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Intertextuality, Aesthetics, and the Digital: Rediscovering Chekhov in Early British Modernism

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Abstract

Intertextuality between Anton Chekhov and early modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Raymond Carver, and DH Lawrence is a recurrent topic in comparativist scholarship. However, due to the breadth of methodological approaches, conclusions regarding Chekhov's influence continue to elude scholars. This essay seeks to shift the exploration of Chekhovian intertextuality in the early modernist period (circa 1900–1925) away from the rigid concept of influence alone. By applying current theory regarding postcritical hermeneutics, aesthetics, and digital textual analysis, I introduce new intertextual connections between Chekhov and modernist short stories, showing that transnational exchange within the short story genre need not perfectly align along historical, contextual, or chronological lines. My reading blends close reading with digital textual analysis, providing a more nuanced and kaleidoscopic view of the spreading of the short story genre across time and nations

Keywords: Chekhov, British, Intertextuality, Modernism, Digital Humanities

The intertextual links between Chekhov and early modernist writers have proven difficult to assess. Many of these writers, including Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and DH Lawrence, all either published criticism of Chekhov, translated his works and letters, or drew on him in their

own fiction. Scholarly work has most commonly focused on these hallmark modernists' imitation and veneration of Chekhov's thematic choices, unblinking realism, and his nonlinear and unresolved plots. Many of these writers, like Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, and Raymond Carver, have even been awarded monikers directly linking them and their respective literary style and standing to the Russian author within their own literary and national contexts as "the English," "Irish," or "American Chekhov" respectively (Butenina 27). Following the modernist era and into the 1970s and 80s, British performances of Chekhov's plays occurred so frequently that these were only outstripped by Shakespeare performances (Miles 55). Since Constance Garnett's early translations of Chekhov's stories and plays in the early 1920s, translations of Chekhov into English have grown "beyond calculation" (Kilmenko 122). Even today, contemporary poets and writers outside of Russia draw upon Chekov's texts in both overt and nearly undetectable ways.

This essay renews and extends the exploration of Chekhovian intertextuality within the early British modernist period (1900–1925) beyond the rigid question of influence alone. In what follows, I first synthesize several previous critical examinations of intertextual networks between Chekhov and other early modernist writers. This review of past scholarship informs a short theoretical reexamination of the concept of intertextuality generally, starting first with TS Eliot's landmark essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and moving into current theory regarding literary aesthetics, postcritical hermeneutics, and the role of the digital humanities in identifying new intertextual networks. These theories lay the groundwork for conceptualizing intertextuality as multidirectional, showing that productive scholarly conversation can occur between texts that may not perfectly align along historical, contextual, or chronological lines. This alters the current order of operations often used in comparative literary analyses by using aesthetic, compositional,

thematic, and linguistic elements as the foundation of intertextual analysis, with shared historical and contextual periphery of texts supplementing and enriching these primary connections. Ultimately, the purpose of these analytical adjustments is to allow the impact of intertextuality to extend beyond the influence of one author upon another, showing that lack of complete overlap between textual contexts should not disqualify critical or creative co-production between texts. This theoretical section forms the foundation for the body of my article, wherein I conduct a comparative reading of a pair of short stories, one published by Chekhov and another by the modernist author, Katherine Mansfield. My reading blends traditional close reading with digital textual analysis, resulting in a more nuanced, multifaceted, and kaleidoscopic view of Chekhov within British modernism. This examination of the unique and complex relationship between Chekhov and the modernist writers ultimately opens the door for more flexible and ubiquitous dialog between texts of differing literary, national, and linguistic backgrounds.

Intertextuality, Aesthetics, and the Digital

Due to the breadth of references and allusions to Chekhov in the literature and criticism that has followed in his wake, the doctor-turned-writer's intertextual presence continues to puzzle and fascinate scholars. This persistent yet diverse fascination arises primarily out of the multitude of critical approaches employed by scholars. Some, such as Svetlana Kilmenko, find the diverse scholarly commentary on the "remarkable quantity and quality of reincarnations of Chekhov in English" unproductive (121). She asserts that non-Russian writers, and consequentially the scholars who study them, have identified allusions to a Chekhov work or proclaimed intertextuality between texts based on a shared sense of misplaced nostalgia for the

past.[1] An unfortunate consequence of this argument would be to dismiss much of what scholars have assigned as "Chekhovian" in early 20th century English texts as intertextual invention rather than sincere instances of intentional and identifiable affinity. Other critics, like Claire Davison, have steered critical conversations on this subject towards a focus on the impact that translation holds upon these Anglo-Russian intertextual-networks. Davison approaches these questions not "in terms of [shared] theme, motif or originality" of Chekhovian and British texts, but rather via "the poetics of translating" (7). She claims that British authors' ability and willingness to engage in Chekhov's texts in the original Russian facilitated a more masterful integration of Russian literary style into their own work. This enabled these authors, in Davidson's view, to better "think across traditions, styles and genres" in writing their own work (7). However, if carried in the reverse, Davison's argument also (perhaps inadvertently) implies that an author's *inability* to translate between languages ultimately occludes the intertextual and allusive links that could be forged with foreign authors. Still other critics, such as Kerry McSweeny, reject Kilmenko's historic (or what Kilmenko may call nostalgic) lens and instead conducts comparative analyses of Chekhov and other authors synoptically.[2] McSweeny claims that critics who point toward Chekhovian influence in non-Chekhov texts via biographical, contextual, or historical modes alone overlook the vibrant aesthetic value of Chekhov's stories. These aesthetic connections,

[1] Kilmenko's description of this nostalgic effect is as follows: "The English Chekhov . . . brings emphasis to the universal essence of nostalgia as longing away from the present . . . away from any determination at all of time or space . . . [his texts] demonstrate that people do not miss what is beautiful or glorious, but rather beautify and glorify what is missing" (132).

[2] McSweeny defines this method as "an aesthetic critical model for more detailed considerations of the short stories" which "brings distinctive features of the work of each into sharp focus, facilitates making qualitative discriminations among stories, and provides a basis for assessing the profitability of other critical models" (preface, x).

according to McSweeny, provide more fruitful ground for discovering allusive material between texts, material which interpretative or subtextual readings of the stories alone cannot provide. He writes, "The kind of critical attention Chekhov's stories invite is not exclusively or even primarily interpretative, but such attention needs to be informed by a sense of how [aesthetic] literary allusion works in a text" (30). Aesthetics and affect, rather than context, therefore, form the basis of McSweeny's examination of Chekhov's ties to non-Russian writers.

At this point, we have arrived at a critical and methodological crossroad. Scholars exploring intertextual links to Chekhov must, it seems, choose between emphasizing the shared historical context of Chekhov and British writers, focusing on the effects of translation, or comparing the aesthetic and thematic elements of Anglo-Chekhov texts. To aid my own choice at this intersection, I briefly step away from Chekhov and turn towards intertextuality in the broader, theoretical sense. Doing so will, I hope, synthesize the aforementioned scholarship and the methods these scholars have employed and justify the critical and analytical method which I will employ in my own comparative readings between Chekhov and other British writers.

Much of the theoretical complexity and debate surrounding intertextuality lies in finding precise definitions of what constitutes intertextuality, which texts are suited for intertextual examinations, and the effect these links produce on our current understanding of texts. With the present article's particular topic and literary period in mind, I turn first to TS Eliot's landmark essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," (1919) in which Eliot delivers his view of the relationship between poets and the literary tradition which preceded them. Eliot's essay fundamentally concerns itself with the question of intertextuality, though not in the historic or contextual sense. He quickly rejects the idea that critics should examine intertextual links to the past literary tradition as if they were "some pleasing archeological reconstruction" of allusions

and quotations (3). For Eliot, critical excavation of the historical strata of influence and intertextual indebtedness of one author to another does little to link authors together, but instead isolates them from each other. Because "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone," a "contrast and comparison" of the writer "among the dead" writers of the past constitute an essential part of literary criticism (6). However, this critical valuation between past and present writers is not bound by any temporal or time-based criteria for Eliot, but is instead "a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism" (6). Eliot's essay displays the way in which intertextual time operates. It does not progress in a neat or linear fashion; rather, successful poets, for Eliot at least, infuse their texts with both the past and the present, merging the aesthetics of their predecessors together into their own work. Eliot's essay supports the idea of intertextual multidirectionality and timeless literature, where "the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (7).

And yet, in the decades that have passed since Eliot's essay, criticism—intertextual or otherwise—has apparently moved on from Eliot, opting instead to plumb the depths of historic intertextuality and dig deeper and deeper into the layers of contextual sediment between authors. There is little point, critics seem to be saying, in comparing texts without any shared authorial or extra-textual justification, shared history, sociological subtext, or some other hidden and obscure commonality. However, some critics, such as Rita Felski, have recently pushed back against this notion. Felski laments that literary scholars have thus far achieved "little success in halting the tsunami of context-based criticism" (152). Despite the years of analysis devoted to "Tradition and the Individual Talent," critical inquiries into the intertextual nature of texts have, on the whole, adhered to "the prevailing picture of context as a kind of historical container in which individual texts are encased and held fast [in] what we call periods — each of which surrounds,

sustains, and subsumes" a text (156). Such an approach has, for Felski, greatly inhibited the possibilities and power behind the discovery and description of intertextuality between seemingly disparate authors. She writes that historicism serves as the "equivalent of cultural relativism, quarantining difference, denying relatedness, and suspending—or less kindly, evading—the question of why past texts matter and how they speak to us now" (154, 156). From this, Felski calls for "models of textual mobility and transhistorical attachment" in criticism, granting text the ability to "attract allies, generate attachments, trigger translations, and inspire copies, spin-offs, and clones" beyond what their historic or contextual period may permit, "to swirl, tumble, and collide in everchanging combinations and constellations" (168–169, 158). Felski's timeless conception of literary relationships ultimately reverses the commonly held order of operations in the critical comparison of texts.

By applying Felski and Eliot's concepts, intertextual criticism can enrich its traditional, linear[3] model with a new focus on aesthetics and affect. However, this does not mean that context, historic or biographical, goes thrown out of the window. Rather, my intent is to merely widen the view and processes which critics can employ in their valuations of texts. Felski defends aesthetics the preferable starting point for comparative criticism by claiming that aesthetics—formal devices, characters, plot, themes, and diction are the that—are not the result of historic connections between authors, but are "the very reason such [historic] connections are forged and sustained" in the first place (165). So, while a primary focus on shared aesthetic elements between texts does not preclude the examination of the social or historic periphery, this

[3] I use linear here to imply a general attitude in comparative literary criticism. The word, I feel captures both the instinct of needing to "dig deep" into social or contextual depths and to adhere to a proper chronological horizontality, or order of events (Felski 52).

approach affords texts a "transtemporal liveliness," or texts' ability to create and co-construct with each other "without opposing thought to emotion or divorcing [the] intellectual rigor" of historic and contextual criticism from a scholarly examination of related writers (154).

With these new and exciting possibilities for intertextual networks, the potential that digital tools and technologies hold to further enhance and enlarge our explorations and comparisons of texts should not be overlooked. Many of the tools and techniques currently in use within the field of digital humanities align with Felski and Eliot. Franco Moretti has recently pointed out the ability of digital quantitative software to quickly and accurate point out potential intertextual links between texts. He terms this concept "distant reading," a way of performing traditional close readings across a wide spread of literary corpora (55). Yet other scholars are using these digital tools in a more intimate way than Moretti suggests, turning instead to individual texts or specific pairings between texts. For example, Julie Van Peteghem has noted how "within the digital framework," tools that search across both "large text corpora" and in individual texts "for the precise recurrence of words and phrases" produce as accurate and fruitful "observations and interpretations" of texts as larger-scale digital search tools (43). Additionally, Neil Coffee et al. align themselves with Felski's theory of aesthetics and extra-textual production, claiming that the use of digital resources in the study of literature not only builds stronger intertextual networks between texts, but also between the texts and their readers. They state that "digital detection" tools are able to "bring to prominence . . . features that have passed beneath the notice of critics, but which have nevertheless played a role in the poet's production and reader's experience" (418). Such a digitally aided and enhanced focus ultimately, in Coffee's words, constructs "a more satisfying profile of the artistry of each poet and richer interpretations of their works" (418).

Why then does a multidirectional, aesthetic-based, digitally-aided model of intertextual analysis fit Chekhov? The aforementioned scholarship on Anglo-Chekhov intertextuality—each utilizing different methods, approaches, and viewpoints—all seem to place Chekhov on a different intertextual or influential point on the literary map. In answering this question, I find one characterization by Donald Rayfield, Chekhov's primary biographer, particularly helpful. Rayfield proclaims Chekhov as "the most approachable and the least alien . . . of all the Russian 'classics' . . . to non-Russians especially," but that "Chekhov's approachability" in the English literary tradition "is inseparable from his elusiveness. It is very hard to say what he 'meant,' when he so rarely judges or expounds" (preface, xv). Efforts, like those of Kilmenko, to steer criticism of Anglo-Chekhov connections toward context and historically motivated analyses may perhaps be due to Rayfield's description of Chekhov's elusive and murky authorial presence. However, the quality of approachability in Chekhov cannot be so easily dismissed, for such a quality relates strongly to his stories' aesthetic and formal attractiveness. McSweeny's approach toward Chekhov is firmly based on this emphasis of Chekhov's aesthetic hospitality: "[Chekhov's] stories . . . are better read in terms of their aesthetic effects than their alleged subtexts . . . [they] invite a different kind of critical attention—not interpretative problem-solving but correct construal and an articulate aesthetic response" (43, 47). Chekhov's stories, whether for their compositional inventiveness, their poignant themes, lively characters, or simply the words they contain, exude what Wai Chee Dimock calls "resonance" or an ability to initiate newfound connections between literatures in unexpected places (1061). His literature manifests what Felski describes as a "dexterity in soliciting and sustaining attachments" with other authors and texts (166). But ultimately, Chekhov's own description of his literature captures its enduring relatability. In a letter he once wrote, "so I turn out a sort of patchwork quilt rather than

literature. What can I do? I simply don't know. I will simply depend on all-healing time" (Karlinsy, 273). Such a statement foreshadows the timeless and far-flung influence his work would produce on writers during and after his own time.

In the section that follows, I will perform a comparative reading, aided by software[4] designed for digital textual analysis, of a Chekhov and a Mansfield story. Using these aforementioned theoretical attitudes and models, I hope to provide interpretations of the stories that do not leave the impact of these intertextual pairs stranded within their own historic or aesthetic compartments. Instead, as Felski says, I intend to step into "a coproduction between [textual] actors that brings new things to light," (174). Though I do examine instances of biographical concordance between the authors or direct contextual linkage between the texts themselves, I primarily focus on what the texts' aesthetic and thematic qualities produce, question, and propose as they are brought into conversation with each other. These bi-textual productions, I hope, will ultimately produce newfound appreciation not only for Chekhov's work as they stand alone, but for what they have enabled in the wider world of literature since his career and into today.

Reconceptualizing Mansfield-Chekhovian Intertextuality in "Daughters of the Late Colonel" and "A Dreary Story"

Of the many scholarly comparisons of Chekhov and other early modernist writers, Mansfield garners perhaps the most attention and focus. Her open admiration of Chekhov's stories, plays, literary methods, and biography is well-documented and well-researched, and comparative criticism and analyses of their literature and intertextual relationships are just as

[4] Unless otherwise specified, I will be using the Voyant software, designed by Stefan Sinclair, McGill University and Geoffrey Rockwell, University of Alberta, which can be accessed for free at voyant-tools.org.

consistent and thorough.[5] However, despite the frequency and ardency with which these two writers have been brought together in both historical scholarship and literary criticism, more critical attention must be given to Mansfield's simultaneous dependence on and independence from Chekhov through new comparative pairings between each author's stories.

Previous analyses of the intertextual networks between Mansfield and Chekhov tend to split into two general areas. The first category centers on Mansfield's fascination with the biographical aspects of Chekhov's life. These studies often investigate her translation of a volume of Chekhov's correspondence—published in collaboration with Samuel Koteliansky, a Russian-born British translator and well-known literary friend of other writers such as Virginia Woolf and DH Lawrence—as well as her reviews and essays on Chekhov's literature, often published and circulated through her husband, John Middleton Murray (Diment 238–239). The second category of criticism focuses on the aesthetic and literary indebtedness that Mansfield's short stories apparently owe Chekhov. Much of this scholarship tends to bring a particular pair of stories into conversation with each other: Mansfield's early story, "The-Child-who-was-Tired," (1910) and Chekhov's story, "Спать Хочется" [Sleepy] (1888), with Mansfield's story often being read as an almost-plagiarized version of Chekhov's story. These literary studies tend to be more divisive than the historically based scholarship, either accusing Mansfield of blatantly imitating Chekhov or defending Mansfield's independent aesthetic and literary style from Chekhov's. Such polarized claims stem from the lack of variety in the pairings of different

[5] Some examples of well-known studies on intertextual links between Mansfield and Chekhov (see bibliography for full citations): Schneider, 1935; "The Times Literary Supplement" debate by post in 1951 (published by Tomalin, 1987); Sutherland, 1955; Alpers, 1980; Tomalin, 1987; New, 1999; McDonnell, 2010; Jones, 2011; Lelis, 2011; Glotova, 2014.

Chekhov and Mansfield stories. The dissonance within the scholarship, therefore, has tended to push these narrow comparisons of Mansfield and Chekhov towards one side or the other.

However, the goal of this section is not to debate from one particular end of this scholarly spectrum, nor is it to comment on previous pairings of Mansfield and Chekhov stories. Rather, the intention of this section is to bring a previously unconnected pair of stories into conversation with each other, illustrating the complex network between biography, context, and literary style at work in Chekhov and Mansfield. Despite the seemingly contradictory and disparate scholarly conclusions about these authors' intertextual relationship, my comparison of Mansfield's "Daughters of the Late Colonel" (1921) and Chekhov's "A Dreary Story" (1889) rethinks Mansfield's intertextual "indebtedness" to Chekhov. At first glance, the plot structure and themes of Mansfield's "Daughters" seem to imitate "A Dreary Story," much in the same fashion that has drawn attention to "The-Child-who-was-Tired" and "Sleepy." However, the stories contrast strongly in their narrative modes. These contrasts alter the final conclusion and meaning of the theme of death that each story presents to the reader. Despite the initial intertextual linage between the stories, these formal and aesthetic differences demonstrate Mansfield's and Chekhov's individual and independent aesthetic and literary style. Ultimately, this comparison shows that the divided analyses—those which isolate Chekhov and Mansfield from each other and those which establish an intertextual line of credit between the authors—are not mutually exclusive. Rather, this comparison unfolds the multidimensional relationship that exists between Mansfield and Chekhov, a network of co-production that enriches and enlivens our understanding, appreciation, and application of their texts.

Beginning with the cursory similarities between the stories, the plot of Mansfield's "Daughters" can be read as a continuation of the plot and events described in Chekhov's "A

Dreary Story." Chekhov's tale follows the physical, intellectual, and emotional downfall of a renowned professor of medicine, Nikolai Stepanovich. After being diagnosed with a degenerative illness, Nikolai becomes increasingly alienated, detached, and embittered towards his colleagues, friends, and family, specifically his wife, Varya, daughter, Liza, and foster daughter, Katya. The decay of these relationships only increases Nikolai's suffering and ultimately "empties his life of meaning" (Flath 272). Mansfield continues "A Dreary Story" where Chekhov left off. "Daughters" begins further along the timeline of the plot, shifting focus onto Josephine and Constantia, daughters of an equally prestigious and alienated patriarch, and explores their navigation of the traumatic and spectral presence of their tyrannical and cantankerous father.

Details from some letters and correspondence provide firmer footing for the claim that Mansfield wrote "Daughters" as a type of continuation of "A Dreary Story." Mansfield's story was published three years after her own diagnosis with consumption in 1918. Her anxiety concerning her own death, as well as her journaling of these anxieties alongside meditations on Chekhov and his literature, parallel the emotions and reflections expressed by Nikolai Stepanovich in "A Dreary Story," which Chekhov framed as if told from the professor's diary. This diagnosis also prompted many ardent reflections about Chekhov in her own notebooks and journals as she struggled to balance her writing with the debilitating illness. In one notebook, Mansfield writes, "At four 30 today it [illness] did conquer me and I began, like the Tchekov students, to 'pace from corner to corner', then up and down, up and down and the pain racked me like a curse and I could hardly breathe...I feel too ill to write" (*Letters,* 141). Such invocations of Chekhov align Mansfield's own personal and existential anxieties with those of Nikolai Stepanovich in "A Dreary Story."

"Daughters" emerges in part out of these biographical alignments. One particular instance of Mansfield's musings on Chekhov from her many notebooks draws a direct link between "A Dreary Story" and "Daughters." Mansfield writes: "I must start writing again... Ach, Tchekhov! Why are you dead! Why can't I talk to you – in a big, darkish room – at late evening – where the light is green from the waving trees outside . . ." (*Letters*, 141). Mansfield's descriptive, almost prayerful appeal to Chekhov mirrors the setting and mood of a pertinent scene in "Daughters" where Constantia and Josephine are briefly freed from their father's phantom-like presence by the memories of their mother:

> "The sunlight pressed through the windows, thieved its way in, flashed its light over the furniture and the photographs . . . When it came to mother's photograph . . . it lingered . . . The thieving sun touched Josephine gently. She lifted her face. She was drawn over to the window by gentle beams." (28-29)

In one of the only moments in "Daughters" where natural light appears in the story, the sisters are able to momentarily break out of their fearful, apprehensive, and timid behaviors and shake off the influence of their father. Josephine is able to think and act clearly rather than "vaguely" for the first time in the story, and she recalls specific memories of the happier "other life" when her mother was living (29). The imagery in this moment of escape and relief from their father's spectral presence and the responsibilities left to the sisters after his death parallels the setting described in Mansfield's notebook. Both are described as places of aethereal, earthy light, with Mansfield freed from her anxiety of death and dying and able to converse with a ghostly Chekhov, much in the same way that Josephine and Constantia seem to interact with their deceased mother. Ultimately, "Daughters" likeness to "A Dreary Story" in terms of biographical context and plot reveal a vibrant intertextual correlation between the two stories. Such a

correlation affirms many scholarly conclusions regarding Mansfield's heavy reliance on Chekhov's texts to inspire and propel her own stories.

And yet, "Daughters" simultaneously resists intertextual affinity with Chekhov's "A Dreary Story" when considering the narrative modes of both stories. Their diverse registers not only differentiate each author's individual and independent literary style, but also provide grounds for new and distinct interpretations of each story, despite their related plots, context, and themes. Carol Flath has pointed out that "A Dreary Story" is unique for Chekhov in its usage of the journal or diary-like mode of narration. This departs from the mode of many of Chekhov's other texts, which are famously celebrated for their innovative proto-modernist plotlessness. For Chekhov this often meant beginning *in medias res* and using an omniscient, third-person narrator. However, "A Dreary Story," as Flath says, is told "in the imperfect aspect, present tense," exhibiting Chekhov's less known though nonetheless "…skillful use of the first-person narrative" (272). Telling the story in this alternative register, while increasing the reader's access to Nikolai Stepanovich's intimate thoughts and feelings about his fading life, forces the reader to accept Nikolai's version of the story's events, which may or may not be true to the experience of those he writes about.

However, the narrative mode shifts abruptly at the end of the story as Nikolai Stepanovich switches into the past tense and perfective aspect from the present imperfective.[6] The final moment of the story demonstrates this shift in the verbal narration. As Katya abruptly

[6] It is important to note that the shift in verb tense, especially between the perfective and imperfective aspect, is much more apparent in the original Russian. Verbs set in these different aspects are more quickly and readily identifiable due to the alternative spellings, prefixes, or suffix endings that differentiate perfective or imperfective verb sets.

leaves Nikolai's hotel room, never to see him again, he writes, "She knows that I am watching her go, and will probably look back when she reaches the corner. No, she didn't. I caught one last glimpse of her black dress, her steps faded away…Farewell, my treasure! (217)." In the first sentence, Nikolai continues his account in the imperfective present, using verbs such as "знает" [knows], "гляжу" [am watching], and "повороте оглянется" [look back]. However, the final two sentences of the quotation shift abruptly into the perfective past tense, with verbs such as "не оглянулась" [didn't look back], "мелькнуло" [caught], and "затихли" [faded]. This shift to the past tense and perfective aspect metaphorically signal the end of Nikolai's life. Thus, throughout the whole story, Chekov's narrative mode, including these key shifts in verb tense, models the very process of dying. Readers are exposed to Nikolai's thoughts and emotions in the present, granting a more visceral and in-the-moment view of his decline. In these final moments, the reader is forced, like Nikolai Stepanovich, to acknowledge the end of life. Ultimately, "A Dreary Story" presents a vivid and poignant perspective on the process of dying.

Conversely, "Daughters" focuses on death conceptually rather than its process. The story does this through a different and characteristically Mansfieldian narrative mode. Mansfield captures the isolating and estranging effects of death on the sisters by telling the majority of the story through third-person narration. Though Mansfield occasionally reveals the sister's first-person perspectives and thoughts, she does so far less frequently and overtly than Chekhov. Mansfield grants this access by blurring the narration with the interior thoughts of the sisters, sometimes omitting quotation marks around their thoughts or questions. One example of this occurs as the sisters are attempting to sort through their father's belongings:

> She had the most extraordinary feeling that she had just escaped something simply awful. But how could she explain to Constantia that father was in the chest of drawers? He was

> in the top drawer with his handkerchiefs and neckties, or in the next with his shirts and pyjamas, or in the lowest of all with his suits. He was watching there, hidden away—just behind the door-handle—ready to spring. (21)

The ambiguity in whether the narrator or Josephine is sensing the old colonel's presence in the wardrobe clouds the sisters' emotional sensibilities. This murkiness however enhances the reader's awareness of the trauma that these sisters are experience because of their father's passing.

Mansfield enriches the detached and distant mood which her narrative register generates through another of her well-known stylistic techniques: object-oriented interiority or the opening of a character's inner thoughts and emotions based on surrounding objects. This technique achieves a similar estranging effect, channeling the sisters' normal human emotions towards objects rather than other people. This is evident in the passage quoted above where the sisters apprehend their father more strongly through his old "handkerchiefs . . . neckties . . . shirts . . . and pyjamas" than through any memory or experience with him (21). This object-oriented relationship between the father and his old possessions is shown in Figure 1 below, where the frequency of the term "father" drops into closer correlation and frequency with the objects described during segment five, the moment when both sisters attempt to sort through his effects.

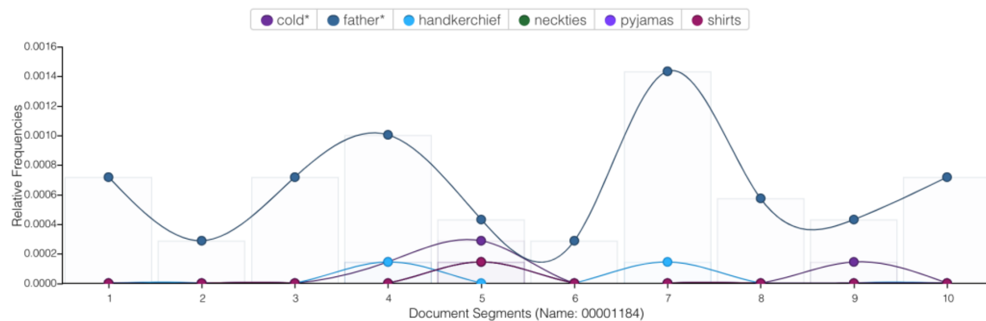

Figure 1: Trends Graph. The x-axis progresses through each consecutive part of the story, while the y-axis gives the frequencies of the selected keywords in each segment.

Mansfield pairs this spectral, even predatorial aura surrounding their father's clothing with a description of the study's cold temperature: "Everything was covered" with a "coldness" and "whiteness" from which the sisters "expected a snowflake to fall" (20). This indicates that the sisters, in the wake of their father's death, have become alienated and distant from their own lives. Mansfield's unique narrative methods ultimately alter the story's approach to the subject of death. Unlike "A Dreary Story," "Daughters" concerns itself less with process or experience of dying and more with the alienating effects of death on those still living.

And yet, though these contrasting narrative modes appear to put more intertextual distance between Chekhov and Mansfield, they do so only in terms of their literary styles. The individual and independent qualities and techniques of each writer do not cancel out the biographical and contextual ways in which these stories directly correlate to each other. Though this may seem paradoxical, this statement from Russian immigrant critic, D.S. Mirskii, puts this apparent riddle of Mansfield-Chekhovian intertextuality into clear, provocative terms: " . . . if Chekhov has had a genuine heir to the secrets of his art, it is in England, where Katherine Mansfield did what no Russian has done—learned from Chekhov without imitating him" (382–383). Mansfield's admiration and knowledge of Chekhov is undeniably linked to many of the intertextualities between their texts. But each author's literary style and methods are also undeniably their own. Ultimately, this comparison demonstrates the multi-layered nature of intertextuality, showing how texts and writers may align by one definition of intertextuality while simultaneously maintaining independence from each other.

Conclusion: Revisiting Modernism and Chekhov's Invitations

What is now left to consider is how critical conceptions of literary modernism continue to change because of Chekhov. Scholars who have examined this area have often pointed towards

the non-traditional narrative mode which Chekhov inspired writers to adopt as the world passed into modernity. Florence Goyet, for example, claims that Chekov's short fiction calls "into question the very idea of a stable, affirmative self and the superiority of one 'voice' over the others" ultimately subverting the pre-modern narrative tradition (8). Adrian Hunter additionally credits Chekhov for allowing the short story to "distinguish itself as something other than a miniaturized novel" explaining the way in which his texts resist "novelistic strategies of continuity and identification, seeking an 'open', interrogative effect rather than a 'closed', declarative one" (73). Such praise of Chekhov's innovation and genius is widely felt and easily discernable, especially thanks to digital tools employed both in this article and in other scholarly work. However, this critical praise of the "interrogative" and "interior" effect also casts a vague persona around Chekhov. Critics of modernism revere him as a sort of absentee author—one who is always objective, constantly passing into the imperfect and biased minds of his characters, though never offering any subjective view or opinion of his own for the reader to consider. Modernist writers and contemporary critics admire him for his seemingly non-political, non-moral, and non-spiritual perspectives on the world. Even Chekhov's descriptions of his own writing seemingly justify this view. In one letter to his brother, Chekov writes, "To describe . . . you need . . . to free yourself from personal expression . . . Subjectivity is a terrible thing" (Koteliansky). Such a statement confirms Chekhov's own apparent eschewing of overt social commentary, personal opinions, or ideologies within his work.

I call this emphasis on Chekhov's narrative objectivity into question, specifically in regard to the "interrogative" persona cast on him by some critics. Hunter's aforementioned characterization of Chekhov as the detached interrogator and objective questioner of humanity separates Chekhov from both his texts and his readers, removing "the obligation to provide any

interpretative content" in his stories (74). While Hunter justifiably attributes this freedom from interpretative obligations to later modernists, the characterization also discounts Chekhov's deep interest in steering his readers towards adopting new beliefs and attitudes about themselves and their worlds. Just because Chekhov's texts do not provide overt or declarative interpretations of themselves does not mean that Chekhov is merely an uninvested interrogator.

With this in mind, I suggest that Chekhov's stories, despite their interpretative haziness and Chekov's own admitted avoidance of subjectivity, do not only interrogate and cross-examine. His stories offer thoughtful "invitations" for readers, directing them towards possible answers and actions. Justification for my reconceptualization of Chekhov's influence in terms of an "invitation" instead of an interrogation stems from the linguistic nuances in the Russian word for invitation, "приглашение." The etymological root of the word is "глас" or "голос," meaning "voice," and bears the following figurative meaning: "высказываемое мнение" [an expressed opinion] (Тихонов 143). Furthermore, an invitation does not only suggest or give voice to the inviter's opinion; it also provides the choice of acceptance or rejection for the recipient. The great subtlety of Chekhov's works is that they offer opinioned invitations to readers without sacrificing interpretative complexity and nuance. Thinking of Chekhov as an inviter rather than interrogator accounts for the wider-than-expected range of writers with whom Chekhov intersects. And though several of these writers were explored in the previous sections of this article, reconsidering Chekhov's stories as invitations ultimately offer scholars the promise of discovering many more intertextual links between Chekhov and other authors.

This concept of invitation not only adheres to Chekhov's own texts individually, but also links Chekhov to aspects of the modernist literary project. Rather than proclaiming a message, their aim was to observe, question, and invite. Katherine Mansfield, in a 1919 letter to Virginia

Woolf, confirms this invitational characteristic of modernism and modernist literature. She writes, “what the writer does is not so much solve the question but. . . put the question. There must be the question put. That seems to me a very nice dividing line between the true and the false writer” (*Letters*, 320). Invitation ultimately lies at the heart of what modernist writers intended to change about literature: bridging the divide between writer and reader, leading readers into the interior minds and thoughts of characters and inviting meaning and interpretation rather than declaring it. As scholars continue to investigate Chekhov’s intertextual influence, his work will undoubtedly continue to support this mode of invitational literature within modernism.

Redefining the influence of Chekhov’s texts on modernism as invitations rather than interrogations also parallels the method and attitude in which I have performed my intertextual analyses. This article has demonstrated the way in which Chekhov’s short fiction invites other texts of diverse contextual backgrounds and aesthetic qualities to combine and collide in fruitful ways. The bi-textual productions explicated in this article have, I hope, not only generated a newfound appreciation for Chekhov’s work alone but have also expanded the critical conversation surrounding British modernism, granting Chekhov a current and active role in shaping how we understand this period of literary history today.

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