

Mr. WidELITZ. English Assignment Week 7. Monday, June 8, 2020

A) Read GRIEF by Anton Chekov

B) LITERARY CRITIQUE

- 1) What is the significance of the physical setting?
- 2) What do we learn about Iona Potapov in the first paragraph?
- 3) How does the author illustrate the driver's depression through careful use of details?
- 4) Compare and contrast Iona's experiences with each of the individuals whom he tries to engage in conversation. In what ways does the cabby try to make a human connection with his passengers? Why is he rejected each time?
- 5) Compare the behavior of the lanky young men towards the humpback to that of the humpback to the driver. Why do these young men behave as they do?
- 6) How is the cabby's response to the blows he receives at the hands of the humpback consistent with the narrator's description? Why do you suppose Iona tolerates this behavior from men who are so much younger than he?
- 7) What makes it easier for Iona to talk about his son than to envision him? What are the different ways in which Iona will miss his son?
- 8) How do the narrator's frequent descriptions of the horse throughout the story foreshadow the ending?
- 9) What does Iona's experience reveal about class distinction in Chekov's Russia?
- 10) What patterns appear as each character or set of characters is introduced? Why is Iona rejected by his peers?
- 11) Of all the characters with whom Iona interacts, which is the most human? What is the author's message.

While there will be no essay in this week's assignment, the LITERARY CRITIQUE questions clearly require more detail and specificity than the questions in previous assignments.

ENGLISH LITERATURE WEEK SEVEN Mr. WIDELITZ

Literary Critique

NAME:

GRADE:

RETURN INFORMATION:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**NAME:**

**GRADE:**

6. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Grief

Anton Chekov

## FOCUS: INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION; IRONY

It is twilight. A thick wet snow is slowly twirling around the newly lighted streetlamps, and lying in soft thin layers on the roofs, the horse's backs, people's shoulders and hats. The cab driver, Iona Potapov, is quite white, and looks like a *phantom*. He is bent double as far as a human body can bend double, he is seated on his box, and never makes a move. If a whole snowdrift fell on him, it seems as if he would not find it necessary to shake it off. His little horse is also quite white, and remains motionless. Its *immobility*, its *angularity*, and its straight wooden looking legs, even close by give it the appearance of a gingerbread horse worth a kopeck.\* It is, no doubt, plunged in deep thought. If you were snatched from the plow, from your usual gray surroundings, and were thrown into this *slough* full of monstrous lights, unceasing noise and hurrying people, you too would find it difficult not to think.

What is the effect of the whiteness that pervades the opening paragraph?

Iona and his little horse have not moved from their place for a long while. They left their yard before dinner, and, up to now, have not had a single fare. The evening mist is descending over the town, the white lights of the lamps are replacing brighter rays, and the hubbub of the street is getting louder. "Cabby, for Viborg way!" suddenly hears Iona. "Cabby!"

Iona jumps, and through his snow-covered eyelashes, sees an officer in a greatcoat,\* with his hood over his head.

### HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

**kopeck** — a sub-unit of currency in Russia, worth one-hundredth of a ruble.

**greatcoat** — a long, thick, heavy overcoat, worn especially by soldiers.

"Viborg way!" the officer repeats. "Are you asleep? Viborg way!"

With a nod of *assent* Iona picks up the reins, in consequence of which layers of snow slip off the horse's back and neck. The officer seats himself in the sleigh, the cab-driver smacks his lips to encourage his horse, stretches out his neck like a swan, sits up, and, more from habit than necessity, *brandishes* his whip. The little horse also stretches his neck, bends his wooden-looking legs, and makes a move undecidedly.

"What are you doing!" is the exclamation Iona hears from the dark mass moving to and fro as soon as they started.

"Where are you going! To the r-r-right!"

"You do not know how to drive. Keep to the right!" calls the officer angrily.

A coachman from a private carriage swears at him. A passerby, who has run across the road and rubbed his shoulder against the horse's nose, looks at him furiously as he sweeps the snow from his sleeve. Iona shifts about on his seat as if he were on needles, moves his elbows as if he were trying to keep his *equilibrium*, and gapes about like someone suffocating, and who does not understand where he is or why he is there.

"What scoundrels they all are!" jokes the officer. "One would think they had all entered into an agreement to jostle you or fall under your horse."

Iona looks round at the officer and moves his lips. He evidently wants to say something, but the only sound that issues is a *snuffle*.

"What?" asks the officer.

Iona twists his mouth into a smile, and with an effort says hoarsely:

"My son, sir, died this week."

"Hm! What did he die of?"

Iona turns with his whole body toward his fare, and says:

"And who knows! They say high fever. He was three days in the hospital, and then died .... God's will be done."

"Turn around!" sounded from the darkness.

"Have you popped off, old doggie, eh? Use your eyes!"

"Go on, go on," said the officer, "otherwise we shall not get there by tomorrow. Hurry up a bit!"

*What similarities are seen between the horse and driver?*

*Who is being referred to as a "dark mass"?*

*What can we conclude about Iona?*

*How does the officer react to Iona's tale of woe?*

The cab driver again stretches his neck, sits up, and, with a bad grace, brandishes his whip. Several times again he turns to look at his fare, but the latter had closed his eyes, and apparently is not disposed to listen. Having deposited the officer in the Viborg, he stops by the tavern, doubles himself up on his seat, and again remains motionless, while the snow once more begins to cover him and his horse. An hour and another .... Then, along the foot path, with a squeak of galoshes,\* and quarreling, come three young men, two of them tall and lanky,\* the third one short and humpbacked.

"Cabby, to the Police Bridge!" in a cracked voice calls the humpback. "The three of us for twenty kopecks."

Iona picks up his reins, and clucks to his horse. Twenty kopecks is not a fair price, but he does not mind if it is a ruble\* or five kopecks — to him it is all the same now, so long as they are *wayfarers*. The young men, *jostling* each other and using bad language, approach the sleigh, and all three at once try to get on to the seat. Then begins a discussion about which two shall sit and who shall be the one to stand. After *wrangling*, abusing each other, and much *petulance*, it is at last decided that the humpback should stand, as he is the smallest.

"Now then, hurry up!" says the humpback in a *twanging* voice, as he takes his place, and breathes down Iona's neck. "Here, mate, what a cap you have got, there is not a worse one to be found in all Petersburg! ..."

"Hi, hi, hi, hi," giggles Iona. "Such a ...."

"Now you, 'such a,' hurry up. Are you going the whole way at this pace? Are you? Do you want it in the neck?"

"My head feels like bursting," says one of the lanky ones. "Last night at the Donkmasovs, Vaska and I drank the whole of four bottles of cognac."

"I don't understand what you lie for," said the other lanky one angrily. "You lie like a brute."

"It's the truth!"

"It's as much a truth as that a louse coughs!"

"Hi, hi," grins Iona, "what merry young gentlemen!"

"Pshaw,"\* indignantly says the humpback.

Why does  
Iona giggle?

### HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

**galoshes** — rubber overshoes for use during wet weather.

**lanky** — ungracefully tall and thin.

**ruble** — the main unit of currency in Russia.

**pshaw** — an exclamation of impatience or contempt.

"Are you going to get on or not, you old pest? Is that the way to drive? Use the whip a bit! Go on, go on, give it to him!"

Iona feels at his back the little man wriggling, and the tremble in his voice. He listens to the insults hurled at him, sees the people; and little by little the feeling of loneliness leaves him. The humpback goes on swearing until he gets mixed up in some elaborate six-foot oath, or chokes with coughing. Iona looks round at them several times; he waits for a temporary silence, then, turning round again, he murmurs:

"My son ... died this week."

"We must all die," sighs the humpback, wiping his lips after an attack of coughing. "Now, hurry up, hurry up! Gentlemen, I really cannot go any farther like this! When will he get us there?"

"Well, just you stimulate him a little in the neck!"

"You old pest, do you hear, I'll bone your neck for you! If one treated the like of you with ceremony one would have to go on foot! Do you hear, old serpent! Or do you not care?"

Iona hears rather than feels the blows they deal him.

"Hi, hi," he laughs. "They are merry young gentlemen, God bless 'em!"

"Cabby, are you married?" asks a lanky one.

"I? Hi, hi, merry young gentlemen! Now I have only a wife: the moist ground .... Hi, ho, ho, that is to say, the grave! My son has died, and I am alive. A wonderful thing, death mistook the door... instead of coming to me, it went to my son ...."

Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at this moment the humpback, giving a little sigh, announces that, thank God, they have at last reached their destination. Iona watches them disappear through the dark entrance. Once more he is alone, and again surrounded by silence .... His grief, which had *abated* for a short while, returns and *rends* his heart with greater force. With an anxious and a hurried look, he searches among the crowds passing on either side of the street to find if there is just one person who will listen to him. But the crowds hurry by without noticing him or his trouble. Yet it is such an immense, illimitable grief. Should his heart break and the grief pour out, it would flow over the whole earth it seems, and yet, no one sees it. It has

*Why does Iona feel less lonely?*

*What is the humpback's reaction to the news of Iona's loss?*

*What stereotype about the "lower classes" is the humpback proclaiming?*

*To whom does Iona say he is married?*

*What does Iona need? Why is it unavailable to him?*

managed to conceal itself in such an insignificant shell that no one can see it even by day and with a light.

Iona sees a hall porter with some sacking\* and decides to talk to him.

"Friend, what sort of time is it?" he asks.

"Past nine. What are you standing here for? Move on."

Iona moves on a few steps, doubles himself up, and abandons himself to his grief. He sees it is useless to turn to people for help. In less than five minutes he straightens himself, holds up his head as if he felt some sharp pain, and gives a tug at the reins. He can bear it no longer. "The stables," he thinks, and the little horse, as if he understood, starts off at a trot.

About an hour and a half later Iona is seated by a large dirty stove. Around the stove, on the floor, on the benches, people are snoring. The air is thick and suffocatingly hot. Iona looks at the sleepers, scratches himself, and regrets having returned so early.

"I have not even earned my *fodder*," he thinks. "That's what's my trouble. A man who knows his job, who has had enough to eat, and his horse too, can always sleep peacefully."

A young cab driver in one of the corners half gets up, grunts sleepily, and stretches toward a bucket of water.

"Do you want a drink?" Iona asks him.

"Don't I want a drink!"

"That's so? Your good health! But listen, mate — you know, my son is dead. ... Did you hear? This week, in hospital .... It's a long story."

Iona looks to see what effect his words have, but sees none — the young man has hidden his face, and is fast asleep again. The old man sighs, and scratches his head. Just as much as the young one wanted to drink, the old man wanted to talk. It will soon be a week since his son died, and he has not been able to speak about it properly to anyone. One must tell it slowly and carefully; how his son fell ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died. One must describe every detail of the funeral, and the journey to the hospital to fetch his son's clothes.

What is ambiguous about this question?

How does this statement express the human theme of Chekhov's story?

### **H**ELPFUL DEFINITIONS

**sacking** — coarse cloth, usually woven from hemp or jute, used for making sacks.



His daughter Anissia remained in the village — one must talk about her too. Was it nothing he had to tell? Surely the listener would gasp and sigh, and sympathize with him?

"I'll go and look at my horse," thinks Iona. "There's always time to sleep. No fear of that!"

He puts on his coat, and goes to the stables to his horse. He thinks of the corn, the hay, the weather. When he is alone, he dare not think of his son. He could speak about him to anyone, but to think of him, and picture him to himself, is unbearably painful.

"Are you tucking in?"\* Iona asks his horse, looking at his bright eyes. "Go on, tuck in, though we've not earned our corn, we can eat hay. Yes! I am too old to drive — my son could have, not I. He was a first-rate cab driver. If only he had lived!"

Iona is silent for a moment, then continues:

"That's how it is, my old horse. There's no more Kuzma Ionitch.\* He has left us to live, and he went off. Now let's say, you had a foal, you were that foal's mother, and suddenly, let's say, that foal went and left you to live after him. It would be sad, wouldn't it?"

The little horse munches, listens, and breathes over his master's hand ....

Iona's feelings are too much for him, and he tells the little horse the whole story.

*What is referred to here as "nothing"?*

*Why is it a problem when Iona is alone?*

*Why is Iona bitter as he states that his son left him?*

*How does Iona solve his dilemma? Why may his solution be effective?*



tucking in — (idiom) eating heartily.

Kuzma Ionitch — Iona Potapov's son; the Russian tradition adds a patronymic, a name formed from the father's first name, by adding *-itch* (or *-ytch*) for sons and *-ovna* for daughters to the child's name. Thus, Iona's son is called Ionitch, son of Iona.

*HELPFUL*  
*DEFINITIONS*