his former uncomfortable position as he "huddles on the box" (сгибается на козлах) and when Iona is finally overwhelmed, he "bends himself double." (изгибается) In the latter two examples, "сгибается на козлах" and "изгибается," we can see the same root within both verbs. The word "гибнуть" (to die, to perish) also shares this root and comes to the reader's mind, stressing the extent of the permeation of *toska*. The use of the aforementioned verbs in the text indicates that *toska*, through the snow, is debilitating Iona and his movement as well as crippling his body.

It is important to note that this crippling effect of *toska* only occurs when Iona has failed to convey to another the grief he feels over the death of his son. Immediately after Iona brings

[5] As Elena Siemens writes "'toska' becomes tangible, it acquires color, shape, and sound" (267) allowing it to be "no longer an abstract untranslatable concept but a phenomenon which the reader is able to hear and visualize." (274)

his first fare, a military officer, to his destination, Iona reverts to his huddled position. Still, *toska* is not mentioned directly in the text, yet it is constantly felt. Chekhov is allowing his idea of *toska* to mature so that when it finally appears, its power can be fully revealed to the reader. During this maturation of *toska*, we can see the effects of its development upon the protagonist, Iona. *Toska*, in its developing status, is seen punishing Iona for trying to reach out to a listener. In order to maintain its firm grasp on the emotional state of Iona, *toska* restrains Iona's physical state. Thus, *toska* is seen as inhibiting Iona's motion and making it more difficult for him to interact with the people in his environment. If Iona were to successfully find a proper listener, unlike any fare he encounters in the narrative, *toska*'s hold on Iona would at least be temporarily severed and its development thwarted.

Toska, in the form of the snow, also features prominently everywhere in the environment. From on the tops of roofs, clothing, and horses' backs, to being found in Iona's "snow-plastered eyelashes," (ресницы, облепленные снегом) it is impossible to escape from *toska*. Speaking to his passengers gives Iona a momentary reprieve from the debilitating burden of *toska*. This is why Iona is so desperate to talk to someone about his grief and is eager to give information out to those listening in his carriage about his pain. He is even able to bear the increasingly hurtful invectives thrown at him just to get a chance to become a part of the conversations held between his passengers. This is evidenced during Iona's ride with the hunchback and his friends in which the cabman waits patiently for a lull in the conversation to say aloud the great misery which has affected him. He knows that his company makes him feel less alone and more able to deal with *toska* bearing down on him.

Iona is less able to perceive his immediate surroundings because of *toska*. In the opening paragraph, Iona is sitting under a layer of snow and the narrator comments that if a snowdrift

(*сугроб*) were to fall on him, he wouldn't budge to remove it. Interestingly, the word *сугроб* includes the word fragment *гроб* which means "coffin". It is almost as if Iona is already lying in his coffin, "dead" to the world in the sense that he is isolated and unable to interact with it. Siemens writes that "itself invisible, 'toska' also virtually erases those who surrender to its power." (269-270) By not budging to remove the snow, which covers him, Iona is silently acquiescing to the power of *toska* and he himself figuratively dies and becomes a non-entity, or a "ghost". His mare, likewise, figuratively transforms from an organic entity into a non-organic one, a "gingerbread horse". Thus, *toska*, in the form of the snow, blankets Iona and his horse completely while the cabman does not seem to care that its power and influence is growing.

Toska also causes Iona not to be able to distinguish what is happening around him. After setting off with his first fare of the night, Iona is chastised for his carriage driving not from any individual or specific person but from a shifting, dark mass: "'Where are you shoving, you devil?' Iona immediately hears shouts from the dark mass shifting to and fro before him." (126) (--Куда прешь, леший! -- на первых же порах слышит Иона возгласы из темной, движущейся взад и вперед массы.) (4: 326-327) Iona can't identify the source of the shouting because *toska* has blinded him to his immediate surroundings, decreasing his awareness and perception of the environment. Later, another abrasive comment is heard by Iona, but he cannot place the exact source: "'Turn round, you devil!' comes out of the darkness. 'Have you gone cracked, you old dog?'" (126) (-- Сворачивай, дьявол! -- раздается в потемках. -- Повылазило, что ли, старый пес?) (4: 327) In this example, Iona again cannot discern where the comment originated because *toska* has blinded him. He is unable to see what is actually there because *toska* has separated him from his environment and it is controlling him. As Lawrence Dessner observes, it has reduced Iona to "a passive, somnolent, lonely sentient figure of easy fun." (249) While driving

in his carriage, Iona is described as “one possessed as though he did not know where he was or why he was there.” (126) (как угорелый, словно не понимает, где он и зачем он здесь.) (4: 327) In fact, *toska* as a force does possess and control Iona. The power of *toska* is reflected in its control over the cabman, making him numb to the outside world. When the hunchback fare strikes Iona, the cabman “hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck.” (128) (больше слышит, чем чувствует, звуки подзатыльника.) (4: 329) *Toska* has desensitized Iona to the pain coming from someone like the hunchback because it possesses a monopoly of pain over Iona. Therefore, the only pain that Iona can feel is the pain that *toska* induces. This is seen later in the story when Iona “gives himself up to his misery” (отдается тоске). At this moment, he shakes his head as though he feels a “sharp pain” (острую боль).

Toska begins to take a more active, discernible position in the narrative as Iona interacts with his fares. In addition to inhibiting movement and separating the cabman from the world around him, *toska* takes on another ability. This ability is more sinister and it involves the delimiting and distortion of Iona’s verbal communication. Each time Iona attempts to explicate his grief to an individual, *toska* restricts and prevents him from clearly expressing his thoughts. From the very first occasion that Iona communicates with an individual, in this case the first fare, Iona has trouble producing audible speech for the listener: “Iona looks at his fare and moves his lips…Apparently he means to say something, but nothing comes but a sniff." (126) (Иона оглядывается на седока и шевелит губами... Хочет он, по-видимому, что-то сказать, но из горла не выходит ничего, кроме сипенья.) (4: 327) However, with a great amount of effort and throat straining, Iona manages to get out the following statement: “My son…er…my son died this week, sir." (126) (А у меня, барин, тово... сын на этой неделе помер.) (4: 327) It seems, judging by the conversations that Iona has with his fares, that the conditions for Iona to

share his pain with his passengers are never favorable. In the above instance, Iona must strain his throat to be heard by the listener. His huskily said remark about his son is casually heard but unheeded. This fare, the military officer, hears what happened to the cabman's unfortunate son and soon dismisses the matter as trivial compared to his own need to arrive at his destination as quickly as possible. Thus, Iona is rushed and is not given a comfortable amount of time to begin to talk about his situation. Ralph Lindheim captures one of Chekhov's major themes in this work, the lack of communication, in the following: "The inability of people to talk to one another in the same language or to make themselves understood across differences in temperament, status, and values, produces a confusion in communication or even its breakdown." (59) From fare to fare, the reader is shown how this lack of communication between Iona and other individuals eventually erodes into an almost complete breakdown of verbal speech on the part of the cabman.

The reader can see this continuing disintegration of communication in the exchange between Iona and his second fare, the hunchback with his two friends. These three are constantly fighting and verbally abusing each other, as well as the unfortunate cabman. Their back and forth dominates almost the entirety of the amount of free space in the conversation in which Iona can intervene and begin his speech about his son. Iona does manage to exclaim more or less the same exact statement he made to the military officer: "This week…er…my…er…son died!" (128) (А у меня на этой неделе... тово... сын помер!) (4: 328) Similar to the military officer's reaction to this utterance, the hunchback dismisses Iona's comment without any kind of discussion in favor of insulting Iona further by calling him names and exhorting him to drive faster. Once again, the cabman is rushed by his carriage occupants and is not given the needed conversation time he craves.

In the last instance of Iona's deteriorating human to human communication, it appears as if the listener, a young cabman, will actually allow Iona the time to talk. It also appears that the conditions for their conversation are favorable. Iona and the young cabman are not rushed by their fares, they are located in an intimate setting away from the crowded and noisy city, and the young cabman is receptive to Iona because Iona offers the young man a drink, and he accepts. Iona then says the following: "May it do you good…But my son is dead, mate…Do you hear? This week in the hospital…It's a queer business…" (129) (Так... На здоровье... А у меня, брат, сын помер... Слыхал? На этой неделе в больнице... История!) (4: 330) After Iona begins to open up about his son, the aforementioned conditions turn out to create a familiar situation to the cabman. Iona fails to capture the attention of his listener because his listener falls asleep. However, Iona cannot be blamed for this failure of communication, although he himself is not the best communicator. Iona certainly makes several attempts to have a proper conversation with his fares but he is consistently unable to succeed in his goal. His "thirst for speech" is motivated by his desire to assuage the feeling of *toska* that attacks him when he is without people around him. This propels him to try and talk to as many people as possible in his path. He even tries to strike up a conversation with a house caretaker on the street by asking the time but he is immediately rebuked and told to drive along. Lindheim relates another theme which is significant in this story: "Chekhov comments movingly on the indifference of human beings toward one another fostered by routine toil and strengthened by real or imaginary slights and humiliations." (60) The house caretaker, the younger cabbie, and the hunchback and his friends, along with the military officer are all manifestations of this theme. Everyone is busy and indifferent to the needs of the individual, especially those of Iona, in this world.

What is to blame for this indifference and lack of communication between individuals? The perpetrator is *toska*, a force that is handicapping Iona from connecting verbally with other individuals. It disconnects Iona from his environment and it also fragments his actual speech. Visible disconnections, traces of this restrictive force, can be seen in the multiple ellipses present in Iona's dialogue. These ellipses are visual markers of the intrusion of *toska* into Iona's life and are themselves identifiable reminders that it exists and persists in the world to burden the cabman. Thus, the ellipses are also a signal of *toska*'s detrimental impact on speech. Its theft of Iona's voice within the text demonstrates its strong presence and the silence, which is the outcome of this continued verbal thievery, is evidence of *toska*'s dominance. Siemens relates that "all of these 'internal disturbances', together with those coming from outside sources, demonstrate that silence is reluctant to surrender its power and that it never does retreat altogether." (272)

Interestingly, only Iona's speech is characterized by ellipses. The minor characters who interact with Iona, including the military officer, the hunchback and his friends, and the young cabby, speak without interruptions or pauses. Unlike the cabby, they are not burdened at this moment in time with the emotional, physical, and psychological weight that *toska* carries. So, they are freer to be absorbed in the more mundane things in life from chasing skirts and drinking, to running errands, and getting a good night's rest. However, this does not mean that they are immune to *toska*. This power exists as a force in the world of the story and it is only a matter of time before the very same people who ignored Iona will be subjected to the same changes that it enacts. In "Misery", Chekhov details how *toska* impacts one individual in particular, what he experiences, and how he copes with this force in his life.

So far, *toska* has been perceived as manifesting in the environment, as the snow, as well as in Iona's fragmented speech. However, the word itself does not appear explicitly in the text until Iona drops off his second fare, the hunchback. The cabman once again returns to a state of silence and loneliness, but this time, *toska* manifests itself clearly and perceptibly to the reader. Until this point, Chekhov has been giving his readers a sense of this power through a series of lenses, including those of snow and fragmented speech, in order to prepare them to see it for what it really is. Now, Chekhov has finally removed the last lens, and we see the great power and influence that *toska* possesses. This time around, it is directly identified and is described in terms of a natural force that is both cruel and immense:

> The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona's eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery. . . . His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight. . . . (128-129)

> Утихшая ненадолго тоска появляется вновь и распирает грудь еще с большей силой. Глаза Ионы тревожно и мученически бегают по толпам, снующим по обе стороны улицы: не найдется ли из этих тысяч людей хоть один, который выслушал бы его? Но толпы бегут, не замечая ни его, ни тоски... Тоска громадная, не знающая границ. Лопни грудь Ионы и вылейся из нее тоска, так она бы, кажется, весь свет залила, но, тем не менее, ее не видно. Она сумела поместиться в такую ничтожную скорлупу, что ее не увидишь днем с огнем... (4: 329)

In this passage, the word is mentioned four times. This is significant because its presence and power is finally affirmed by the narrator explicitly. After reading this, readers are now certain of what *toska* does and how it affects the individual, in this case, Iona. Throughout the story, we have seen how Iona has consistently been unable to dispel this force, which has seized him. He

has been denied every opportunity to properly communicate his feelings and emotions to another human being. Now, because of this failure, *toska* has been allowed to grow to such an immensity and power that it is beyond Iona's control. The narrator even recognizes the extent and possible damage that Iona's hardship possesses when he says that "If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery (*toska*) to flow out, it would flood the whole world […] " (129) (Лопни грудь Ионы и вылейся из нее тоска, так она бы, кажется, весь свет залила […]) (4: 329). Because of the enormity of *toska*, it poses a real threat not just to Iona but to the entire world. Even more menacing is its ability, despite its gigantic size, to be invisible. As an invisible, immense, and powerful force, *toska* is capable of much destruction. Not only has it reached its zenith of development, but it appears to grow even stronger. It subdues Iona to its will and has subsequently deprived him of the ability to fight back against its overwhelming strength and influence.

Toska defeats and triumphs over Iona. He concedes to it, which he can bear no more, and returns home near the end of the story. It is worth noting that the cabman himself addresses his internal state as toska. It has grown to such proportions that it is no longer able to hide from Iona. Although he directly refers to it as the source of his problems, he misrecognizes it as something caused by his inability to work hard enough and generate the income necessary for feeding himself and his horse: " 'I have not earned enough to pay for the oats, even,' he thinks. 'That's why I am so miserable. A man who knows how to do his work, … who has had enough to eat, and whose horse has had enough to eat, is always at ease. . . .' " (129) ("И на овес не выездил, -- думает он. -- Оттого-то вот и тоска. Человек, который знающий свое дело... который и сам сыт, и лошадь сыта, завсегда покоен...") (4: 330) Iona does not see *toska* as an external force. Rather, he thinks of it as something internal that can be controlled by working

harder and earning more money. By improving his current situation, Iona thinks he will be released from the yoke of this force. However, unlike the protagonist, the reader understands that *toska* is powerful, immense, and beyond the individual's control. The narrator relates that *toska* has even made it impossible for the cabman to think about his son in his current state: “He thinks about oats, about hay, about the weather…He cannot think about his son when he is alone…To talk about him with someone is possible, but to think of him and picture him is insufferable anguish…” (130) (Думает он об овсе, сене, о погоде... Про сына, когда один, думать он не может... Поговорить с кем-нибудь о нем можно, но самому думать и рисовать себе его образ невыносимо жутко...) (4: 330) It will not release its grip on Iona and it appears that it will maintain its control over the cabman indefinitely.

Toska has seemingly dominated Iona by the end of the story. Its unchecked power has steamrolled Iona into being helplessly unable to communicate with another human being. *Toska* has surpassed Iona’s capability of trying to contain it. The narrator recognizes the plight of Iona and describes how the cabman desires the ability to speak with another person, an ability that has recently been destroyed by *toska*: "Just as the young man had been thirsty for water, he thirsts for speech." (129) (Как молодому хотелось пить, так ему хочется говорить.) (4: 330) Because of this destructive act, the narrator relates to the reader details about Iona’s life that the cabman was unable to verbally express in the earlier parts of the story. It seems as if the narrator, in the following, intervenes on Iona's behalf in a sympathetic manner by relating Iona's desire to talk about "how his son was taken ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died…He wants to describe the funeral, and how he went to the hospital to get his son's clothes." (129-130) (как заболел сын, как он мучился, что говорил перед смертью, как умер... Нужно описать

похороны и поездку в больницу за одеждой покойника.[6]) (4: 330) Even though the narrator's comments concerning Iona's situation may seem sentimental and compassionate, this same voice cannot help itself but to ironically tear at the same character he seems to verbally support: "His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament…It would be even better to talk to women. Though they are silly creatures, they blubber at the first word." (130) (Слушатель должен охать, вздыхать, причитывать... А с бабами говорить еще лучше. Те хоть и дуры, но ревут от двух слов.) (4:330)

Throughout the story, Iona has been desperately seeking an audience with anyone, regardless of gender, to speak of his situation. Yet, near the end of the story, the reader finds that women would be the preferred the audience for Iona, even though they are "silly creatures". Even more ironic is the fact that *toska*, the force which has been plaguing Iona through the entirety of the story, is a feminine noun and thus puts Iona in an awkward position. He is stuck between a rock (*toska*) and a hard place (a woman listener), as the saying goes. Concerning the duality of Iona's predicament, Dessner relates that "Chekhov's 'aloofness, a kind of principled objectivity, a deliberate restraint,' is expressed through his narrator's tendency to see the ridiculous in the pathetic at the same time that he is seeing the pathetic in the ridiculous." (247) Luckily for Iona, Chekhov solves this both ridiculous and pathetic situation at the conclusion of the short story.

At the story's finale, despite the overwhelming influence of *toska* on the cabman, Iona appears to be able to open up and begin to express everything that had been previously impossible to say to people. His listener is the only creature who was with him from the

[6] It may be noted that the narrator's speech in this section somewhat resembles the actual dialogue of Iona's previously. The narration here is in the "tone and spirit" of the protagonist. Although more eloquent and refined, it is still not devoid of multiple elliptical interpolations.

beginning until the very end, that is, his horse. As Iona talks more with his horse, he sees that his companion is actually listening to him, unlike everyone else before, and the story ends with Iona absorbed in his conversation:

> “That's how it is, old girl. . . . Kuzma Ionitch is gone. . . . He said good-by to me. . . . He went and died for no reason. . . . Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt. . . . And all at once that same little colt went and died. . . . You'd be sorry, wouldn't you?” . . . The little mare munches, listens, and breathes on her master's hands. Iona is carried away and tells her all about it. (130)

> "Так-то, брат кобылочка... Нету Кузьмы Иоыча... Приказал долго жить... Взял и помер зря... Таперя, скажем, у тебя жеребеночек, и ты этому жеребеночку родная мать... И вдруг, скажем, этот самый жеребеночек приказал долго жить... Ведь жалко?" Лошаденка жует, слушает и дышит на руки своего хозяина... Иона увлекается и рассказывает ей всё... (4: 330)

Despite all of the previous, failed attempts at communication with people, Iona’s communication with his horse seems to be successful. Moreover, it appears that the horse understands its master and in a sign of compassion, breathes on his hands. The ending of "Misery" is a stark contrast in tone to the rest of the narrative because Iona’s interaction with his horse may signal a mitigation of *toska* as an external force. Dessner writes "The horse does not *seem* to listen, or chew *as if* she were listening. The narrator's aloofness, and objectivity, not to mention his mockery of this vulgar and ridiculous man have been swept away." (254) Thus, hope might remain for Iona, whereas for the rest of the short story, *toska* grew to become the dominant force in Iona’s life and in the world. The fact remains though that whether or not this force has been permanently alleviated by this interaction or only temporarily mitigated, Iona talked with a horse. Has Iona’s interaction with his horse compromised the power and influence of *toska*?

In order to attempt to answer this question, the ending of the story must be examined closely. Regarding this conclusion, there is a variety of critical interpretation. Some critics

argue that this ending borders on the absurd. For example, Vladimir Kataev notes that “Misery” ends in a "grotesque-ironic" way (*Literaturnye svyazi Chekhova*). Other critics argue that the ending contains elements of both irony and pathos. In particular, Lawrence Dessner writes that "here at the story's end we have the culmination of its intense pathos as well as of its thematic linkage of man and animal. But Iona, who had been repeatedly linked with animal life, now credits an animal with a human's sensitivity to personal anguish." (253) Both Kataev and Dessner might suggest that *toska* has been in no way compromised, although neither critic mentions this concept explicitly in their analyses. However, Robert Louis Jackson challenges the opinions of Kataev and Dessner saying in his article entitled "Концовка рассказа ‘Тоска’ – Ирония или Пафос?" (The End of the Story 'Toska' – Irony or Pathos?), that at the end of the story, there is “nothing absurd, nothing grotesque, and nothing ironic.” (359) Even though Iona does talk with a horse, the form of communication between them turns out to be “fully natural, intelligent, and humane." (Jackson, 357) Furthermore, Jackson mentions that this form of communication is not absurd because Iona and his horse share the same loneliness and eventually their shared loneliness is overcome psychologically and spiritually. The end, in Jackson’s opinion, is a “peripeteia of the theme of loneliness.”[7] (357) As seen in the story, *toska* grows stronger and appears in the world when Iona is alone. In a state of loneliness, when Iona is devoid of contact and communication with another person, *toska* overpowers the cabman and forces him to remain alone. Thus, when Iona talks to his horse and it seems that his horse understands him, *toska*’s hold on Iona is broken because he no longer suffers from loneliness. According to Jackson, it appears that in the final moments of the story, *toska* has been dispelled.

[7] Due to this sudden reversal, the reader may be caught off guard. Florence Goyet emphasizes this kind of ending when she writes "the trick ending condenses that unrelenting coexistence into the paradox of the horse alone being gifted with the virtue of humanity. It sharpens our perception of it; it shocks us." (45)

While I find Jackson's argument compelling, I am not convinced that Iona is truly able to overcome *toska*. Jackson relates that the pathos of "Misery" is the inability to convey one's sadness, to express the pain of loss (*Kontsovka rasskaza 'Toska'*, 355). As seen throughout the story, Iona has been consistently prevented by *toska* from fully expressing this sadness. Although Iona in the very end was able to express his misery, the horse is not able to act like a human being, more specifically a woman, who "ought to sigh and exclaim and lament" (130) at the news of her son's death. As mentioned before, Iona prefers to have a woman who can verbally sympathize with him because he may think a woman is more capable of sharing in his misery or a woman can understand his suffering and react to it in a proper way.[8] However, at the same time, the horse is described as distinctly feminine and motherly. The words for horse, which the narrator uses (лошадь and лошаденка), are both feminine nouns. Iona himself calls his horse "little mare" (кобылочка). While talking to her, Iona describes his horse, hypothetically, as a "mother to that little colt" (этому жеребеночку родная мать). With no one left to talk to, the horse acts as a mother figure and listens to him talk about his misery. Thus, this ending becomes more complex because, although Iona does talk with his horse, who seems to understand him, this stand-in for a mother is an unsatisfactory, artificial one. Iona refers to his mare having a little colt and its sudden passing, but this is used only in a hypothetical instance. The cabman is looking for a parent, someone who has had to raise and nurture a child, but he is talking with a creature of a different species and the reader is unsure whether or not his mare has ever had a foal. Iona is trying to humanize his mare in an attempt to relinquish his pent up suffering and ultimately does find some relief in communicating with his horse but this comfort seems temporary, an opinion that is in line with the reasoning of Kataev and Dessner.

[8] Women are only passively mentioned in this story and Iona does not interact with a single one in the narrative.

Thus, I assert that Iona's conversation with his horse has done little to compromise the power and influence of *toska*. I maintain that *toska* remains the dominant, permanent force in his life, as well as the focal point of the story. *Toska* has been with Iona since the beginning of the story and it seems as if it will not disappear. The irony involves Iona not realizing that a "feminine" presence has been with him all along and misrecognizing that this "companion" was his mare, a non-human entity that would not be fully capable of truly empathizing with the cabman. It is not a coincidence that Iona does not meet a single woman during the story. *Toska*, like a jealous spouse, prevents Iona from reaching out to another human soul, and it is with sardonic wit that *toska* forces the distraught cabman to lower himself and converse with an animal creature. The ending elicits a feeling of pity not only because of this debasement, but because Iona is stuck with *toska* for the foreseeable future. He will never be able to relieve himself of *toska* as his companion, nor will he be able to understand its role in his life. The last lines of the story betray a false sense of optimism and create a feeling of sentimentality knowing now that *toska* will remain a permanent part of Iona's life. *Toska* goes unchallenged by the main character and it seems that there is no hope for not just Iona, but the entire world, considering all of humanity is susceptible to *toska*.

BEARING YOUR CROSS: A JOURNEY FROM *TOSKA* TO "TRUTH AND BEAUTY" IN "THE STUDENT"

"The Student" (1894) is very popular among literary critics. Donald Rayfield calls "The Student" Chekhov's "shortest mature story […] a work which he [Chekhov] himself singled out for its concise perfection." (*Anton Chekhov: A Life*, 314) More recently, Andrey Shcherbenok has reminded us that the author "called 'The Student' his favorite story and cited it to defend himself against the accusation of pessimism." (300) Indeed, according to Bunin's memoirs, in reference to this allegation from critics during his time, Chekhov said the following:

> But how am I a moaner and groaner? In what way am I, as my critics call me, a "gloomy individual" or a "cold-blooded writer"? After all, "The Student" is my most favorite story…And for me, the word "pessimist" is a repulsive one… (*About Chekhov*, 21)

Although Chekhov may have considered himself far from being a pessimist, his critics saw not just differently from him but differently among themselves. Chekhov's works escape any kind of definitive interpretation, which often leads literary critics to express opposing views. Two critics in particular, Robert Louis Jackson and Wolf Schmid, give polar interpretations of the story's ending. However, to understand Chekhov's own position in this story and his position in relation to *toska*, a close reading of the story must be provided. First, a discussion of the plot is necessary.

"The Student" is about a young seminarian, named Ivan Velikopolsky, who is returning home from a fowling trip. Hungry, cold, and gloomy, he comes across two peasant women around a fire along the way. The student tells the two, a mother and her daughter, the Gospel

story of Peter's denial of Jesus. Ivan departs from the women after he tells this story and resumes his journey home. Before the story concludes, Ivan thinks about the mother and how she cried after hearing his narration of the events of the Gospel. He then makes the connection between her weeping in the present and the weeping of Peter after he denied Jesus three times in the past**.** Ivan believes that the mother and Peter are related in some way by their action of crying. He then thinks about the connectedness of humanity in general and also thinks that the past and the present are connected. The thought that "truth and beauty" has continued from Peter's time until his gives Ivan a feeling of happiness, and life, according to his perspective at the story's finale, seems filled with a higher meaning.

At the beginning of "The Student," Ivan notices how the weather abruptly changes from pleasant, spring-like conditions, to unpleasant, winter-like ones. As Donald Rayfield points out, "Nature is given predominance. Even in such a brief work, changes of mood are initiated by nature." (*Understanding Chekhov*, 132) Nature doesn't welcome Ivan back from his hunting trip and hinders his journey further. It seems to Ivan that nature closes herself off from his interference in her borders and enforces his physical isolation: "Needles of ice reached over the puddles, and the forest became inhospitable, forsaken, desolate."[9] (263) (По лужам протянулись ледяные иглы, и стало в лесу неуютно, глухо и нелюдимо.) (8: 306) This change in environment is painful to Ivan, "His fingers were numb, and his face was burned by the wind" (263) (У него закоченели пальцы, и разгорелось от ветра лицо) (8: 306) and he feels alone in the dark, "It was deserted around him and somehow especially gloomy." (263) (Кругом было пустынно и как-то особенно мрачно.) (8: 306) He feels that the sudden change in weather violated the "order and harmony" of everything, that nature herself felt dismayed. He

[9] I use the Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky translation of "The Student", as found in *Stories*, pp.263-266.

doesn’t seem to recognize that the natural order is capable of such a change. Ivan feels this way because he doesn’t accept that a changing environment is part of the natural order of things. As Kenneth Lantz notes in his discussion of Chekhov's short stories, "Nature seems to delight in confounding the characters' expectations by not conforming to their emotions and moods." (57) In addition, Ivan goes out to hunt on Good Friday, thus committing a sinful action. He leaves his home where his mother and father are obeying the fast to shoot and kill birds. Ivan seems not to think about his actions, despite his education and knowledge of religious custom. Or, rather, Ivan is acting defiantly of his family's tradition of celebrating the religious holiday. This is confirmed in the narrator's comment that "he did not want to go home" (264) despite the encroaching weather, which made everything seem cold, silent, and dark.

Ivan's thoughts amid this changing environment become increasingly gloomy, as evidenced in the following:

> And now, hunching up from the cold, the student thought how exactly the same wind had blown in the time of Rurik, and of Ioann the Terrible, and of Peter, and in their time there had been the same savage poverty and hunger; the same leaky thatched roofs, ignorance and anguish [тоска], the same surrounding emptiness and darkness, the sense of oppression—all these horrors had been, and were, and would be, and when another thousand years had passed, life would be no better. (263-264)

> И теперь, пожимаясь от холода, студент думал о том, что точно такой же ветер дул и при Рюрике, и при Иоанне Грозном, и при Петре, и что при них была точно такая же лютая бедность, голод, такие же дырявые соломенные крыши, невежество, тоска, такая же пустыня кругом, мрак, чувство гнета, -- все эти ужасы были, есть и будут, и оттого, что пройдет еще тысяча лет, жизнь не станет лучше. (8: 306)

His condition of being hungry and cold leads him to make a philosophical connection between his current state and the historical state of Russia as a whole in negative terms. In establishing

this connection between himself and humanity, Ivan frames Russian history as a repetition of poverty (бедность), hunger (голод), ignorance (невежество), darkness (мрак), and most importantly for our topic, *toska* (тоска). He sees this history as a cycle of these concepts, which he calls horrors (ужасы). Ivan thinks that these "horrors" will last forever and he does not see any improvement in Russian life nor escape from this cycle. However, Aleksandr Chudakov relates that "These thoughts do not form the basis of the student's convictions […] It was the external circumstances of the particular moment, the cold, the wind, and the darkness, that set his thoughts in motion." (363) Indeed, these thoughts arise as Ivan is "hunching up from the cold" and seem to show how limited Ivan's thinking is concerning Russian life in general. While there may still be such things as poverty, hunger, and *toska*, Russian life has improved considerably since Rurik and Ivan the Terrible. In this moment of unpleasantness caused by the cold, Ivan consigns the historical fate of his country to a vicious circle without realizing how far the country has advanced in the course of time. Despite his pessimistic attitude with respect to this historical continuity of "horrors", Ivan nevertheless makes a connection to humanity. In the opinion of Robert Louis Jackson, this is of great importance: "For to recognize a relation to something or to somebody or to some event is to affirm the reality of connections: it is the first step toward a consciousness of the unity of all human existence, toward establishing ethical bonds among people, holding people together, caring for people, loving them." (*An Unbroken Chain*, 644) Cold and hungry in the forest, Ivan philosophizes that there is indeed a "reality of connections" or a human continuity, but this one is not founded on positive terms such as love. Rather, he believes this continuity is based on negative ones.

One of these negative terms is *toska*. *Toska* is eternal just like the other human problems that Ivan calls "horrors", such as ignorance and hunger. It has existed since ancient times and

will continue to exist in the future. However, *toska* is unique among the group of terms Ivan uses to classify Russian life. Poverty and hunger are external social ills that can be treated given the proper attention, time, and dedication. Ignorance is an issue that can be remedied by education, learning, and experience. "Пустыня кругом" (emptiness) and "мрак" (darkness) are temporal feelings felt by Ivan because he is alone in the dark forest. *Toska*, on the contrary, seems impossible to fix, remedy, or solve because it is a complex mental state. Apparently, it must be accepted as a part of human life because it is always there regardless of an individual's physical state or situation. Just as the weather is impossible for Ivan to control, *toska* is beyond the control of the individual.

Immediately after the student's philosophizing, darkness gives way to brightness, silence to sound, and cold to warmth when Ivan meets two women, Vasilisa and Lukerya, around a fire:

> The gardens were called the widows' because they were kept by two widows, a mother and a daughter. The fire burned hotly, with a crackle, throwing light far around over the ploughed soil. The widow Vasilisa, a tall, plump old woman in a man's coat, stood by and gazed pensively at the fire; her daughter Lukerya, small, pockmarked, with a slightly stupid face, was sitting on the ground washing the pot and spoons. Evidently they had only just finished supper. Male voices were heard; it was local laborers watering their horses at the river. (264)

> Огороды назывались вдовьими потому, что их содержали две вдовы, мать и дочь. Костер горел жарко, с треском, освещая далеко кругом вспаханную землю. Вдова Василиса, высокая, пухлая старуха в мужском полушубке, стояла возле и в раздумье глядела на огонь; ее дочь Лукерья, маленькая, рябая, с глуповатым лицом, сидела на земле и мыла котел и ложки. Очевидно, только что отужинали. Слышались мужские голоса; это здешние работники на реке поили лошадей. (8: 306-307)

The crackling fire, the voices of the male laborers, the sounds of Lukerya washing the dinnerware, and the warmth that Ivan feels from the fire serve as an immediate juxtaposition to the environment in which Ivan has previously suffered cold and hunger. Out of this new

environment, Ivan has found a potential bastion of warmth and human contact, ending his isolation in the forest. He was suffering from cold, but for now at least, he can warm himself by the fire. Ivan sees confirmation of the historical permanence of *toska* and its relationship to suffering when he meets these two peasant women. They, like Ivan, are exposed to the cold weather since they are found outside. The narrator says that both women are widows. The older woman, Vasilisa, was formerly a wet nurse and then a nanny, but apparently has no job now. The younger woman, Lukerya, is described as a village woman, beaten down by her husband, who "only squinted at the student and kept silent, and her expression was strange, like that of a deaf-mute." (264) (только щурилась на студента и молчала, и выражение у нее было странное, как у глухонемой.) (8: 307) The suffering of the women at first seems to stem from their poverty and the violence inflicted on the daughter. Soon, Ivan tells them the biblical story of Peter's denial of Jesus three times. Importantly for the topic, in Ivan's telling, both Peter and Jesus experience *toska*: "After the supper, Jesus was praying in the garden, sorrowful unto death […] " (265) (После вечери Иисус смертельно тосковал в саду и молился […]) (8: 307) and "Peter, exhausted, suffering in sorrow and anguish […] " (265) (Петр, изнеможенный, замученный тоской и тревогой[…]) (8: 307) *Toska*, which Ivan experiences in the present, is also assigned to nineteen centuries of Russian history by the student. It appears that *toska* has a unifying power since it unites Ivan with the people before him until now including the two women, Jesus, and Peter.

But why do Peter and Jesus experience *toska* in the seminary student's version of the three denials? One interpretation is that Ivan wants to emphasize how *toska* connects and affects everyone. The seminary student might want to say how no one is spared from *toska*, not even Jesus. *Toska* is something that is inherent to human existence. This idea is illustrated in Ivan's

retelling of the Gospel story. *Toska* compromises Peter's physical state and doesn't allow him comfort: "Peter was worn out in his soul, he grew weak, his eyes were heavy, and he could not fight off his sleepiness. He slept." (265) (Петр истомился душой, ослабел, веки у него отяжелели, и он никак не мог побороть сна. Спал.) (8: 307) Peter tries to stay awake and not let Jesus be taken away, but *toska* wears him down. In Ivan's story, it appears Jesus is susceptible to *toska*. He continues to pray in the hope that he will not be sacrificed for humanity's sake. Both Peter and Jesus challenge *toska* but, apparently, they are unsuccessful.

In addition to appearing as something inherent and difficult to challenge, Ivan shows in his story that *toska* is also inevitable**.** Jesus tells Peter that his disciple will deny him three times before the cock crows. As predicted, Peter denies that he knows Jesus three times. In Ivan's retelling, the young seminarian says that: "And right after that the cock crowed, and Peter, looking at Jesus from afar, remembered the word he had said to him at supper…Remembered, recovered, went out of the courtyard, and wept bitterly." (265) (И после этого раза тотчас же запел петух, и Петр, взглянув издали на Иисуса, вспомнил слова, которые он сказал ему на вечери...Вспомнил, очнулся, пошел со двора и горько-горько заплакал.) (8: 308) Ivan makes the correlation between the unavoidability of *toska* and the actions of Peter in his retelling. Peter loved his teacher passionately but he could not stop Jesus from being beaten: "He loved Jesus passionately, to distraction, and now from afar he saw how they beat him." (265) (Он страстно, без памяти любил Иисуса, и теперь видел издали, как его били.) (8: 308) Peter could also not stop himself from denying that he knew Jesus, despite his love for him. Ivan shows how *toska*, like Peter's three consecutive denials, is expected and unavoidable.

Another interpretation is that Ivan is telling this story with an instructive message for the women. By making the main characters of this biblical story experience suffering and *toska*, he

is making a parallel with the suffering of the women in their current situation. Indeed, before Ivan begins telling the story he correlates the environment of the women in the present with the environment of Peter and Jesus in the Gospels: "'In the same way the apostle Peter warmed himself by a fire on a cold night,' said the student, holding his hands out to the flames. 'So it was cold then, too. Ah, what a dreadful night that was, granny! An exceedingly, long, dreary night!'" (264) (—Точно так же в холодную ночь грелся у костра апостол Петр, -- сказал студент, протягивая к огню руки. –Значит, и тогда было холодно. Ах, какая то была страшная ночь, бабушка! До чрезвычайности унылая, длинная ночь!) (8: 307) Yet, the women's suffering is not confined to their environment. Apparently, they are also experiencing *toska* and are themselves affected by it just like Ivan, Peter, and Jesus.

If Ivan's purpose of telling the Gospel story of Peter and Jesus is meant to be instructive, it achieves the desired effect. Vasilisa begins to weep and "she shielded her face from the fire with her sleeve, as if ashamed of her tears […] " (265) (она заслонила рукавом лицо от огня, как бы стыдясь своих слез […]) (8: 308) while her daughter's "expression became heavy, strained, as in someone who is trying to suppress intense pain." (265) (выражение […] стало тяжелым, напряженным, как у человека, который сдерживает сильную боль.) (8: 308) What was it about Ivan's story that produced the reactions by the women? Robert Louis Jackson writes: "What is important is that these women experience the suffering of Peter and the Passion of Christ with their entire being." (*An Unbroken Chain*, 644) He argues that these women are able to connect with what happened to Jesus and Peter and now understand that "one's commitment to one's fellow man, to the good, to God, cannot be abstract, 'from a distance.'" (Jackson, 644) Upon this understanding, Vasilisa should now love her daughter as Peter loved Jesus, which is "passionately, to distraction" (страстно, без памяти). Her realization that she

has not loved Lukerya in this way prompts her to weep. Wolf Schmid provides an alternative interpretation to the reactions of the women. He writes that the two women, Vasilisa and Lukerya, are analogous to Peter and Christ, respectively: "Lukeria, who 'had been beaten senseless by her husband,' is analogous to Christ, who (as Peter observes from a distance) was beaten by his torturers. Vasilisa, for her part, 'bursts into tears' like Peter, who after his act of betrayal 'began to shed bitter, bitter tears.'" (Schmid, 647) Schmid argues that after listening to Ivan's story, Vasilisa realizes she has betrayed her own daughter by giving her over to an abusive husband. Vasilisa and her daughter's reactions are thus prompted by their identification with the biblical heroes, Peter and Jesus. In the middle of the retelling of the Gospel events of Peter's three denials, Lukerya "abandoned the spoons and turned her fixed gaze on the student" (265) (оставила ложки и устремила неподвижный взгляд на студента) (8: 308), and it seems that at this moment, she realizes that she shares a connection with Jesus. According to Schmid, she, like Jesus, has been betrayed and beaten.

What makes the women react to Ivan's story in different ways is not just their identification with Peter and Jesus but their realization that *toska* connects them and everyone by suffering. Just like Peter and Jesus in the past, Vasilisa and Lukerya suffer. As mentioned above, both Peter and Jesus experienced *toska* directly. Vasilisa and Lukerya experience *toska* vicariously through Peter and Jesus. By telling the Gospel story to these two women, Ivan creates a continuity, or a connection between them and Jesus and Peter. Ivan, thinking about the biblical scene of Peter's third and final denial of Jesus, says: "I picture it: a very, very silent and dark garden, and, barely heard in the silence, a muffled sobbing…" (265) (Воображаю: тихий-тихий, темный-темный сад, и в тишине едва слышатся глухие рыдания…) (8: 308) This muffled sobbing belongs to Peter, and right after this, the student "fell to thinking" while Vasilisa

begins to cry. Peter and Vasilisa are linked by their action of crying. Thus, Vasilisa feels *toska* through Peter's experience and weeps just as Peter did. Peter "remembered, recovered, went out of the courtyard, and wept bitterly" (265) (вспомнил, очнулся, пошел со двора и горько-горько заплакал) (8: 308) and Vasilisa also "wept" (заплакала). The connection between Vasilisa and Peter is confirmed in the following thought by Ivan: "Now the student was thinking about Vasilisa: if she wept, it meant that everything that had happened with Peter on that dreadful night had some relation to her…" (266) (Теперь студент думал о Василисе: если она заплакала, то, значит, все, происходившее в ту страшную ночь с Петром, имеет к ней какое-то отношение…) (8: 308) Their connection, or their relation, is of course their shared experience of *toska* and the physical suffering of someone close to them. Despite living nineteen centuries apart, *toska* is felt by both Peter and Vasilisa because of its historical permanence. In addition, Vasilisa and Peter both have betrayed their loved ones and in doing so, they have watched their loved ones beaten. These loved ones, as a result of their being betrayed, share in physical suffering. Jesus is beaten by guards and members of the Sanhedrin[10] and Lukerya is also beaten by her husband. The "intense pain" (сильная боль) which the narrator says Lukerya looks as if she feels is not only a current pain, but one that is ancient, the very same pain that Jesus felt as he was being struck and spat upon. The women now understand that their suffering was felt by Jesus and Peter and that the *toska* which existed then still exists now.

After sharing the Gospel story of Peter and Jesus with the two widows, Ivan bids them farewell and leaves. Before long, he thinks about the widows and their reactions to his retelling of Jesus's suffering and Peter's betrayal and realizes that what happened to the women in his time has some relation to what happened in the time of Christ. Ivan suddenly feels joy in his soul and

[10] This event is found in Matthew 26.67, Mark 14.65, and Luke 22.63.

envisions that "the past […] is connected with the present in an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of the other." (266) (прошлое […] связано с настоящим непрерывною цепью событий, вытекавших одно из другого.) (8: 309) He feels that he is able to see both ends of this chain as well as touch it. After this brief introspective moment, the student continues on his journey and the story ends thus:

> And when he crossed the river on the ferry, and then, going up the hill, looked at his native village and to the west, where a narrow strip of cold, crimson sunset shone, he kept thinking how the truth and beauty that had guided human life there in the garden and in the high priest's courtyard, went on unbroken to this day and evidently had always been the main thing in human life and generally on earth; and a feeling of youth, health, strength – he was only twenty-two – and an inexpressibly sweet anticipation of happiness, an unknown, mysterious happiness, gradually came over him, and life seemed to him delightful, wondrous, and filled with lofty meaning. (266)

> А когда он переправлялся на пароме через реку и потом, поднимаясь на гору, глядел на свою родную деревню и на запад, где узкою полосой светилась холодная багровая заря, то думал о том, что правда и красота, направлявшие человеческую жизнь там, в саду и во дворе первосвященника, продолжались непрерывно до сего дня и, по-видимому, всегда составляли главное в человеческой жизни и вообще на земле; и чувство молодости, здоровья, силы, -- ему было только 22 года, -- и невыразимо сладкое ожидание счастья, неведомого, таинственного счастья овладевали им мало-помалу, и жизнь казалась ему восхитительной, чудесной и полной высокого смысла. (8: 309)

In a reversal of how Ivan felt previously at the beginning of the story, the young student has reached a peak of understanding regarding humanity's connectedness over time and subsequently feels an inner happiness and optimism towards the future. However, it is unclear whether or not *toska* has been conquered in the ending. Returning to Jackson and Schmid, both consider the conclusion in their analyses but provide radically different opinions of the outcome.

In Jackson's interpretation, he does not explicitly say that *toska* has been defeated, but he does remark that Ivan undergoes a spiritual transformation when he realizes the connectedness of

humanity. Jackson refers to Ivan's moment of clarity at the end of "The Student" in which the young seminarian sees history as an unbroken chain of events from past to present. Through his observation of the women and his realization that all of humankind is connected, Ivan understands that the biblical events of the story he narrated to the women also relate to him. As Jackson has it, similar to the women, Ivan "passes through suffering; that is, he painfully experiences not only the tragedy of the Russian people, Russian history and life, but also the drama of Christ and the moral-spiritual sufferings of Peter." (*An Unbroken Chain*, 641) Thus, in Jackson's opinion, Ivan undergoes a spiritual transformation in which his "grief and self-pity have been overcome through a deeply felt ethics of connection—through relating to people and life." (646)

While Jackson's interpretation of the ending of the "The Student" finds Ivan's connection to humanity fully reestablished, Schmid argues that the story's conclusion confirms the existence of a vicious circle of life rather than a chain of events: "The text suggests that Vasilisa's story is linked to Peter's not by contiguity and connection, but by similarity and equivalence, through a repetition of betrayal that confirms the pessimistic image of the vicious circle far more than the optimistic image of the chain." (648) In Schmid's view, Ivan misrecognizes the vicious circle of life as a causal chain. He also argues that, rather than a chain that has two ends, one end being the starting point and the other the ending point, life is really more like a circle with neither beginning nor ending. Schmid asserts that suffering continues to exist in the world and Ivan is not only disinterested in this suffering, but uses it for unsavory reasons: "In this aspiring cleric who goes hunting on Good Friday and observes the fast only under duress, the story reveals a terrifying disinterest in the suffering of the world […] the young theologian, Chekhov shows us, avails himself freely of the suffering of others for his own selfish, hedonistic purposes." (649)

Thus, in the opinion of Schmid, Ivan is an opportunist who uses the suffering of Vasilisa and Lukerya to create “abstract and exhilarating conclusions” (649) to make himself feel better.

Given the arguments of Jackson and Schmid, it is problematic to agree with either side fully. For Jackson, Ivan changes completely by the end of the story. In his reading, Ivan’s transformation is absolute and “he experiences the paschal transfiguration in a moment that seems to allude to Jesus’ ascent to the mount.” (*An Unbroken Chain*, 646) Jackson seems to overestimate Ivan's transformative event as something that triumphs all negative emotions and therefore *toska*. Yet, this seems unlikely given the nature of *toska* and how it functions within this story. Conversely for Schmid, Ivan doesn’t change at all. In his interpretation, the protagonist remains disinterested in the suffering of the world and he is depicted “as someone who gets it wrong and is inclined toward rash, theoretical conclusions.” (Schmid, 649) Although Schmid provides a convincing argument,[11] he underestimates Ivan's realization and transformed thinking in the ending. However, it seems that both Jackson and Schmid do not pay sufficient attention to the concluding paragraph of the story wherein Chekhov both supports and distances himself from Ivan. Here, the author apparently finds a balance between his voice and the voice of the student. I assert that this balancing of voices shows neither the complete defeat of *toska* nor its absolute victory in the end; rather, *toska* is portrayed as an indispensable component to the "truth and beauty" of human life. This will be examined in more detail by first discussing the presence of the author's voice in the concluding paragraph.

In the last part of "The Student," the voice of the author can be sensed in how the natural environment is described simultaneously with Ivan's philosophical conclusion of the unbroken

[11] Schmid refers to the composition of "The Student" as having a circular shape, which he sees as representative of life's vicious circle. Donald Rayfield provides evidence to back up this claim saying, "The most striking element of the structure is its cyclic shape: all the details of the scene are mirrored in the final page of the narrative." (*Understanding Chekhov*, p. 133)

chain of "truth and beauty" in human life. The "narrow strip of cold, crimson sunset" (266) is not immediately a pleasant image, but rather one of foreboding. "Crimson" is the color of blood and suggests violence or suffering while "cold" is a reminder of the harsh wind that Ivan has already experienced twice. Yet, after this environmental description, Ivan's belief that the "truth and beauty" found in Jesus's time is still found in his present is more optimistic and positive than the previous image of the sunset. Within this first half of the last paragraph, Chekhov seems to suggest that the "horrors" Ivan is familiar with, including ignorance, poverty, and *toska*, are still extant, but Ivan's realization of the "truth and beauty" in human life has momentarily surpassed these obstacles to human happiness in his mind.[12]

Secondly, the author's voice is found in the motif of the chain. Ivan's thoughts concerning the chain of unbroken events from past to present, which are introduced in the penultimate paragraph, are reinforced by the implicit, poetic image of the chain in the last paragraph.[13] Although not mentioned explicitly, the presence of the chain image is still palpable here. It seems that Chekhov supports Ivan's newfound thoughts concerning life by expanding on this poetic image without overshadowing his character's voice. But at the same time, the author uses such words as "evidently" (по-видимому) and "seemed" (казалась) to cast doubt on these very same thoughts. Furthermore, the authorial interjection of "he was only twenty-two" suggests that Chekhov is skeptical of Ivan's views because of his youth and the adjectives used to describe Ivan's happiness ("unknown" and "mysterious") belong to Chekhov's vocabulary rather

[12] Radislav Lapushin writes concerning the presence of the author's voice here that "this presence is felt because of an emotional intensity that Chekhov does not easily allow himself and which is, therefore, always sensed by the reader." (*Dew on the Grass*, p. 174)

[13] According to Chudakov, "Chekhov was very consistent in his adherence to the concrete representation of an idea," (360) the chain being the representation of the idea of humanity's connectedness.

than Ivan's in this context. Jerome Katsell writes that "Chekhov here undercuts the life and joy, Velikopolsky's seeming threshold onto a boundless entelechy…" (113)

Although Chekhov's combination of support for and distance from Ivan's beliefs found in the last paragraph may be puzzling, it serves his artistic purpose. This dichotomy is integral to understanding Chekhov's conception of *toska*. *Toska* and "truth and beauty" belong to the opposite ends of the same chain. When Ivan has "seen both ends of that chain," (266) this might also mean that he has experienced both *toska* and the "truth and beauty" of human life. Not only has Ivan experienced these two phenomena, he finally becomes aware that they exist dependently of one another at the conclusion of the story. Moreover, Chekhov gives several hints of the necessary duality of *toska* and "truth and beauty" throughout "The Student." For example, at the beginning of the story, the narrator relates that Ivan's parents remain at home and fast in order to observe Good Friday, or the passion of Jesus Christ. They go hungry in order to commemorate Jesus's suffering but with the knowledge that this suffering lead to the redemption of humanity and Jesus's resurrection. Another example is the widows' reactions to Ivan's story, which shows they understand their own personal suffering, their *toska* quite clearly.

Chekhov embraces both *toska* and the "truth and beauty" of human life rather than pick one or the other. These two concepts are interconnected and are inseparable from one another and they can best be seen in the narrator's image of the chain. Without *toska*, itself an inherent and necessary part of human existence, there is no "truth and beauty" in life. From ancient times, Jesus and Peter endured *toska* and Ivan feels this same unchangeable and indestructible *toska* in his time. Suffering existed then for Jesus and it exists now for Ivan. Yet, this suffering creates something important for those who experience it. Donald Rayfield writes that “the student understands that the misery and horror of life engender truth and beauty in those who suffer from

it." (*Understanding Chekhov*, 132) One may add that *toska* is an equal piece of this formula. At the end of the story, Ivan's pessimistic outlook becomes optimistic towards life in general and he sees life in terms of light rather than darkness, as opposed to how he did near the beginning. Although Ivan cannot defeat *toska*, he has seen both ends of the chain of human life, these ends being *toska* and "truth and beauty". He now realizes that both are connected and this thought gives him happiness and confirmation that life has meaning.

CONCLUSION

In her poem entitled "Flour and Torment" (Мука́ и му́ка), Marina Tsvetaeva writes about *toska*. What she writes can be described as there being two kinds of people in the world: those who accept *toska* as a part of their existence and those who do not:

"Все перемелется, будет мукóй!"
Люди утешены этой наукой.
Станет мукóю, что было тоской?
Нет, лучше му́кой!

Люди, поверьте: мы живы тоской!
Только в тоске мы победны над скукой.
Все перемелется? Будет мукóй?
Нет, лучше му́кой! (28)

"In the end, things will mend!"
People are comforted by this lesson.
Will there be peace from misery?
No, it's better with suffering!

People, believe that we live through misery!
Only in misery are we victorious over monotony.
In the end, will things come out right?
No, it's better with suffering![14]

In the poem, the poet relates that it is better to live by torment and suffering than to be simply comforted by the notion that eventually one's pain and grief will pass in time. She says that people are alive by or through *toska* (мы живы тоской!) and that only in *toska* do we conquer

[14] This translation is mine.

boredom or dullness in our lives. It seems that the poet would rather choose a life of suffering than one with serenity. At the poem's core, it seems to say that *toska* does exist in our daily lives and must create unpleasantness and suffering for us. People try to console themselves believing that *toska* is temporary and will disappear. However, the poet challenges this conception by arguing that *toska* doesn't simply burden us, but instead simultaneously enlivens and gives us the power to live an exciting life. Only after we know and accept *toska* can we really and truly live a life worth living.

If one considers this poem in relation to the two stories which have been discussed in the previous sections, we can see the two types of people which exist in Chekhov's world and their fates in regards to the influence of *toska* in their lives. In the short story, "Misery," the character Iona represents the first category of person, that is, the individual who does not accept *toska* and does not realize it as a natural and necessary part of human existence. In this story, *toska* is portrayed as something that is unable to be challenged, has a discernible presence within the story, robs the protagonist of his ability to conduct real communication with members of his community, and ultimately renders him powerless and weak. Iona is an example of the characters in Chekhov's fiction who are "overwhelmed by humiliating truths or trends they cannot alter, panic, thereby accelerating rather than postponing or averting a disaster." (Lindheim, 64) Iona's fate is uncertain; he finds a connection, but this connection is his horse. Because of this lack of human interaction, he cannot fully express his feelings or let go of his intense pain over losing his son. He may have felt some small comfort talking with his mare, but it seems that *toska* as well as his misery remain. Iona belongs to the group of people in Chekhov's short fiction who believe what the poet quotes in the first line of her poem (Все перемелется, будет муко́й!), that everything will pass in good time. In the story "Vanka"

(1886), for example, a young servant boy can only dream of escaping the reality of working under a harsh master and mistress. He hopes that his grandfather will rescue him from this wretched situation but it appears that this will not happen. And in "The Darling" (1899), Olenka's feeling of despair that her ward, Sasha, will return to his parents is one that will remain with her. Eventually, just as her previous three relationships turned out, it appears that Olenka will soon be left alone once Sasha leaves. Although the characters of Iona, Vanka, and Olenka may receive minor comfort from their belief that everything will work out in the end, this is merely ephemeral. They will never truly be happy.

In the next short story, "The Student," the character Ivan represents the second category of person, which is the individual who accepts *toska* and realizes that it is a vital part of human life. In this story, Chekhov depicts *toska* similarly to as he did in "Misery" but he also shows that not only is it inevitable, eternal, linked to suffering, but it also connects and binds all of humanity together. Thus, *toska* has a special unifying power. The major difference between this story and the former is that the protagonist, the seminary student Ivan, finally understands the role of *toska* in human life and once he does, it seems his fate is certain and optimistic. At the end of "The Student", Ivan is more optimistic about life than he was in the earlier part of the story, and he sees his life filled with potential; more importantly, he feels a happiness come over him, something which is lacking in Iona's ending.[15] If Ivan were to be seen in light of Tsvetaeva's poem, he would belong to one of the poet's ilk. Ivan, like the poet, would rather live with the suffering and pain caused by *toska* because it allows him to live life in a fuller sense and with meaning. By experiencing *toska*, Ivan sees the truth and beauty of human life which existed in Christ's time as well as his own. He is an example of the characters who "though doomed to

[15] Of course, one has to take into account that unlike Iona, Ivan does not experience a great personal loss.

take two steps backward for every one step forward, are not overwhelmed by this prospect and persist in their frequently frustrated quest for truth." (Lindheim, 65) The protagonist of the story "Love" (1886) relates that as a married man, he forgives all of his wife's mistakes, even though in the past as a single man he would have cast her aside for a trivial word or action. He doesn't understand why he loves his wife enough to forgive her but he does so regardless because he accepts the good along with the bad in his marriage. In "The Lady with the Dog" (1899), the happiness shared between Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna in their affair comes at the cost of experiencing depression and putting on an elaborate deception. Despite the couple's precarious situation, they are still able to hope in a bright future together: "And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning." (*Later Short Stories*, 585) Meanwhile, Iona, who fails to achieve an understanding of *toska* in his own life, seems to become forever burdened with suffering and the inability to effectively communicate with another human being. Iona's future seems much bleaker than Ivan's does. As Lantz observes, "The most basic problem Chekhov's characters face is to cross this 'boundless plain' of Russian life, to cope with their environment. His 'little man' is bewildered and disoriented and is desperately trying to find his way." (76) Iona, this "little man," is unable to cope with his environment of indifferent human beings and remains figuratively stuck in his journey through Russian life. On the other hand, Ivan does cope with his environment, including the ignorance, darkness, hunger, and *toska* in the world, and literally continues onward in his journey. Ivan embraces *toska* while Iona desperately seeks to expunge it in vain.

Toska's portrayal in Chekhov seems to change in relation to its character. In "Misery," *toska* is shown as a monolithic external force that overpowers and debilitates the character, rendering him unable to live a happy life because of the suffering it causes him. In the next story, "The Student," *toska* is seen as something linked to suffering, and its existence as a necessary part of human life in general. Although we see *toska* differently in these two Chekhovian stories, *toska* remains a complex, multi-faceted, and difficult to define as well as comprehend concept. Yet, by looking at *toska* and its evolution through these stories, we are able to learn more about it as well as Chekhov's ideas towards the concept. Maxim Gorky writes that Chekhov "had the art of revealing everywhere […] an art which is only possible to a man who demands much from life and which comes from a keen desire to see men simple, beautiful, harmonious." (*Reminiscences*, 14-15) My conclusion is that a close reading of Chekhov's "Misery" and "The Student" reveals the author's conception of *toska* and its many nuances; at the same time, looking closely at how *toska* functions and changes in these short stories also reveals the nuances of Chekhov's artistic world. In this world, the author's characters may either accept or reject *toska*, and their outcome largely depends on this choice. However, the decision to choose the former is ultimately the better choice, as echoed in Tsvetaeva's poem.

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