Bread Loaf School of English
Middlebury College

The Steppe and the Sea:

Nature in Chekhov's Prose

Hugh Koeze
Summer of Writing
Michael Katz
August 8, 2020

Introduction

Chekhov's readers and characters alike feel the allure of his natural landscapes, but encounter difficulties while interpreting them. Surrounded by the shallow vulgarity of their social milieu, many of Chekhov's characters seek a glimpse of deeper truth in nature. There are many examples: Yegorushka feeling the warmth of sunrise on the steppe, Gurov seeing eternity in the sea at Oreanda, the master of arts Kovrin receiving confirmation of his genius in the sea as he dies, or the coffin maker Yakov realizing the loss of his life as he sits under the willow and gazes at the river. But when they find that glimpse, it is not always clear how to interpret it, or apply it to their day-to-day lives. These moments seem to be among the most important in the characters' lives, but it can be difficult to name their significance, or sustain their importance over time.

Readers face similar problems in their search for deeper truth in Chekhov's descriptions of nature. Beginning with "The Steppe" (1887), Chekhov's nature descriptions diverged sharply from the rest of his writing in their lyricism, poetic features, long sentences, and shifts in narration. In their divergence, these passages seem to offer a window into the fundamental principles undergirding Chekhov's fiction. But using nature descriptions in this way is tricky; they are almost always preceded by the vexing "it seemed to him," locating these revelations within a character's perspective. Without a clear authorial voice, the significance of these passages can be felt broadly, but not often named specifically. And so the readers are left like the characters: with a feeling that we have glimpsed something momentous, but struggling to precisely describe it. We finish his stories unsettled, wanting to believe that the characters'

encounter with nature was real and meaningful, but unable to deny that the characters might have imagined it.

Is nature in Chekhov meaningful? This is the basic question Chekhov's landscapes pose, and to explore it, I will examine Chekhov's nature writing, beginning with "The Steppe," and then tracing the influence of this story on several landscapes later in his career. From "The Steppe" until his last stories, Chekhov's treatments of nature ask the reader to consider two cosmological visions. If nature's revelations are real and meaningful, the universe is a comprehensible, humanistic, sympathetic, even theist place, in which people can look to their surroundings for meaning and purpose. If not, the feeling of significance that Chekhov's landscapes create is an illusion born of the characters' perspectives, and the world of Chekhov's prose is an empty, indifferent plane on which characters' brief lives flicker meaninglessly. Chekhov's natural landscapes are either the bedrock on which an understanding of a harmonious universe can rest, or they are more shifting sands, revealing the impossibility of purpose and meaning in a chaotic cosmos.

To create these cosmologies, Chekhov's landscapes use webs of tonally-linked motifs. The first set of motifs, representing an indifferent and empty universe devoid of meaning, uses descriptions of large empty spaces, often in intense heat or cold, with repetitive sounds and features, like endless expanses of trees, salty seas or withered grain. Chekhov uses the same few epithets ("listless," "oppressive," "dull," "monotonous," "repetitive," "overpowering," "sultry" and "indifferent") to create these lifeless hellscapes. The second set of motifs represents the opposite universe: a humanistic, communicative and sympathetic world where nature communicates with humanity. These landscapes rely on motifs of riotous life and vibrant beauty,

like greenness, moisture, vibrant colors, coolness, fresh air, song, and animals, especially birds and insects. Again, Chekhov creates the tone using a few epithets repeated throughout his career, like "gentle," "tender," "lively," "plaintive," "trilling," "alluring," and "caressing."

The trouble for readers is that Chekhov's narration locates landscapes within characters' perspectives. This makes the cosmologies fluid and subjective. While the indifferent and sympathetic universes might be opposites, Chekhov's psychologically complex characters frequently vacillate between them, or even hold both universes in their mind at once. The cosmologies are modes of perception more than objective indicators of external reality. But in Chekhov, subjective does not mean false, and his later stories indicate that objective confirmation of the nature of the universe is less important than the individual's choice to create meaning out of nature. Finding meaning in Chekhov's depictions of nature is an existentialist exercise; natural revelations depend on human participation. His characters may never know for sure that the sea or the birds or the moon are communicating with them, but they certainly live more happily and meaningfully in a world in which they accept these glimpses and allow them to change their lives. Similarly, while Chekhov's prose allows the reader to ascribe meaning to nature or not, wandering his natural landscapes is a much more meaningful experience if we do.

The Steppe: Chekhov's Early Nature Writing

Scholarly debate on nature in Chekhov is active and unsettled, but often too limited in scope. Many critics discuss Chekhov's treatment of nature mostly in conjunction with his work of the late 1880s, and emphasize other topics later in his career. Even within those early chapters, critics tend to use his nature descriptions as useful components of larger arguments. For example,

Winner sees Chekhov's use of nature as an extension of his impressionistic techniques of characterization. Nature, he writes, serves as "a participant in the inner world of Chekhov's characters," and when he refers to landscapes, he does so with the assumption that they reflect the internal dynamics of the characters (Winner 54). Rayfield and Karlinsky ascribe more importance to nature than Winner, and both find an ecological consciousness in Chekhov's work. Rayfield, for example, writes in his introduction to *Understanding Chekhov* that the "evocation of evening light, sea, or storms lies at the heart of his world-outlook, in which human reflections and actions are only an ephemeral interruption of nature's continuum" (Rayfield xv). Yet, like Winner, Karlinsky and Rayfield spill relatively little ink discussing nature in the second half of Chekhov's career.

Jane Costlow is an exception in her ecological approach to Chekhov. She shows that his landscapes are not just allegories for aspects of human existence or props in service of his literary aims, and argues that Chekhov's work presents a "defense of the woods" and natural spaces in general (Costlow, "Imaginations" 116). In her essay "Reading the Environmental Chekhov," Costlow argues that his landscapes "are as varied as Russia itself" (Costlow 165). She distinguishes between several types of landscapes and their relative health, but the throughline for Costlow is that these environments are real "ethnoscapes" that document real ecological interactions, and do not function "merely as background" or reflections of the characters' minds (166, 164). For Costlow, Chekhov's trees are trees, and one aim of his writing is to depict natural environments accurately.

Chekhov indicates in his letters that depicting nature was the central purpose of "The Steppe." As he wrote in an 1888 letter to Dmitri Grigorovich, "for my thick journal debut, I've

selected the steppe" ("To Dmitry Grigorovich" 91). The characters and the plot are devices to connect the chapters; Chekhov's aim was to "describe the plain, its lilac vistas, the sheep breeders, the Jews, the priests, the nocturnal storms, the inns, the wagon trains, the steppe birds and so on" (91). Accordingly, Chekhov writes that successful portions of the story "smell like hay," whereas less successful sections are "dry, detailed" and encyclopedic (91). For critics, the elevation of nature description above plot, character or theme is difficult. Chekhov himself called the story "rather odd" and "much too original" (91). It is no wonder that generations of critics have found the story "formless," characterized by its "amorphousness," or lacking in "purpose, theme and soul" (Winner 52, Finke 80, Rayfield 55). As Finke has noted, many critics believe that "The Steppe" is "irregular and flawed, perhaps fatally" (Finke 80).

Other critics find "essential unity" in "The Steppe," but there is considerable disagreement about what that unity might be (Winner 52). Many critics, Peter Bitsilli, Abram Derman, and Rufus Mathewson Jr. among them, ignore the content of the motifs, finding unity that "tends to defy any precise articulation" in the story's poetic or musical techniques (Finke 80). Those that interpret the story symbolically do so in a variety of ways. Winner writes that "the struggle of life and death forces on the steppe" represents "the Chekhovian contrast of the world of art, sensitivity, and beauty to that of *poshlost*, ugliness and vulgarity" (Winner 47). The death forces ultimately win out in Winner's analysis; he calls "The Steppe" "an allegory of life and death," and "one of the most pessimistic of Chekhov's works" (56). Rayfield, on the other hand, sees "The Steppe" as "one of the last pieces of romantic prose," a "mini-epic" in which "immortal and vast" nature itself triumphs over the people who enter its domain (Rayfield 53). And yet, Rayfield writes that the story's "rhapsodies on nature" contain a "rational core": the

"recurrent motif" of "lunar sterility," suggesting nature's hostility to human life, as well as its "fragility" in the rapidly industrializing Donets Basin (Rayfield 46). So criticism of "The Steppe" runs the gamut; depending on the critic, the story has no coherent interpretation, a coherence that cannot be named specifically, or a specific interpretation that contradicts all the others.

The problem that critics of "The Steppe" face is the bifurcated symbolism of the story's depiction of nature. Chekhov's greatest innovation in "The Steppe" is his use of motifs in his landscapes. Beginning in this story, Chekhov's landscapes use webs of motifs to create two cosmologies: one sympathetic, harmonious, and communicative, and the other oppressive, indifferent, and chaotic. Because Chekhov presents these landscapes mostly within the protagonist's perspective, these opposite cosmologies coexist and interact in complex ways. To some degree, my analysis follows Michael Finke in his article "Chekhov's 'Steppe:' A Metapoetic Journey," which uses linguistic concepts borrowed from Kabbalah to argue that the dramatic tension of the story lies within the motifs themselves. He argues that motifs expand as the story continues, gaining symbolic associations, becoming "internally contradictory," and then undergoing a "crisis of meaning" and a "release of internal tension" (Finke 100). For Finke, the steppe is a text, and Yegorushka's journey across it is "his struggle to comprehend an expanding world through language" (102). Finke writes that the boy's "problem is one of establishing meaning, of reading" (102).

Jane Costlow has indicated a weakness of Finke's highly symbolic, metaliterary reading: it denudes nature. Chekhov's trees are trees, and his steppe is not just a text, but the steppe as well. Regarding "The Steppe" specifically, she argues (contradicting Rayfield and Winner's reading of the story's environment) that "the landscape of 'Steppe' breathes wildness and

profound health" (Costlow, "Reading" 165). I agree; Yegorushka's journey in "The Steppe," is a struggle to interpret the natural world itself. Indeed, Chekhov's motifs in "The Steppe" represent Yegorushka's attempts to understand the fundamental nature of the universe, but he finds that nature is multifaceted, ambiguous, embedded within his perception, and ultimately unverifiable. Both cosmologies exist, but perhaps only in the mind; the observer (whether a character or a reader) must participate in creating the world's meaning.

"The Steppe" begins with what would become a typical Chekhovian movement: the shift from the circumscribed, mundane life in town to the strange, boundless world of nature. Yegorushka, a young boy in search of answers (he has "no notion where he was going or what he was doing"), travels past a series of familiar places, each of which emphasizes the distinct boundaries of ordinary life (191). Religion is prominent in these images of boundaries. The chaise drives past "the prison" with its "sentinels," "white walls," "little barred windows" and "cross" (191). Similarly, when Yegorushka passes "the snug green cemetery surrounded by a wall of cobblestones," he sees the "white crosses and tombstones…[peeping] out gaily from behind the wall," suggesting that religion's conventions tame even the disorientation of death (191). Admittedly, there is a moment of uneasiness when Yegorushka remembers that his dead Granny's eyes "would not keep shut" during the funeral, but surrounded by the "familiar places" of his home, he quickly recalls a comfortingly limited interpretation of death: "Now she did nothing but sleep and sleep…" (191). Still, however, in that ellipses, as well as the obscurity of the "smoking brickyards" at the edge of town, the reader sees a hint that this pat explanation for death is only satisfying in the conventional, bounded world of town.

The town's conventionality has metaliterary implications as well: as both Rayfield and Winner note, the story begins conventionally. Winner suggests that "'The Steppe' is constructed as a traditional tale of the adventures and observations of a travelling hero" (46). Winner also notes that the "shabby," "decrepit" and "antediluvian chaise" of the opening paragraph alludes to the "rather pretty little chaise on springs" of the opening of Gogol's novel *Dead Souls* (46). In Rayfield's analysis, these aspects of "The Steppe" give the story "a period charm" as "Chekhov's formal entrance through the front door of literature" (Rayfield 53. He writes that "Gogol, Turgenev and early Tolstoy indicate the way" for Chekhov (Rayfield 53). Rayfield also sees hints of older literature in the "veil of anonymity" given to the town and province as well as "the reflections of Russian humanity in general and the reminders to the reader from the discreet narrator that Yegorushka is to grow up and find a new understanding of his experience" (53). Yegorushka's journey, the reader expects, will answer his questions; nature will help him question the distinctions of his childhood, and grow to understand himself and his world more deeply.

Perhaps foreshadowed by the ancient chaise's "readiness to drop to pieces," the conventional distinctions disappear as soon as the travelers enter the "open country" ("Steppe" 189, 192). Like many of the Chekhovian protagonists who would follow him, Yegorushka leaves town and finds himself in an indefinite natural world where clear distinctions and simple interpretations are impossible. There are no walls, no barred windows, and no crosses; one might see the steppe as the "vast tract" between faith and atheism that Chekhov discusses in an 1897 diary entry (Borny 43). As Finke has argued, the overwhelming size of the steppe is a metaphor for the "literary space" away from conventional categories; despite being "encircled by a chain

of low hills," the steppe is "boundless" (Finke 103, "Steppe" 193). There is a degree of fear in this indefiniteness, and the hills seem to be as afraid and confused of the vastness as Yegorushka: "huddling together and peeping out from behind one another, these hills melted together into rising ground, which stretched right to the very horizon and disappeared into the lilac distance" (193). Rather than circumscribing the steppe, the hills indicate its interpretive openness; any attempt to bound the steppe with a discrete interpretation seems doomed. "One drives on and on," the narrator notes, "and one cannot discern where it begins or where it ends…" (193-4). This description applies equally to the narration or plot of the story as its depiction of nature; the steppe is a place of strangeness and disorientation, where the conventional understandings, traditional literary forms, and accepted distinctions collapse.

The disorienting aspect of Russian wilderness was an important part of Chekhov's view of nature, as he writes in a February 1888 letter to Dmitri Grigorovich. He contrasts the despair of Western Europe with that of Russia, writing that Western Europeans "perish from living where it is overcrowded and suffocating" ("To Dmitri Grigorovich" 520). For "us," Chekhov continues, "it is from living where it's too wide open… There is so much space that tiny man is powerless to orient himself" ("To Dmitri Grigorovich" 520). Yet, this boundlessness is also psychologically powerful, as Chekhov describes in an 1887 letter to his family. Having gotten out of his train to relieve himself, "there before me were endless wonders: the moon, the boundless steppe, the barrows, the wilderness, deathly stillness, the railway cars and tracks clearly outlined in the twilight - as if no living thing remained… It was a picture no one could forget, not in a million years" ("To the Chekhov family" 518). Nature is not the human landscape; it is strange and disorienting, but powerful for those very reasons.

Of course, Chekhov did not invent the mind-opening power of nature; taking to nature to find freedom away from the constraints of society is fundamental to Romantic literature. Some of Chekhov's early stories before his journeys of the 1880s and 1890s contain moments like this, such as "Dreams" (1886), which places the vagrants' dreams of a free life among the natural landscapes of Siberia. Even in "From Siberia" (1893) Chekhov includes rhapsodies on the freedom found in the wild. Writing of the Trans-Siberian Highway, Chekhov writes enthusiastically of the "secrets" and "devil-may-care, seductive freedom" that "wafts from this enigmatic pathway," including bands of criminals and hidden villages (36). Passages like this support Jeffery Brooks's claim that Chekhov's early work was influenced by Patsuhkov's serialized adventure novel *The Bandit Churkin* (Brooks). Similarly, Rayfield writes these early natural descriptions are "ecstatically romantic" dreams (Rayfield 25). But the natural descriptions "The Steppe" are more radically, unnervingly open to interpretation than in most Romantic literature. "The Steppe" doesn't answer Yegorushka's questions about the direction of his life, but replaces them with more profound questions about the ability to interpret life and the universe in general.

Chekhov raises these questions through motifs, using them to represent two cosmologies: the sympathetic and the indifferent. The first example of these motifs is the description of morning on the steppe. At first, personification abounds in a passage filled with life and sympathy. The sun "peeped" above the horizon, and streaks of light "crept over the ground," "embraced the hills," and even gently "touched Yegorushka's spine" ("Steppe" 194). "Soon, the whole wide steppe" is "smiling and sparkling" in the morning dew, which "washed," "caressed" and "revived" the grasses during the night (194). The "joyful cries" of the marmots, "plaintive

notes" of the lapwings, the "soft 'trrrr!" of partridges, and the "churring, monotonous music" of the insects create a comforting symphony of life. Yet within moments, "the dew evaporated, the air grew stagnant, and the disillusioned steppe began to wear its jaded July aspect" (194). The steppe's size reasserts itself in motifs of death, oppressiveness, and disorienting vastness: "the sun-baked hills, brownish-green and lilac in the distance with their quiet, shadowy tones, the plain with the misty distances and, arched above them, the sky, which seems terribly deep and transparent in the steppe, where there are no woods or high hills, seemed now endless, petrified with dreariness" (194-195). This "stifling and oppressive" world resists interpretation; a hawk flies away, and there is "no telling why it flew off and what it wanted" (195). These motifs (the hills, the heat, the plain and the sky) are larger, stranger, and quieter than the dewy grasses and insects of sunrise; their nature is indifferent to Yegorushka.

These opposite versions of nature exist together throughout "The Steppe," even within the same images and sounds. The single sentence about grasses of the steppe includes descriptions of their "withered," "brown and half dead" state in the "sultry heat" as well as their early morning washing, caressing and reviving by the dew (194). The sentence ends with another reversal as the dew gives way to heat, causing the grasses "to fade again" (194). Yegorushka, through whom the reader sees steppe, must be confused; the steppe seems to be speaking to him and overwhelming him with its oppressive silence. The key distinction between these motif webs is scale; the trilling song of a single grasshopper on a single stalk sparkling with dew reassures Yegorushka, but when he tries to listen to all of the insects, or take in the entirety of the steppe, or consider the full length of a day, the vibrance of the microscopic level disappears under the incomprehensible vastness of the macroscopic whole. These opposite cosmologies, then, derive

at least partially from Yegorushka's perspective; how widely he focuses his eyes determines what type of universe he sees.

An instructive example of the role of scale in the comprehensibility of the universe occurs when Yegorushka and his party rest at a stream in the middle of their first day on the steppe. On a smaller scale, the universe communicates eloquently to Yegorushka, helping him understand some of the baffling images he encountered earlier in the morning. However, he cannot entirely escape reminders of the large scales beyond his comprehension, and the overall significance of the stop at the stream becomes ambiguous. Around midday, the travelers arrive at a "little stream," which flows in a "thin trickle" out of a "little pipe" at the base of a "low hill," its smallness a refuge against the vastness of the steppe (200). The stream's "soft, very caressing gurgle" supports a lush environment filled with motifs of the living universe, like "green and luxuriant" reeds, fresh air, and several living creatures (three snipe, a lapwing, and grasshopper), all of whom produce musical sounds (199-200, 204). The rivulet, however, also contains motifs of a large and indifferent cosmos surrounding it, including "oppressive" heat, "stillness," "stagnation," and the ever-present "lilac distance" (204). Just beyond the refuge of the stream, life seems impossible: a hamlet seems to have "expired in the burning air and was dried up" (204).

In this environment, a small refuge still connected to the incomprehensibly massive steppe, Yegorushka hears a mysterious "soft singing," which speaks to him eloquently of the bifurcated nature of the steppe (205). It seems as though the song comes "first from the right, then from the left, then from above, and then from underground, as though an unseen spirit were

hovering over the steppe and singing" (206). This mysterious indefiniteness causes Yegorushka to imagine that "the grass was singing":

> ...in its song, withered and half-dead, it was without words, but plaintively and passionately urging that it was not to blame, that the sun was burning it for no fault of its own; it urged that it ardently longed to live, that it was young and might have been beautiful but for the heat and the drought; it was guiltless, but yet it prayed for forgiveness and protested that it was in anguish, sad and sorry for itself (206).

This "subdued, dreary and melancholy" song is an important symbol in its cosmological ambivalence. This song is the product of both Chekhovian universes: both real and imaginary, a creation of people (the peasant woman singing it and Yegorushka's imagination) and the steppe in its use of motifs that echo earlier descriptions. The universe communicates "plaintively and passionately" through its music, but its paradoxical message of hostility depresses Yegorushka, making "the air hotter, more suffocating and more stagnant" (206). While listening to it, the "very caressing" gurgle of the stream becomes monotonous, and it seems that time, like the air, has become "stagnant and come to a standstill" (208).

The "mournful" and "dreary" "dirge" seems to remind him of larger scales of time, especially the eternity of death. "Could it be," Yegorushka wonders, that in "God's world," the chaise and the horses would "come to a standstill in that air, and, like the hills, turn to stone and remain forever in that one spot?" (208). He slips into an apocalyptic reverie that could be a dream of the disorienting sensations of death: the "lilac distance" begins "heaving," and "with it the sky floated away," bringing Yegorushka floating along as well (208). This song seems to contain both answers to "The Steppe's" fundamental question about the nature of the universe: it is evidence of a communicative, sympathetic world, but in its disorienting incomprehensibility seems to convince Yegorushka of the indifferent and empty opposite. The difference between the

two is in Yegorushka's perspective: he can hear and understand the world around him when focused on smaller scales, but when considering larger spaces and longer times, he loses orientation, and the universe loses its coherence and communicative nature. In this way, both cosmologies exist via the perception of the protagonist, and their attendant motifs are more modes of perception than external clues to the universe's fundamental nature.

Chekhov does not allow his characters or readers to verify the nature of the universe in "The Steppe," but rather builds tension between the two cosmologies as the story continues. The narrator does not assert authorial authority; every revelation that nature provides to Yegorushka is contested, ambiguous, and limited to his own perspective. One night, for example, the narrator describes the steppe with a remarkable degree of personification. "The steppe is lovely and full of life," the narrator writes, adding that when the sun goes down, "the steppe breathes a light sigh from its broad bosom" (235). The communicative music of nature accompanies these romantic images with "a gay, youthful twitter" full of "chirruping, twittering, whistling, scratching" mingling in a "sweet" and soothing "lullaby" (235-6). This night, like the sunrise or the stream, contains the strangeness and unease (the "sinister" and "uncanny" moonlight makes "everything looks different than what it is"), but overall, the description sings with Romantic lyricism. In the "triumph of beauty," "the exuberance of happiness," and the "joyful clamor" that nature expresses, there is "yearning and grief" in the steppe's "mournful, hopeless call for singers, singers!" (238). The steppe feels alive, musical and communicative.

The following night, however, depicts the opposite cosmology; the steppe is the same, but the description indicates a frighteningly indifferent universe. As Yegorushka drifts off, the narrator notes the effect of gazing at the sky:

> One begins to feel hopelessly solitary, and everything one used to look upon as near and akin becomes infinitely remote and valueless; the stars that have looked down from the sky thousands of years already, the mists and incomprehensible sky itself, indifferent to the brief life of man, oppress the soul with their silence when one is left face to face with them and tries to grasp their significance. One is reminded of the solitude awaiting each one of us in the grave, and the reality of life seems awful...full of despair… (266)

Just as the previous night on the steppe was its clearest expression of a communicative, sympathetic universe, this night is the clearest depiction of an silent, "indifferent" and "incomprehensible" one. Everything "near and akin" is "valueless;" life is "brief," "awful," "full of despair" and impossible to understand. This reverie reminds Yegorushka of his"granny in the dark and narrow coffin, helpless and deserted by everyone," a sharp change from his earlier view of her death as sleep (266). Yet as the night continues, the motifs of the living universe reassert themselves in attempts to speak and communicate. The night is filled with the cries of birds, the crooked crosses of graves on either side of the road which attest poetically to the presence of the soul and the sadness of the steppe (269). On this night, even Dymov "hummed some plaintive song," and while Kiruha and Emelyan's songs are "discordant" and "harsh," the "soft, warm night" "whispered" in Yegorushka's ear as he drifts off (285, 286). The cosmologies exist in constant tension and uneasy balance.

Before the increasing tension between the cosmologies comes to a head in the climactic storm, Yegorushka encounters a variety of characters who model how to live in such an ambiguous and overwhelming world. Some characters close themselves off to the world around them, avoiding its terrifying indifference as well as its beauty and reassurance. Kuzmitchov, for example, begins the story in a genial mood, but as the chaise heads further into the open steppe, "the geniality gradually faded out of his uncle's face, and nothing else was left but the air of

business reserve," an air which also characterizes his interactions with other characters (197). Other characters deal violently with nature, like Dymov and Kiruha. Dymov looks at the world as an insensitive and restless predator, incapable of looking deeply into anything (249). As he looks around him, "his mischievous, mocking eyes glided over the road, the wagons and the sky without resting on anything, and seemed looking for someone to kill, just as a pastime, and something to laugh at" (250). Both of these characters have limited their perception; they do not see the terror of the steppe, but they do not see its beauty either.

Better are the role models who are open to the world, but not reflective or sensitive enough to feel overwhelmed by its terrifying scale. Father Christopher, for example, lives in a childlike state of perpetual wonder, gazing "with moist eyes wonderingly at God's world," a broad smile almost always plastered across his face (190). Another example of this approach is the wagon driver Vassya, whose "extraordinarily keen" sight fills the "brown steppe" with "life and interest," like "foxes playing, hares washing themselves with their paws, bustards preening their wings and hammering out their hollow nests" (251). "Thanks to this keenness of sight," the narrator says, "Vassya had, beside the world seen by everyone, another world of his own, accessible to no one else, and probably a very beautiful one, for when he saw something and was in raptures over it, it was impossible not to envy him" (252). Vassya's sharp eyes broaden his sight; he can always see small, comprehensible details of a sympathetic universe in the empty vastness.

When the storm comes in Chapter 7, Yegorushka finds it impossible to follow this open-minded model; he may crave communication and answers from nature, but when they come, they overwhelm rather than reassure him. The storm clouds are a "coarse, clumsy monster

like a claw with fingers, [stretching] to the moon;" the thunder shouts incoherently throughout the passage in a "fearful, deafening din" of "Trrah!" and "tah!" (297, 298). The storm renders any attempt to limit the scale of the universe impossible; even looking through "a slit in the mat," Yegorushka sees "the whole highroad to the very horizon, all the wagoners, and even Kiruha's waistcoat" (297). Like the rain inorexably penetrating the mat, the "magic light" of the lightning even "pierced through closed eyelids," giving the boy a terrifying vision of "three huge giants with long pikes following the wagon" (298, 299). Before this, the universe overwhelms Yegorushka with its silence; now, nature's communication overwhelms the child, making him "simply numb with cold and the conviction that the storm would never end" (300). The storm reverses the motifs' meaning. The universe of the storm is alive, but not sympathetic; it is communicative, but not comprehensible. And, of course, all of this enters the narrative through Yegorushka's limited perspective; another character's experience of the storm might be entirely different. In other words, "The Steppe" explores the basic question of nature's meaning from every angle, reversing and reiterating the question again and again, but refusing to answer it.

The rest of the story resolves little. Yegorushka feels sick, gets better, leaves the steppe, arrives at his new home in his new town. He ends the story as he begins it: crying and wondering what his life will be like: "he sank helplessly on the little bench, and with bitter tears greeted the new unknown life that was beginning for him now....(323). It is not clear how Yegorushka will live his life, how he understands his universe, or whether he will become more like Kuzmitchov, Father Christopher, or some other character. Yet the steppe has changed Yegorushka's perspective. Even in town, he encounters the motifs of the steppe; he has "oppressive misty dreams" of the steppe at night, but also hears "a cricket [churruping] in the stove," and a "faint

humming" reminiscent of the song of the grass coming from the lamp (321). He cannot go back to his simple understanding of the world; he now knows that nature is a complex, multi-faceted entity. Unlike the beginning of the story, in which Yegorushka bounces passively in the aged chaise, unable even to form a question to express his confusion, the end of the story makes the question explicit: "What would that life be like?" (323). Nature has not settled his fundamental questions, but it has taught him how to ask. If Yegorushka is to understand his world, he cannot passively wait for answers; he must participate in finding those answers himself.

The Sea: Chekhov's Later Nature Writing

Chekhov's depiction of nature followed the pattern set by "The Steppe" for the rest of his career. As my analysis of "The Steppe's" influence on *Sakhalin Island* (1893), "Gusev" (1890), "The Black Monk" (1893), and "The Lady with the Little Dog" (1899) will show, nature remains characters' source of deeper truth. Similarly, his stories continue to represent opposing cosmologies in webs of natural motifs, but refuse to resolve the motifs' contradictions. In other words, his landscapes continue to ask questions about nature's meaning, and they continue to not answer them. The landscapes diversify, but they operate more or less similarly to the steppe. Indeed, while many aspects of Chekhov's writing changed significantly in the years after publication of "The Steppe," nature mostly remains the same.

It is possible, however, to identify some subtle and important shifts. First, descriptions of nature remain frequent and important, but become shorter, more fragmentary, and more tied to difficult questions of perspective. Second, while both Chekhov's sympathetic and indifferent cosmologies and their motifs are even more closely intertwined than in "The Steppe." In some

stories, it might be more accurate to join Chekhov's universes into a paradoxically harmonious whole. Still, the effect of these shifts is minor; they serve to emphasize only more strongly Chekhov's imperative to choose and create one's own meaning of nature. These glimpses of truth cannot be verified, Chekhov's stories suggest, but a world in which nature speaks is a much better one to live in.

The consistency of the natural world of Chekhov's later stories and that of "The Steppe" is remarkable. As in "The Steppe," the boundless freedom of nature and its accompanying disorientation characterize many of Chekhov's descriptions of nature. *Sakhalin Island*, especially its preface "From Siberia," includes many moments like this. For example, Chekhov describes the incomprehensible size of the taiga in a passage that echoes the openness of the steppe. "The power and enchantment of the taiga lie not in titanic trees or the silence of the graveyard," Chekhov writes, "but in the fact that only birds of passage know where it ends" (Sakhalin 35). Immersing oneself in a space this vast and indefinite is both thrilling and "actually terrifying," as Chekhov wrote in a very similar passage in a letter to his family ("To the Chekhov family" 526). The "wonderment" of the beginning of the journey fades quickly to a "sensation that you will never manage to emerge from this green monster" (35). This unnerving lack of boundaries allows unconventional thoughts, like the irrelevance of "customary human yardsticks" such as morality or a human life (36). Describing the sight of a "runaway exile," for example, Chekhov writes "how petty and insignificant, in comparison with the enormous taiga, appear his villanies, torments and he himself! He will perish here in the taiga, and there is nothing strange, nothing dreadful about this, like the death of a gnat" (35). The vastness of Siberia (like the vastness of the steppe) defamiliarizes conventional interpretations of life, which is liberating but also disturbing.

Even in the smaller glimpses of Chekhov's later stories, nature provides freedom from the *poshlost*, conventionality, tradition and other boundaries of the built landscape. Take, for example, "Rothschild's Violin," which presents an extreme illustration of nature's ability to subvert distinctions and categories. The protagonist, Yakov the coffin-maker, is one of the narrowest characters in Chekhov. Bound by his concept of "losses," Yakov, or Bronze, as he is often referred to, lives in a mental space akin to his coffins (282). Limited to a point of callous inhumanity, he is "never in a good mood," cruel to his wife and to Jews, especially the musician Rothschild, and he has even forgotten (consciously, at least) the death of his own child (282). Bronze measures his wife with his "iron rule" for her coffin before she has died, and his only reflections after her burial surround the frugality of the service and the quality of his coffin (285-6). The motifs surrounding him are fittingly hard and oppressive, like the metal of Yakov's nickname or his ruler, and the "crimson" faces, "choking" smells, and heat of the orchestra (282).

Yakov, however, finds freedom from his mental confinement in nature. Walking by the river and the "green, quiet and sad" willow, hearing the "cheeping" sandpipers and "quacking" ducks, the motifs of nature remind Yakov of his child, opening his perspective more broadly. The landscape contains large vistas and images of life, flight, and boundless movement: besides the birds and the "youthful and slender" feminized birch (two motifs with direct echos of "The Steppe"), Yakov remembers the "large forest of birches," "ancient pine wood" that had once "shone" on the "horizon," and the "huge flocks of white geese rushing towards one another" (287). This vision of nature frees Yakov from his self-imposed confinement, allowing him to understand other sorts of "losses" beyond money, like those of his wife, his child, his life, and

even ecological loss (288). By the end of the revelation, the word "benefit" even slips into the narration, and Yakov ends his story making restitution to Rothschild (288-289). As in "The Steppe," nature opens Yakov's mind, allowing new interpretations of himself and his environment.

Second, Chekhov's post-"Steppe" prose also uses similar motifs to represent the same indifferent and sympathetic cosmologies. In *Sakhalin Island*, nature generally oppresses and overwhelms with the cold, the pounding waves, and the endless hills or capes, which remind Chekhov of the indifference of nature to human suffering. Much of the book is factual and pessimistic, and its few lyrical passages tend to depict an indifferent and incomprehensible universe. At the mouth of the Naibuchi river, for example, he writes that "the roaring sea is cold and colourless in appearance, and its "tall grey waves" pounding the shore seem to be saying "oh God, why did you create us?" (197). Gazing at a landscape of endless capes, Chekhov senses that "all around there is not a single living soul, not a bird, not a fly, and it is beyond comprehension who the waves are roaring for, who listens to them at nights here, what they want, and, finally, who they would roar for when I was gone" (197). Similarly, while leaving Alexandrovsk, Chekhov hears "an impotent and malicious boredom" in "the roar of the pounding waves" (171). At the Arkovo Cordon, "the waves pounded dull and melancholy," and in Dooay, which Chekhov calls a "deadful, hideous place, wretched in every respect," the monotonous "thunder of the breakers" merges with "slow, measured jangling of fetters" and the "humming of the telegraph wires" (123, 129). When Chekhov writes "it is always quiet in Dooay," he means this profoundly: the quietness of Dooay is the silence of the cosmos towards humanity.

And yet the trees and the sea also speak warmly and reassuringly at various points in his journey to Sakhalin, and just as in "The Steppe," these sets of motifs connect closely, despite presenting opposite visions of the universe. In Dooay, for example, there is a song, a madman's song, admittedly, but a song nonetheless (129). In Siberia, Chekhov finds not the "soundless," scentless taiga he'd expected, but rather a landscape that he describes as lyrically as sunrise on the steppe: "birds pouring out songs," "buzzing" insects, "the thick fragrance of resin," and "delicate pale-blue, pink and yellow flowers, which caress not merely the sense of sight" (34-35). Similarly, the sea on Sakhalin Island is not just a reminder of the universe's indifference, but can also restore and reassure, as Chekhov discovers when he climbs to the lighthouse above Alexandrovsk: "the higher one rises, the more freely one breathes; the sea stretches out before one's eyes, and little by little thoughts arise which have nothing to with the prison, or hard labour, or the penal colony" (104).

And yet, just like the grasses on the steppe, even this lyrical, communicative vision of nature contains its opposite. Chekhov continues that "on the mountain, in sight of the sea and the beautiful ravines," the intrigues of the prison officials' lives seem "impossibly cheap and sordid" (104). Despite Chekhov's statement that he's able to think of other things besides the vulgarity of life in the colony in nature, he writes that "it is only up here that one becomes aware how wearisome and hard life is down below" (104). Indeed, once Chekhov reaches the lighthouse, the sea seems to contain both universes at once: the "wide broad sea" is both "sparkling in the sunlight" and making a "hollow roaring sound," causing one to "grow terrified" and one's "head [to spin]" (105). The indifferent and sympathetic universes are never far apart in Chekhov's prose; each contains its opposite.

The motifs of Chekhov's later stories represent the same cosmologies as "The Steppe," and these stories make definitive interpretations of nature even more challenging in their use of perspective. Take, for example, the treatment of nature in "The Black Monk," a story whose mentally ill protagonist raises complex issues. Master of Arts Kovrin is in some ways the opposite of Yegorushka in his relationship to nature; whereas the inarticulate and passive Yegorushka lacks the ability to comprehend anything larger than a small stream, Kovrin's mania is characterized by its confident overinterpretation of nature. Nor is Kovrin the only character with these sorts of egotistical hallucinations in the story; the horticulturalist Pesotsky's gardens and orchard are similar projections onto nature. When Kovrin first sees the monk, he perceives similar motifs of a communicative universe as in "The Steppe," including birds ("snipe" and "ducks"), wind, fresh water, a sunset, a wide field of "young rye," and the "sacred harmony" of music (230, 229). These motifs, along with the "gloomy pines," speak to Kovrin in the "muted murmur," suggesting a sympathetic, living cosmos (230). Kovrin, however, amplifies these subtle messages into the monk, who poisons him by verifying the "innermost" thoughts of his own genius (238).

The black monk is Kovrin's egotistical projection onto nature; Pesotsky's is the garden. Plants, of course, are part of nature, but in Pesotsky's quest to make his garden and orchard into "a whole institution of great national significance," he twists his plants into "whims, refined monstrosities, and mockeries of nature," or, in the case of the orchard, into a "checkerboard pattern" as "straight and regular as soldiers," whose "strict, pedantic regularity" makes the orchard "monstrous and even dull" (232, 225). Yet kernels of real truth and beauty exist even in these monstrosities, either in Kovrin's rambles through the less regulated portions, or in the fact

that closer inspection of Pesotsky's trees reveals them to be "gooseberry or currant bushes" (224). But like Kovrin's self-centered theory of his relationship to nature (the monk at one point tells him that "your imagination is part of nature"), Pesotsky also derives confirmation of his genius from the trees of his garden. It shouldn't be surprising that Pesotsky reveres his former tutor so highly, and sees Kovrin as "the only man to whom I would not be afraid to marry my daughter" (233). These connections underscore the danger of Kovrin's communication with nature; the sympathetic universe seems to have a negative side in this story.

Kovrin's relationship to nature becomes more objective when he receives treatment for his mental illness, and descriptions from this portion of the story depict nature as empty and indifferent. The "gloomy pines" who murmured to him in the beginning of the story now "did not whisper, but stood motionless, mute, as if they did not recognize him" (245). Similarly, the sunset only speaks to him of "the windy weather" likely to come the next day, though this detail foreshadows the reawakening Kovrin's mania given the association between the wind and the black monk. By the end of the story, Korvin again sees nature alive again with similar motifs, including the "light breeze" and the song with its "sacred harmony" (251). The bay "looked at" and "beckoned" to Kovrin with "a multitude of blue, aquamarine, turquoise and fiery eyes" "as if alive," and Kovrin dies with "inexpressible, boundless happiness" and a "blissful smile" as the black monk and nature confirm his genius once again (252).

Interpreting the ending of "The Black Monk" is challenging, partially because of the protagonist's insanity, but also because the story shares its seascape with a number of other stories, including "Gusev," and "The Lady with a Little Dog." These seascapes distill the steppe's radical unity, connecting Chekhov's opposing cosmologies and their attendant motifs

ever more tightly. “Gusev” is the first of the three, and for most of the story, nature (which Gusev views through the porthole in the ship’s sick ward) is as indifferent and monotonous as the stifling steppe or the pounding waves of Sakhalin. In fact, the motifs describing “Gusev’s” iteration of the indifferent universe are a combination of the two: either, the “tall waves roar for no known reason” with “no sense, no pity,” or the sea is “limpid” and “bathed in blinding hot sunlight,” its air “hot and dank” (“Gusev” 212, 209, 211). Both are oppressive and uncommunicative to Gusev; nature only speaks to him in his dreams of home.

Just as in “The Black Monk,” however, nature reawakens in remarkable fashion at the end of the story, raising challenging issues of perspective via the protagonists’ deaths and, in Kovrin’s case, his insanity. In “Gusev,” the narration does not mark the protagonist’s death, unnervingly retaining its closeness to Gusev as he’s sewn into a body bag, thrown into the sea, and drifts down to the bottom. As this occurs, the narrator describes a majestic sunset:

> Overhead, meanwhile clouds are massing on the sunset side - one like a triumphal arch, another like a lion, a third like a pair of scissors.
>
> From the clouds a broad, green shaft of light breaks through, spanning out to the sky’s very center. A little later a violet ray settles alongside, then a gold one by that, then a pink one.
>
> The sky turns a delicate mauve. Gazing at this sky so glorious and magical, the ocean scowls at first, but soon it too takes on tender, joyous, ardent hues for which human speech hardly has a name (“Gusev” 214).

This passage connects closely to the sea at the end of “The Black Monk”:

> Kovrin went out on the balcony; the weather was still and warm, and there was a smell of the sea. The beautiful bay reflected the moon and the lights and had a color for which it was difficult to find a name. It was a gentle and soft combination of blue and green; in places the water resembled blue vitriol in color, and in places the bay seemed filled with condensed moonlight instead of water, and overall what a harmony of colors, what a peaceful, calm and lofty feeling! (“The Black Monk” 249-250).

Both passages, in their harmonious lyricism, their beautiful colors, their poetic features (examined in depth by Radislav Lapushin in his book *Dew on the Grass')*, and their epithets (like "tender" or "gentle") recall the alluring, plaintive sunsets of "The Steppe", and the living, sympathetic universe they represent. Taken alone, "Gusev" seems to verify this optimistic cosmology; given that Gusev is dead, this harmonious universe cannot be a product of his imagination. The moment seems to show the ocean mourning the death of this insignificant sailor in colors that human language cannot even name, and there is no hedging, or "it seemed to him," though, as I have noted, the narration is somewhat strange in its refusal to name Gusev's death. The landscape reveals a beautiful, compassionate universe, and in the lack of a living protagonist, its narration suggests that this, perhaps, is a glimpse of the universe that Chekhov himself believed in.

On the other hand, the ending of "The Black Monk" seems to support the opposite conclusion. Kovrin sees the same living, sympathetic universe from his balcony as in the end of "Gusev;" he may as well be looking out at the same difficult-to-describe color from a first-class cabin on Gusev's ship. But Kovrin is insane, the black monk (the ultimate emblem of a communicative universe) is a hallucination, and despite his blissful dying smile, it is difficult to accept the ecstatic cosmology of a cruel and self-centered man lying in a "big pool of blood on the floor" (252). "The Black Monk," like the strange narration of "Gusev," leaves the opposite interpretation open just a bit; Kovrin, after all, dies after a long period of responsible and unpleasant treatment, and it is hard to say that rejecting his hallucinations would have prolonged or improved his life. But still, Kovrin's vision of a sympathetic cosmos does seem to be a

hallucination. It is much easier to read the story as a denunciation of the Romantic imagination of nature than an endorsement.

The third famous seascape of Chekhov's prose (the sea at Oreanda in "The Lady with the Little Dog"), suggests that verifying these interpretations of the natural world is less important than the characters' decision to accept the feeling of significance that nature creates in them. Having just consummated their affair in an atmosphere of appalling vulgarity (the melon-eating is particularly bad), Gurov and Anna seek an antidote in nature. Sitting at the bench at Oreanda, Gurov gazes at the sea, and sees both cosmologies as a harmonious whole:

> Yalta was barely visible through the morning mist, white clouds stood motionless on the mountaintops. The leaves of the trees did not stir, cicadas called, and the monotonous dull noise of the sea, coming from below, spoke of the peace, of the eternal sleep that awaits us. So it had sounded when neither Yalta nor Oreanda were there, so it sounded now and would go on sounding with the same dull indifference when we are no longer here. And in this constancy, in this utter indifference to the life and death of each of us, there perhaps lies hidden the pledge of our eternal salvation, the unceasing movement of life on earth, of unceasing perfection. Sitting beside the young woman, who looked so beautiful in the dawn, appeased and enchanted by the view of this magical decor - sea, mountains, clouds, the open sky - Gurov reflected that, essentially, if you thought of it, everything was beautiful in this world, everything except for what we ourselves think and do when we forget the higher goals of being and our human dignity ("Lady" 419).

This is the same "monotonous dull" sea that Chekhov sees from the mouth of the Naibuchi river, the same sea that Gusev sees through the porthole, and it represents the same "indifference to the life and death of each of us" that Yegorushka sees in the sultry steppe. And yet, this silent universe speaks to Gurov in comforting terms. Paradoxically, this aging man whose predation of young women is at least partially driven by his anxiety about his death, sees a reminder of his death in the "utter indifference" of the universe to humanity, and transforms this into a reassuring "pledge of eternal salvation," "unceasing movement," beauty, and perfection. He rejects an

objective, modern view of the universe, and instead chooses to be "appeased and enchanted" by the sympathetic, "magical" poetry of nature, a choice that he allows to change his life. Even if Gurov and Anna's dreams of "a new beautiful life" will never be realized, this passage suggests that they will lead happier, more vibrant lives having accepted nature's reminder to pursue "higher goals" like love (427).

Gurov illustrates that Chekhov's indifferent and sympathetic cosmologies are not necessarily in conflict; in the fluidity of their motifs and their interpretive openness characters (and readers) can choose to find meaning in even the most uncommunicative natural landscapes. Kovrin is insane, but seeing the black monk and dying is better than hearing nothing in nature, and then dying anyway; like all illnesses in Chekhov, his insanity is medical, not moral. Nature can speak to Yakov-types enclosed in coffin-like minds, and even on Sakhalin Island, the sea sometimes reassures and comforts. Similarly, Gusev cannot witness the beautiful sunset that accompanies his trip to the bottom, but the narrator's refusal to name his death suggests that on some deeper level he might, that the ocean is mourning Gusev in a way that no one else will. Chekhov's nature descriptions contain both sympathetic and indifferent universes in their motifs, but they don't endorse or verify either universe; rather, they suggest an existentialist cosmos, one in which the observer may choose the nature of their universe, at least to some degree. When Chekhov's prose asks whether nature is meaningful, it asks another question as well: which sort of world would we like to live in?

Conclusion

My analysis leaves many questions unanswered and many stories unexplored. The dynamics I identify might apply to many of Chekhov's post-1888 stories. The moonlight of "The Bishop" (1902), the waves of "The Duel" (1891), the blizzard of "On Official Business" (1899), the nocturnal creatures of "In the Ravine" (1900), the sunset of "The Student" (1894) - all of these landscapes and many more speak as eloquently about the nature of Chekhov's universe as my examples. Similarly, I have not examined the role of time, death and anxiety about mortality in Chekhov's nature descriptions, though they are certainly important - even young Yegorushka, a creation of pre-tubercular Chekhov, sees death in nature throughout "The Steppe." This aspect of Chekhov's landscapes only increases as Chekhov's career continues, as Rufus Mathewson has explored in his analysis of "The Lady with the Little Dog" (Mathewson). Also left unexamined is the role of objectivity and genre; in general, Chekhov associates objectivity with the indifferent universe, as the bleak nonfictional landscapes of *Sakhalin Island* make clear. And yet even these indifferent landscapes are not fully verified; while the sympathetic and communicative cosmos is more imaginative, that doesn't necessarily make it less real or true.

Most glaringly, my analysis only examines Chekhov's prose, but the question of Chekhov's depiction of nature is just as important in his drama. Chekhov's plays often revolve around natural entities like the lake of *The Seagull,* Astrov's forests of *Uncle Vanya,* or the titular cherry orchard of *The Cherry Orchard*. Like the landscapes of his prose, these natural emblems seem central to interpreting their plays, but (again like the prose) they remain vexingly inaccessible to direct interpretation. In the prose and the plays, problems of perspective, complex motifs, and the lack of authorial intervention make landscapes ambiguous, but in the plays, nature is also offstage. Nature has no external reality beyond lighting cues and sound effects; it

exists in the mind of the audience, increasing the openness of Chekhov's depiction. Indeed, his plays ask the same question as his prose: is nature meaningful?

Chekhov's prose doesn't directly answer this question, but that refusal to intervene is itself an answer. In Chekhov's world, a world in which "everything… is relative and approximate," characters and readers may choose to see nature as meaningful ("9. To Maria Kiselyova" 61). In fact, Chekhov's characters and readers *should* choose to do so. It may be less objective, but who would choose the empty, indifferent hellscape of the baking summer steppe, when one can also drink from the rivulet and immerse oneself in the river? Who would live on Sakhalin when Siberia, Oreanda or Yakov's village are also available? For the readers, why read his stories only to despair at the meaningless of the characters' world, and not to reaffirm the basic compassion of the universe? Also, throughout these stories, nature's sympathy inspires similar sympathy and compassion in the characters, like Yakov giving his violin to Rothschild; the choice to see meaning in nature has moral significance in Chekhov's prose. But how to read Chekhov's natural landscapes remains a choice; certainly Chekhov never intended to enforce one view of the world. Instead, Chekhov's prose offers two visions of the universe, one sympathetic and communicative, the other indifferent and empty. He leaves it up to us to choose which we would like to live in.

Works Cited

Borny, Geoffrey. “Chekhov’s Vision of Reality.” *Interpreting Chekhov*. ANU Press, 2006, pp. 21–56. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/jctt2jbjpn.

Brooks, Jeffery. *The Firebird and the Fox: Russian Culture under Tsars and Bolsheviks.* Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Chekhov, Anton. “9. To Maria Kiselyova.” *Anton Chekhov’s Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary,* edited by Simon Karlinsky, translated by Michael Henry Heim, Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Chekhov, Anton. “17. To Dmitry Grigorovich.” *Anton Chekhov’s Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary,* edited by Simon Karlinsky, translated by Michael Henry Heim, Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Chekhov, Anton. “The Black Monk.” *Stories*, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Bantam Books, 2000, pp 223-252.

Chekhov, Anton. “Gusev.” *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, translated by Ronald Hingley, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, pp. 202-213.

Chekhov, Anton. “The Lady with the Little Dog.” *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, pp. 414-427.

Chekhov, Anton. “Rothschild’s Violin.” *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, translated by Anna Gunin, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, pp. 281-289.

Chekhov, Anton. *Sakhalin Island*, translated by Brian Reeve. Alma Classics, 2007.

Chekhov, Anton. “The Steppe.” *The Steppe and Other Stories*, translated by Constance Garnett,

Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, pp. 187-323.

Chekhov, Anton. “To the Chekhov family, Cherassk, April 25, 1887.” *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, translated by Cathy Popkin, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 518.

Chekhov, Anton. “To the Chekhov family, Irkutsk, June 6, 1890.” A*nton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, translated by Cathy Popkin, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 525-526.

Chekhov, Anton. “To Dmitry Grigorovich, Moscow, February 5, 1888.” A*nton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, translated by Cathy Popkin, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, p. 519-520.

Costlow, Jane. “Imaginations of Destruction: The ‘Forest Question’ in Nineteenth-Century Russian Culture.” The Russian Review, vol. 62, no. 1, 2003, pp. 91–118. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3664560. Accessed 29 June 2020.

Costlow, Jane. “Reading the Environmental Chekhov”. Approaches to Teaching the Works of Anton Chekhov. United States, Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

Finke, Michael. “CHEKHOV'S ‘STEPPE’: A Metapoetic Journey.” Russian Language Journal / Русский Язык, vol. 39, no. 132/134, 1985, pp. 79–120. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43668944. Accessed 6 July 2020.

Karlinsky, Simon. *Anton Chekhov’s Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary,* translated by Michael Henry Heim, Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Lapushin, Radislav. *‘Dew on the Grass’: The Poetics of Inbetweenness in Chekhov,* Peter Lang, 2010.

Mathewson, Rufus W. Jr. “Intimations of Mortality: The Lady with the Dog”. *Anton Chekhov’s Selected Stories*, edited by Cathy Popkin, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, pp. 664-670.

Rayfield, Donald. *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chekhov’s Prose and Drama*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

Winner, Thomas. *Chekhov and his Prose*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.