

Title: Through the Opaque Veil: Chekhov's Depictions of the Irrational  
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Chekhov's stories are known for their subtle and complex depictions of the human psyche. Whereas earlier writers, notably Dostoevsky, used a character's thoughts and actions to expound upon a specific ideology or set of values, Chekhov's characters think and act without being confined to a particular perspective (Chudakov and Graffy). One method by which Chekhov represents the irrational side of the human psyche utilizes Gothic narrative devices. In the story "A Dead Body," for example, a Cossack comes across a corpse in the forest at night. He voices his fear: "Не боюсь ни волков, ни татей, ни тьмы, а покойников боюсь" (130). The context—an "opaque veil" of mist, a sudden unknown, inhuman cry from the woods, and a shadow that falls over the corpse—adds to the overall feeling that something unnatural *could* happen, perhaps the sudden reanimation of the corpse or a ghostly apparition. By definition, "[the Gothic's] distinctive animating principle is a psychological interest in states of trepidation, dread, panic, revulsion, claustrophobia, and paranoia" (Baldick ix), and it is precisely these states that motivate Chekhov's Cossack to perceive the nighttime forest as he does. Whereas Dostoevsky, depicting a character with Gothic sensibilities, shows only a single or a few facets of that character's personality and worldview (Bowers), Chekhov uses dashes of Gothic modes in order to create more verisimilitudinous characters in his stories. Chekhov's prose redefines generic boundaries and, as a result, "the fluidity and randomness of life [is visibly] made the form of [his] fiction" (Boyd).

#### References

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