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LITERARY ETYMA IN ČECHOV'S *VIŠNEVYJ SAD*

...ежели люди порочные связаны между собой и составляют силу, то людям честным надо сделать только то же самое.

Л. Толстой, *Война и мир*, Эпилог, ч. I, XVI.

0. Foreword

This essay is a philological inquiry into the literary sources of Anton Čechov's *The Cherry Orchard* and their role in the play's meaning and form. Fundamental for the philological tradition is the literal meaning of the Greek word for "reading", *anagnōskein*, "to re-cognize". The task of the philologist, a person who loves the word and is engaged in an unending pursuit of education and culture (*philólogos: ho philón lógos kai spoudázon perì paideías*, Phrynicus [Jaeger 1945: V]) is to re-cognize, in reading inquisitively, the texts of others speaking through the text both to the author of the text and to its reader, and to explain as clearly as possible – i.e., to make re-cognizable to others – that which he has re-cognized.¹ This essay is a part of a larger study devoted to the "intertextual"² aspect of Čechov's poetics. It focuses on the realities of the transmitted text³ and of the literary references in it flagged by Čechov for the benefit of a contemporary audience with whom he shared a body of reading and on whose memory and imagination he (more often than not, mistakenly) counted. That the first and most influential director of *The Cherry Orchard*, K.S. Stanislavskij, was arguably Čechov's worst reader,⁴ is one of the ironies responsible for this inquiry's having to be made at all.

The essay's method is essentially etymological. The work of a literary scholar in pursuit of a text's sources differs little from the work of a sophisticated etymologist who, when probing an etymological history of a word, recognizes its source (etymon, the authentic [origin]) or sources (etyma), based on the word's meaning and sound correspondences, and proceeds to trace and explain the vicissitudes of the word's sense and shape in its historical and structural context. The linguistic etymologist is concerned with smaller textual segments – words and short phrases –, or "mini-texts". The philologist *qua* textual etymologist is

concerned with larger, often very large, (con)texts. Both have to demonstrate a "material" – insofar as sound, shape, and sense may be said to be material – relationship between the text in question and the claimed source text: hence the affinity – isomorphism, to be precise – of the two endeavors. This isomorphism makes it possible to claim that etymology has something to offer to literary studies: generally, its reliable method quickened by imaginative boldness tempered with common sense. While imaginative boldness and common sense require no additional comment, the method does.

In outline, the etymological method consists in establishing similarities among texts and describing the nature of these similarities.

The simplest case is that of literal quotation. For instance, the word *verb* in English is a loan from French *verbe* with an eye to Latin *verbum*, the source of the French. The English word is an almost literal (letter for letter) "quotation" of the French (with the exception of the final *-e*).

Anything different from literal quotation, that is, anything that involves change (such as the missing *-e* of Fr. *verbe* that appears in modern English as *verb*) has to be accounted for. The change has to be described and explained.

Armenian *erku* is a cognate of English *two*. Armenian *erku* and English *two* go back to the same etymon – as does Russian *dva*. Whatever the differences, they have to be described and explained. The description must contain the evidence that corroborates the comparison of the differences (similarities, as is evident, do not require corroboration). If Arm. *erk-* is the only example of the very non-trivial correspondence to Eng. *tw-* and Russ. *dv-*, etc., then the case for it is weak. Fortunately, there are a few more examples of this correspondence (see e.g. Meillet 1936: 51). The case becomes the stronger the more examples of the correspondence are collected and shown. Occam's razor is not a tool for etymology: the more evidence, the better.

Outside of trivial borrowings (such as "samovar") or some direct continuations of basic vocabulary items (such as the number "two"), most word etymologies (word history descriptions) are histories of tropes (as a simple example, take the complicated metonymy of English *babushka* vs. its Russian source *bábuška*). In complex literary texts, words of a source text are pressed into service for a new meaning and relate to their use in the original text as tropic meanings relate to literal meanings. We may therefore speak of "textual metaphors", "textual metonymies", "textual ironies", and the like.

Such are the main characteristics of the etymological method which I attempt to use in this essay.

I am by no means the first (or the only) "literary etymologist". Most exemplary philological work (starting with Plato's Socrates) has pursued similar goals and used similar methods.⁵ I am merely drawing an overt parallel and then use it

explicitly with some theoretical implications which I hope will be useful to the reader whose interests have the same *Stimmung* as mine.

1. A Symbol and its Interpretations

The starting point of my inquiry is the mysterious sound that marks the dramatic peak (Act II) and the conclusion (Act IV) of A. Čechov's *The Cherry Orchard*. This sound seems to me a fitting image both of the problems posed by Čechov's text and of their likely solutions. Here are the relevant loci in the stage directions:

Все сидят, задумались. Тишина. Слышно только, как тихо бормочет Фирс. Вдруг раздается отдаленный звук, точно с неба, звук лопнувшей струны, замирающий, печальный. (13: 224)

Слышится отдаленный звук, точно с неба, звук лопнувшей струны, замирающий, печальный. Наступает тишина, и только слышно, как далеко в саду топором стучат по дереву. (13: 254)

The play's central characters, assembled by the author in the momentous scene of Act II, have a temporal and textual privilege in interpreting the sound:

ЛЮБОВЬ АНДРЕЕВНА. Это что? ЛОПАХИН. Не знаю. Где-нибудь далеко в шахтах сорвалась бадья. Но где-нибудь очень далеко. ГАЕВ. А может быть, птица какая-нибудь... в роде цапли. ТРОФИМОВ. Или филин... ЛЮБОВЬ АНДРЕЕВНА (вздрагивает). Неприятно почему-то. (Пауза) ФИРС. Перед несчастьем то же было: и сова кричала, и самовар гудел беспречь. ГАЕВ. Перед каким несчастьем? ФИРС. Перед волей. (Пауза) (13: 224)

The position of the critic who, like the characters, feels that the sound is a problem and needs an explanation is twofold: he can either accept one of the explanations offered by the characters as "correct" (arguably sanctioned by the author or the most reasonable of both), or he can view at a critical remove both the characters within the play and the author himself within his cultural context and in relation to the play, i.e., he can view them as objects of interpretation and commentary rather than interpreters.

Most critics who have written on our subject have taken the former tack. In this instance, they have chosen to side with Lopachin, the pragmatic nouveau riche of serf origin and the future owner of the cherry orchard, who attributes the sound to a tub breaking off its cable in a distant mine shaft. This point of view seems to have been first expressed by the play's earliest and most

farsighted critic, the writer Andrej Belyj, who describes the scene in Act II as follows:

Вот сидят измученные люди, стараясь забыть ужасы жизни, но прохожий идет мимо... Где-то обрывается в шахте бадья. Всякий понимает, что здесь – ужас. Но может быть все это снится?⁶

A.P. Čudakov mentions "the distant sound as if from the sky, the sound of a string breaking" in the context of his discussion of the *simvoličnost'*, or the symbolic quality, of certain fairly commonplace items in Čechov's oeuvre, which was first pointed out by Andrej Belyj in the article quoted above. Having given several examples of such "shimmering" items – now "realistic", now symbolic⁷ – Čudakov writes:

Из приведенных выше примеров «специально символическим», пожалуй, может показаться лишь «отдаленный, точно с неба, звук струны». Но деталь эта тут же включается в случайностный реально-бытовой план – оказывается, что «где-нибудь в шахтах сорвалась бадья. Но где-нибудь очень далеко». (Čudakov 1971: 171)

While recognizing the symbolic quality of the sound, Čudakov simply accepts Lopachin's version of the sound's provenience as the genuine one. Harvey Pitcher (1973: 182), after discussing the various suggestions by prominent anglophone critics (David Magarshack, Francis Ferguson, and Maurice Valency) as to the significance of the sound in the play,⁸ observes that the "sound was not *invented* by Čechov for the purposes of the play. It was familiar to him from the time spent in his youth in the Donetz Basin, the mining area of Russia, where a bucket⁹ falling in a distant mineshaft would produce this strangely evocative sound". The same view is maintained by E.A. Polockaja in her section of the commentary to the USSR Academy edition of the play:

[Ю]жно-русское происхождение образа вишневого сада несомненно. Звук сорвавшейся в шахте бадьи Чехов также слышал на донецком хуторе Кравцовых [...]; уже в 1887 г. он использовал этот звук в рассказе «Счастье», а в «Вишневом саде» придал ему особый, символический смысл (II и IV действия). (13: 482)

Richard Peace feels that all of the characters' explanations are equally improbable, but refrains from offering his own and merely observes that the sound "provides an even more ominous commentary" than Epichodov's "melancholy,

pessimistic note" (sounded earlier in Act II) "to hopes about the nature of man and the happiness to come through social change". (Peace 1983: 135) (These hopes are expressed in Trofimov's monologue shortly before the sound is heard.)

Most of the critics whose work I have surveyed – the notable, if inconsistent, exceptions are Valency and Peace – read the play linearly, "for the plot", as it were, and so naively accept the most "realistic" explanation offered by one of the characters at face value. They disregard the play's highly literary nature which was observed, specifically in the case of Čechov's stage directions, by S.D. Baluchatij in his 1927 study *Problemy dramaturgičeskogo analiza. Čechov*.¹⁰ What is most important, though, is that the play's "literariness", or orientation toward the *written word*, was clearly, frequently, and in various ways flagged by Čechov himself. The stage directions' wording of the "sound of a string breaking" is a case in point. Čechov, who was as carefully conscious of rhythm in choosing and ordering his words as any master of formal poetry,¹¹ worded the description of the sound exactly the same way in both instances. That is, he not only described the sound but also quite literally showed the reader that it was exactly the same in Act IV as in Act II – by quoting in Act IV his description of the sound in Act II. No one, to my knowledge, has discussed the fact that description of the sound at the end of the play is an exact quotation of its description in Act II. This self-quotation is significant in at least two respects: first, as an indicator of the importance of the device of quotation – particularly self-quotation – in the play, and second, as an indicator of the specifically Čechovian symbolic quality which originates in repetition. An event, if repeated, ceases to be accidental and becomes *significant*. Čechov intends the recognition of the verbal repetition and the question of its significance for the reader; the theater-goer hears the sound as rendered by the director and thus experiences it directly. The critics who concern themselves predominantly with the real-world origin of the sound (the "tub-in-the-mine-shaft" theory) dwell on Čechov's early impressions from the Taganrog area. Even those who do point out *textual* parallels to the scene in question (the two loci in Čechov's own 1887 story "Sčast'e", to be discussed below) do not go any further, while Čechov himself repeatedly, if implicitly (with one exception), alerts the reader to literary sources and authors important for his text.¹² Before proceeding to the literary etyma for the "sound of a string breaking", the most important of which, as I hope to show, is a poem by A.K. Tolstoj ("Zvonče žavoronka pen'e..."), I will retrace heuristically the path that brought me to the re-cognition of the A.K. Tolstoj poem.

2. A.K. Tolstoj's "Grešnica" in Čechov's "Višnevyyj sad"

In Act III of *The Cherry Orchard*, Čechov highlights a text by Count A.K. Tolstoj by not only having a minor character (the Station Master) recite¹³ the beginning of A.K. Tolstoj's narrative poem "Grešnica" but also by identifying the poem and its author in the stage directions. Since this is the only explicitly identified direct quotation in the play, I take that to be important and I claim that Čechov wished to flag both the poem's and its author's special significance for his text. The function of the Tolstoj poem at that juncture in Act III is mentioned by some (see e.g. Peace: "A poem with this title, recited immediately after Lyubov' Andreyevna's teasing defence of love to Trofimov, seems like another instance of Chekhovian indirect commentary..." [p. 147]), but the key questions remain unanswered and, in fact, unasked. What role does A.K. Tolstoj's "Grešnica" play in Act III of *The Cherry Orchard*? What is the significance of Čechov's choosing this particular poem by this particular poet? Perhaps a careful examination of this direct quotation will show how and for what purpose Čechov uses someone else's text in his play.

To my knowledge, the only critic to have ventured a discussion of the A.K. Tolstoj quotation in the play is Donald Rayfield. He writes:

The third and most important aspect of Act 3 [the first aspect, according to Rayfield, is the operatic nature of the ball in Act III and the second, the appearance of extraordinary guests such as the station master – A.L.] is the quotation of a poem, *The Sinning Woman*, by the late-romantic poet A.K. Tolstoy. It does not matter that the station master recites only the first few lines: in Chekhov's day the poem was notorious. It is a long poem about a courtesan who boasts she can seduce anyone, even Christ: John the Baptist enters; she mistakes him for Christ and starts charming him; then the real Christ appears and the sinning woman is overcome with repentance. This is a poem that Chekhov refers to on several occasions in his work of the early 1880s; here it is a sign not only of provincial taste, but also of a guest's tactlessness toward his hostess. Most important, it is a warning of the intrusion of Lopakhin into Ranevskaya's world and of the catastrophe to come that will silence her gaiety for all time. It is the most subtle and, unfortunately, the most ephemeral of Chekhov's literary allusions. (Rayfield 1975: 224)

Donald Rayfield deserves credit for sensing the importance of the poem; however, in his analysis there are a number of inaccuracies which should be corrected. In A.K. Tolstoj's poem,¹⁴ the courtesan, far from boasting "that she can seduce anyone", says merely: "On ne smutit moich očej!" (509) 'He will not

disturb [the boldness of] my eyes!', in other words, 'He will not stare me down!', and it is not John the Baptist who enters but St. John the Evangelist, "Joann iz Galilei, / Ego ljubimyj učenik" (511) 'John of Galilee, / His [Christ's] favorite disciple'. The "sinning woman" does not "start charming" St. John but simply tells him about her own credo:

Я верю только красоте,
Служу вину и поцелуюм,
Мой дух тобою не волнуем,
Твоей смеюсь я чистоте! (510)

There is in fact a direct affinity between the Sinful Woman's speech to St. John the Evangelist (see the last line of the quotation above) and Ljubov' Andreevna's defensive outburst against Petja Trofimov in Act III (the cognate segments are italicized):

ЛЮБОВЬ АНДРЕЕВНА. Надо быть мужчиной, в ваши годы
надо понимать тех, кто любит. И надо самому любить... надо
влюбляться! (Сердито) Да, да! И у вас нет чистоты, а вы
просто чистюлька, смешной чудак, урод... (13: 234 f.)

The phrases "ja verju tol'ko krasote" and "služu vinu i pocelujam" ("The Sinful Woman") are certainly compatible with a portion of the sense of "ljubit'" (Ljubov' Andreevna's lines). It is immediately following the exchange between Ljubov' Andreevna and Petja Trofimov and Petja's indignant departure ending in slapstick ("Petja s lestnicy upal!" [13: 235]) that the Station Master, according to the stage directions, "stops in the middle of the ballroom and recites "The Sinful Woman" by A.K. Tolstoj. The others listen to him but he has barely managed to recite a few lines when the sounds of a waltz are heard from the hall, and the recitation is over. Čechov, by echoing A.K. Tolstoj's over-anthologized and over-performed poem, tediously familiar to the educated audience of his day (13: 518, note to page 235), makes by means of a purely literary device a tragicomical comment on the decadent ball in Ranevskaja's house which has just been auctioned off to the son of a former serf. The affinity of the two texts is reinforced, besides Ljubov' Andreevna's own words, by the parallelism, or correspondence, of Ljubov' Andreevna and the Sinful Woman indicated by Gaev's earlier reference to his sister as "poročna[ja]" 'fallen, depraved'.¹⁵ The meaning of Ranevskaja's Christian name, "Love", is both thematically and textually connected to Tolstoj's poem, cf. section 2 of "The Sinful Woman" which begins "Ljubov'ju k bližnim plameneja..." 'Blazing with love toward [his] neighbors...' The character correspondence "Petja Trofimov // St. John the Evangelist" is pointed up by Petja's preachy, sermon-like monologues, especially those near

the end of Act II and in Act III, of his moralistic advice to Ljubov' Andreevna that provokes her defensive retort quoted above. Petja's appearance (cf. Ljubov' Andreevna's questions upon seeing him after a long absence [Act I]: "Otčego vy tak podurneli? Otčego postareli?" (13: 211) 'Why have you gotten so ugly? Why have you gotten so old?', and Petja's reply: 'Menja v vagone odna baba nazvala tak: oblezlyj barin' 'A peasant woman on the train called me "that moth-eaten mister"') enhances the comic effect, cf. A. Tolstoj's description of St. John the Evangelist as a "muž blagoobraznyj [...] (509) / Vo bleske junoj krasoty (510)" 'man of handsome appearance [...] / In the splendor of youthful beauty'. The middle-aged Ljubov' Andreevna herself is not exactly the voluptuous "bludnica molodaja (508); [...] deva padšaja (509)" 'young fornicatrix;... the fallen maiden' of A.K. Tolstoj's poem, and that adds to the overall comic effect.

The opening lines of "The Sinful Woman" describe the scene of the festivities, to be cut short by the visit of Christ:

Народ кипит, веселье, хохот,
 Звон лютней и кимвалов грохот,
 Кругом и зелень, и цветы,
 И меж столбов, у входа дома,
 Парчи тяжелой переломы
 Тес'мой узорной подняты;
 Чертоги убраны богато,
 Везде горит хрусталь и золото,
 Возниц и коней полон двор;
 Теснясь за трапезой великой,
 Гостей пирует шумный хор,
 Идет, сливааясь с музыкой,
 Их перекрестный разговор. (507)

The details of the festive scene, when recalled by the reader, create a textual counterpoint to the description of the ball at the Ranevskaja estate and/or its stage enactment, which is equivalent to the re-cognizable etymological dimension of a word when recovered by the etymologist. The relation of this counterpoint to Čechov's text is either ironic (cf. the heavy brocade between the pillars, the "palace", the ubiquitous crystal and gold), literal ("people are swarming, there's merriment, laughter") or metaphoric ("The ringing of lutes and the crashing of cymbals", cf. the dance music by the Jewish orchestra which includes the fast-moving and noisily percussive *lezginka*). As Rayfield observes, in Act III "a flute, four fiddles and a double bass play for two-thirds of the time, reducing speech to fragments uttered by pairs of dancers. This fragmentation of the dialogue and the action is not only more realistic, it also makes for surrealism" (224). The dramatic form of the entire Act III – fragmentary, intermittent dialogue

against the background of raucous music – appears to have been suggested to Čechov by A.K. Tolstoj's poem (see the last three lines quoted above).

The entire structure of Act III is analogous to the structure of A.K. Tolstoj's "The Sinful Woman". The poem's decadently rich feast that takes place, as was certainly known to Čechov's educated audience, on the eve of great and cataclysmic events – the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans not long after that – corresponds to what is to be the last ball at the estate with its doomed cherry orchard; Petja Trofimov's words at the close of Act II ring ominously: "Vsja Rossija naš sad" 'All of Russia is our orchard' – an orchard soon to be felled. The speech of A.K. Tolstoj's fornicatrix to St. John the Evangelist corresponds to (more precisely, is the source of) Ljubov' Andreevna Ranevskja's words. Finally and most strikingly, the arrival of Christ which puts an end to the merriment and transforms the soul of the fallen woman is matched by the arrival of Lopachin who announces that it was he who bought the cherry orchard.

The ironic contrast between Christ's arrival in A.K. Tolstoj's poem (bringing salvation and a new life for the Sinful Woman) and Lopachin's in Act III becomes all the more salient once we examine the textual correspondences more closely. Christ looks at the sinful woman, and she is transformed by His all-seeing and healing gaze:

И, чуя новое начало,
Быше страшась земных препон,
Она, колебляся, стояла...
И вдруг в тиши раздался звон
Из рук упавшего фиала...
Стесненной груди слышен стон,
Бледнеет грешница младая,
Дрожат открытые уста,
И пала ниц она, рыдая,
Перед святынею Христа. (512)

In Act III of The Cherry Orchard, Ljubov' Andreevna asks Lopachin, who has just arrived, what happened at the auction. He takes his time with his answer but then finally, when she asks, "Kto kupil?" 'Who bought it?', he replies:

ЛОПАХИН. Я купил. (Пауза) (Любовь Андреевна угнетена; она упала бы, если бы не стояла возле кресла и стола. Варя снимает с пояса ключи, бросает их на пол, посреди гостиной, и уходит) Я купил! (13: 240)

The stage directions correspond closely to the text of "The Sinful Woman"'s finale. Ljubov' Andreevna stands there unsteadily ("she would have fallen had

she not been standing by an armchair and a table"), like the protagonist of the poem. The visual and acoustic counterpart to the chalice fallen from the Sinful Woman's hand are the keys thrown down by Varja. Christ stops the party in "The Sinful Woman":

И чудно благостным приходом
Сердца гостей потрясены.
Замолкнул говор. В ожиданье
Сидит недвижное собранье,
Тревожно дух переводя. (511)

Lopachin stops the party, too, and the text of "The Sinful Woman" provides an ironic counterpoint ("wonderfully", "the goodly arrival") to Ljubov' Andreevna's anxious expectation of the news from the auction. In pathetic contrast to the message of purification and mercy read by the Sinful Woman in Jesus's gaze ("Ona v tom vzore blagodatnom / [...] miloserdie pročla" (512) 'In that gaze full of grace / [...] she read [a message of] mercy'), Lopachin boastfully delivers his merciless message of destruction as he announces that he will put to the axe the cherry orchard that is the meaning of Ljubov' Andreevna's life as declared by her ("bez višnevogo sada ja ne ponimaju svoej žizni" (13: 233) 'my life doesn't make any sense without the cherry orchard', she says to Petja a few minutes earlier):

Приходите все смотреть, как Ермолай Лопахин хватит топором по вишневому саду, как упадут на землю деревья! Настроим мы дач, и наши внуки и правнуки увидят тут новую жизнь... (13: 240)

The contrast of the two endings is underscored in Čechov's stage directions which once again echo, with bitter irony, Tolstoj's concluding lines describing the Sinful Woman falling "prostrate, weeping / Before Christ's sanctity": "The music is playing. Ljubov' Andreevna has sunk into a chair and is weeping bitterly'. This is Lopachin's ball now ("Muzyka, igraj otčetlivo! Puskaj vse, kak ja želaju! (S ironiej) Idet novyj pomeščik, vladelec višnevogo sada!" (13: 241) 'Band, play loud and clear! Let everything be the way I want it! (Sarcastically) Here comes the new landowner, the proprietor of the cherry orchard!').

After Lopachin leaves to join his festivities, Čechov's stage directions once again shift to Ljubov' Andreevna; he finds her almost exactly as before:

В зале и гостиной нет никого, кроме Любови Андреевны, которая сидит, сжалась вся и горько плачет. Тихо играет музыка. Быстро входят Аня и Трофимов. Аня подходит к матери и

становится перед ней на колени. Трофимов остается у входа в залу. (13: 241)

And then comes Anja's empty message of hope, couched in phrases culled from the finale of A.K. Tolstoj's poem, filled with the imagery of sunlight, deep illumination, and new beginnings. Anja's "blagoslovijaju" 'I bless you' (whose sacerdotal tone has troubled the play's English translators¹⁶) and her self-humbling prayerful gesture of kneeling before her mother become comprehensible in the light of the source text. Here is some of Anja's monologue, which concludes Act III, with the correspondences in the conclusion of A.K. Tolstoj's poem:

Мама!.. Мама, ты плачешь? Милая, добрая, хорошая моя мама, моя прекрасная, я люблю тебя... я благословляю [cf. Как много благ [...] Господь ей щедро подарил; [...] в том взоре благодатном] тебя. Вишневый сад продан, его уже нет, это правда, правда [cf. неправда жизни], но не плачь, мама, у тебя осталась жизнь впереди, осталась твоя хорошая чистая душа... Пойдем со мной, пойдем, милая, отсюда, пойдем!.. Мы насадим новый сад [cf. И, чуя новое начало], роскошнее этого, ты увидишь его, поймешь [cf. внезапно стала ей понятна / Неправда жизни святотатной], и радость тихая, глубокая радость опустится на твою душу, как солнце в вечерний час [cf. И был тот взор как луч денницы, / И в сердце сумрачном блудницы / Он разогнал ночную тьму; / И все, что было там тайно / [...] / В ее глазах неумолимо / До глубины озарено], и ты улыбнешься, мама! Пойдем, милая! Пойдем! (13: 241)

It remains to point out some contrasts in Anja's consoling appeal to her mother and in A.K. Tolstoj's third-person description of Christ's transforming effect on the Sinful Woman. Whereas the sunlight imagery in the finale of A.K. Tolstoj's poem, symbolizing salvation and a new beginning ["novoe načalo"], is that of dawn, of daybreak ["luč dennicy [...] razognal nočnuju t'mu"], the joy that is to descend on Ljubov' andreevna's soul is imaged as the light of the setting sun ["kak solnce v večernij čas"], echoing the sunset in Act II, the sunset that inspires Gaev's Turgenevesque prose-poem apostrophe to "gorgeous, beauteous, and indifferent nature" and sets the stage for the pregnant silence interrupted suddenly by the "distant sound" coming "as if from the sky". Ljubov' Andreevna's "new beginning" is unmistakeably a promise of serenity before the end, a promise which is not likely ever to be fulfilled. We already know (and are explicitly told at the end of the play) that Ljubov' Andreevna and Anja are not going to plant any new orchards together: Anja's message of hope is just another empty dream, like the dreams of saving the cherry orchard.

Thus the apparent "ephemeral allusion" (Rayfield) to A.K. Tolstoj's "The Sinful Woman" turns out to be the key that unlocks both the form and the content of Act III, the act where the main theme, or tension, of the play – the fate of the cherry orchard – is resolved. With it, the fates of the main characters are resolved as well. A.K. Tolstoj's poem suggested to Čechov the dramatic structure of Act III and much of its imagery. Recognizing the A.K. Tolstoj poem as the textual source of Act III allows the reader to enjoy a "subtextual" level of comedy and irony that was inaccessible to the critics for so long. It provides an illuminating view of Ermolaj Lopachin as literally the anti-Christ in that symbolic dimension of *The Cherry Orchard* in which Čechov operated in "received" symbols, the dimension opened to us through the comparison with "The Sinful Woman" (as against the symbolic dimension in which Čechov operated with his own symbols created ad hoc, a method that anticipates the theoretical constructs of the Acmeists¹⁷). The main theme of A.K. Tolstoj's poem, well-known to Čechov's audience, is the sinner's miraculous salvation through a personal encounter with Christ.¹⁸ In the poem, Christ unexpectedly saves the "sinful woman", a servant of carnal love. In the play, Lopachin (who was going to save the cherry orchard) unexpectedly destroys Ljubov' Andreevna's last hope of saving the orchard which symbolizes her love and happiness.

The intricacy of Čechov's creative interaction with a literary source alerts the reader to other potential instances of such an interaction in *The Cherry Orchard*. Čechov's use of A.K. Tolstoj's "The Sinful Woman" shows that a "school" text well-known to the audience together with its "school" interpretation is particularly convenient for use as a source in order to highlight a major theme. In what follows, I turn to an exploration of textual etyma from other "standard" authors of Čechov's Russia including Čechov's own earlier work. The sources and their correspondences in the play not only flag the play's major themes but also "interact", both directly and indirectly, with the symbol of "the sound of a string breaking".

The repeated "sound of the string breaking", as I hope to show, condenses two of the play's main themes in a form that is immediately accessible psychologically (thus being trivially symbolic and vague) on the surface plane and accessible only through recognition of its etyma or sources on the literary-recognition, or anagnostic, plane. The reader recognizes a wording, remembers its original context, and brings it back to his understanding of the text in question by creatively recognizing its quality as a literary trope: a textual synecdoche, by virtue of its participation in an earlier literary text; a textual metonym, by virtue of its contiguity with its context; a textual metaphor, by virtue of its standing for its source contexts; etc.

3. Human Happiness and its Place in the Natural Order

I have already pointed out the "Turgenevesque" character of Gaev's monologue leading up to the ominous sound. But it is far more than that. The monologue has a specific textual etymon in "Priroda", one of Turgenev's "prose poems" (*stichotvorenija v proze*), a series of short prose pieces¹⁹ written by Turgenev between 1878 and 1882. This collection became an instant hit with the reading public and, on par with Count A.K. Tolstoj's "Grešnica", standart fare for public declamation.²⁰

ПРИРОДА.

Мне снилось, что я вошел в огромную подземную храмину с высокими сводами. Ее всю наполнял какой-то тоже подземный, ровный свет.

По самой средине храмины сидела величавая женщина в волнистой одежде зеленого цвета. Склонив голову на руку, она казалась погруженной в глубокую думу.

Я тотчас понял, что эта женщина — сама Природа, — и мгновенным холдом внедрился в мою душу благоговейный страх.

Я приблизился к сидящей женщине — и, отдав почтительный поклон: "О, наша общая мать! — воскликнул я. — О чем твоя дума? Не о будущих ли судьбах человечества размышляешь ты? Не о том ли, как ему дойти до возможного совершенства и счастья?"

Женщина медленно обратила на меня свои темные, грозные глаза. Губы ее шевельнулись — и раздался зычный голос, подобный лязгу железа.

— Я думаю о том, как бы придать большую силу мышцам ног блохи, чтобы ей удобнее было спасаться от врагов своих. Равновесие нападения и отпора нарушено... Надо его восстановить.

— Как? — пролепетал я в ответ, — Ты вот о чем думаешь? Но разве мы, люди, не любимые твои дети?

Женщина чуть-чуть наморщила брови: — Все твари мои дети, — промолвила она: — и я одинаково о них заботусь — и одинаково их истребляю.

— Но добро... разум... справедливость... — пролепетал я снова. — Это человеческие слова, — раздался железный голос; — я не ведаю ни добра, ни зла... Разум мне не закон — и чтò такое справедливость? — Я тебе дала жизнь — я ее отниму и дам другим, червям или людям... мне все равно... А ты, пока, защищайся — и не мешай мне!

Я хотел-было возражать... но земля кругом глухо застонала и дрогнула — и я проснулся. (Август, 1879) (Turgenev: 1898: 108–109)

Compare Gaev's speech:

ГАЕВ (негромко, как бы декламируя). *О, природа, дивная, ты
блещешь вечным сиянием, прекрасная и равнодушная, ты,
которую мы называем матерью, сочетаешь в себе бытие и
смерть, ты живешь и разрушаешь...*

The rhetorical or theatrical character of Gaev's monologue is indicated by Čechov himself in the stage directions ("kak by deklamiruja" 'as if declaiming'). The genetic relationship of the two texts seems obvious (the phrases which occur materially in the Turgenev text are in italics; the phrases that are close in meaning to the Turgenev text are underlined). But the Turgenev text is not the only source of Gaev's "prose poem". The etymon of the underlined phrases is A.S. Puškin's famous poem "Brožu li ja vdl' ulic šumnych..." (1829), which, as Richard Peace observed (1983: 53 and 165 note 4), makes an appearance in Act I of *Uncle Vania* (Telegin's "Edu li ja po polju [...], guljaju li v tenistom sadu..." 'Whether I ride through the field [...] or walk in a shady garden...'). The poem, which I quote partially below, is an important textual source for Turgenev's "Nature":

Брожу ли я вдоль улиц шумных,
Вхожу ли в многолюдный храм,
Сижу ль меж юношей безумных,
Я предаюсь своим мечтам.

Я говорю: промчатся годы,
И сколько здесь ни видно нас,
Мы все сойдем под вечны своды –
И чай-нибудь уж близок час.
[...]

И пусть у гробового входа
Младая будет жизнь играть
И равнодушная природа
Красою вечною сиять. (Puškin 1974: 196–7)

Turgenev's "podzemnaja chramina s vysokimi svodami" 'underground temple with tall vaults' points to Puškin's "chram" 'temple' and "pod večny svody" 'under the eternal vaults', whereas his Mother Nature, who equally cares for and destroys all beings, says "mne vse ravno" 'it is all the same to me', harking back to Puškin's *ravno-* of "ravnodušnaja priroda" 'indifferent nature', a phrase that appears literally in Čechov's text. Čechov also has Gaev very nearly quote Puškin's "krasoju večnoju sijat" 'shine with eternal beauty' ('ty blešeš večnym sijaniem, prekrasnaja...' 'thou shinest with eternal splendor, beautiful...').

Čechov was also obviously aware of the genetic relationship between the Puškin poem and the Turgenev "prose poem", because while using Turgenev's text to construct Gaev's monologue he went directly to Puškin's text for some key words which his audience might recognize.

The point of view expressed by the persona of Puškin's poem is vastly different from that of its counterpart in Turgenev's "prose poem". While the persona of "Whether I roam..." broods over nature's indifference to the personal existence and death of an individual human being, the ego of Turgenev's "Nature" speaks not in its own behalf but in behalf of a generalized, 1st-person plural "humanity". A shift has taken place; by replacing the lyrical and psychological "I" of Puškin's persona with the group-oriented and sociological "we", Turgenev recasts the theme of nature's indifference in terms of positivistic social ideology, the ascendent ideology of the "sons" that has put the individualistic idealists of Turgenev's (and Count A.K. Tolstoj's) generation on the defensive – and on the road to defeat. Čechov brings the crisis of the Puškinian tradition to the fore by distilling, in Gaev's hackneyed monologue – abbreviated, or rudely interrupted, by a younger generation (Varja, Anja, and Petja Trofimov) intolerant of "classical" clichés – its former florescence and its present defeat, both in the realm of ideas and in the realm of art.

But that is not all Čechov accomplishes by evoking in his audience the recognition of Turgenev's "Nature". Turgenev's "prose poem" contains another important textual etymon for a key theme in *The Cherry Orchard*, the theme of the *quest for happiness*, articulated in the persona's questions to Mother Nature: "Art thou not pondering the future fate of humanity? Art thou not pondering the way for humanity to attain all possible perfection and happiness?" In *The Cherry Orchard*, Petja Trofimov is the character who talks most about humanity's quest for happiness:

Обойти то мелкое и призрачное, что мешает быть свободным и счастливым, вот цель и смысл нашей жизни. Вперед! Мы идем неудержимо к яркой звезде, которая горит вдали! Вперед! Не отставай, друзья! [...] куда только судьба ни гоняла меня, где я только ни был! И все же душа моя всегда, во всякую минуту и днем и ночью, была полна неизъяснимых предчувствий. Я предчувствую счастье, Аня, я уже вижу его [...] Вот оно, счастье, вот оно идет, подходит все ближе и ближе, я уже слышу его шаги. И если мы не увидим, не узнаем его, то что за беда? Его увидят другие! (13: 227–28)

Я свободный человек. И все, что так высоко и дорого цените вы все, богатые и нищие, не имеет надо мной ни малейшей власти, вот как пух, который носится по воздуху. Я могу обходиться без вас, я могу проходить мимо вас, я силен и горд. Человечество идет к высшей правде, к высшему счастью, какое только возможно на земле, и я в первых рядах! [...]

Дойду, или укажу другим, как дойти. (Слышно, как вдали стучат топором по дереву) (13: 244–45)

Petja Trofimov's quest for happiness is couched in much the same terms as the question of Turgenev's persona in his "prose poem"; what he is seeking is the general happiness of humanity. Even when Petja says "I", when he speaks of himself as a "free", "strong and proud" man, his freedom, strength, and pride derive entirely from his place in those "first ranks" that march toward humanity's collective happiness.

Čechov's subtle comments on Petja's rhetoric are unmistakable. In Act II, Čechov has Petja use the highly ambiguous word *predčuvstvie* 'presentiment, premonition' to articulate his intuition of happiness's approach, and when Petja says "Vot ono, sčast'e, [...], ja uže slyšu ego šagi" 'Here it is, happiness, [...], I hear its steps already', it is in fact Varja who approaches ("Varja's voice: 'Anja! Where are you?'") bringing comical relief (but also naming Anja, Petja's true happiness, in contrast to his demagogic proclamation). In Act III, shortly before the dénouement, Ljubov' Andreevna replies to Petja's tactless sermon on her having to "face the truth" about the orchard's inevitable fate:

Вы смело решаете все важные вопросы, но скажите, голубчик, не потому ли это, что вы молоды, что вы не успели перестрадать ни одного вашего вопроса? Вы смело смотрите вперед, и не потому ли, что не видите и не ждете ничего страшного, так как жизнь еще скрыта от ваших молодых глаз? (13: 233)

Ljubov' Andreevna's happiness – private, irreducible, personal, contingent like all of life's events with the suffering or joy they produce, and meaningful only because interwoven in the irreplicable, precious fabric of a person's memory and hope – her happiness is symbolically embodied in the cherry orchard:

О мое детство, чистота моя! В этой детской я спала, глядела отсюда на сад, счастье просыпалось вместе со мною каждое утро, и тогда он был точно таким, ничто не изменилось. (Смеется от радости) Весь, весь белый! О сад мой! После темной ненастной осени и холодной зимы, опять ты молод, полон счастья, ангелы небесные не покинули тебя... [...] Помимо, покойная мама идет по саду... в белом платье! (Смеется от радости) Это она. [...] мне показалось. Направо, на повороте, белое деревцо склонилось, похоже на женщину... [...] Какой изумительный сад! Белые массы цветов, голубое небо... (13: 210)

Ведь я родилась здесь, здесь жили мои отец и мать, мой дед, я люблю этот дом, без вишневого сада я не понимаю своей жизни [...] Ведь мой сын утонул здесь... (13: 233–34)

О мой милый, мой нежный, прекрасный сад!.. Моя жизнь, моя молодость, счастье мое, прощай!.. Прощай!.. [...] В последний раз взглянуть на стены, на окна... По этой комнате любила ходить покойная мать... (13: 253)

Ljubov' Andreevna's happiness is not the abstract future happiness of humanity, of Trofimov's demagogic "we". Her happiness is the beauty of *these* trees in bloom against *this* blue sky, the memories of her childhood, of her mother – for one moment, a tree *becomes* her mother wearing a white dress –, the memory of her young son and his unexpected death; her happiness is her love for these people and the cherry orchard as the place where they lived and died. The orchard blooming again in the spring, every spring, in a real, beautiful and fragrant show of resurrection ("after a dark stormy autumn and cold winter"), is the only place on earth where happiness – love experienced, remembered, and promised – is at all possible. That is what Lopachin's axes are about to destroy. Yes, the orchard is imperfect; it is too large and has no practical value, as Lopachin points out (Act II); human souls owned by the past generations of Ljubov' Andreevna's family look reproachfully – or should! – "from every cherry tree, from every leaf and every trunk" at the imaginary guilt-ridden bearer of social consciousness strolling in the night, as pictured in Act II for Anja Ranevskaja by Petja Trofimov, the self-appointed chastiser of the atavistic gentry. But human beings are themselves imperfect, and so is their happiness.

Lopachin's vision of happiness replaces the cherry orchard with its house and other old buildings with "дачные участки" 'plots for summer cottages' rented at 10 rubles an acre ("по 25 rublej v god za desjatinu"), plots where the cottage renter will 'do some farming',

и тогда вишневый сад станет счастливым, богатым, роскошным... (13: 206)

Приходите все смотреть, как Ермолай Лопахин хватит топором по вишневому саду, как упадут на землю деревья! Настроим мы дач, и наши внуки и правнуки увидят тут новую жизнь... (13: 240)

Lopachin's scheme is economically rational and profitable, and such is the content of his quest for happiness. He recognizes beauty only as a promise (or result) of profit, compare the above as well as this offer of a loan to Petja Trofimov:

Я весной посеял маку тысячу десятин и теперь заработал сорок тысяч чистого. А когда мой мак цвел, что это была за картина! Так вот я, говорю, заработал сорок тысяч и, значит, предлагаю тебе взаймы [...] (13: 244)

Petja Trofimov, by contrast, sees all forms of private happiness as mere foibles, mere flaws of character or demeanor, including Lopachin's idea of it. Petja's quest for happiness is a life of self-denial, struggle, suffering, "extraordinary, unceasing hard work", the ascetic quest of collective (first-person plural) atonement for someone else's past sins:

Мы отстали по крайней мере лет на двести, у нас нет еще ровно ничего, нет определенного отношения к прошлому [...] Ведь так ясно: чтобы начать жить в настоящем, надо сначала искупить наше прошлое, покончить с ним, а искупить его можно только страданием, только необычайным, непрерывным трудом. Поймите это, Аня. (13: 228)

With his negation of the private domain, Petja has no chance of learning about his own hypocrisy. He declares himself to be one of those new and better men who are "above love" ("my vyše ljubvi" 'we are above love', he says to Anja in Act II and again to Ljubov' ["Love"] Andreevna in Act III, covering himself with the figleaf of his usual "we"), yet at the very end of Act I he exclaims to himself as he watches Anja being taken to her room half-asleep: "(v umilenii) Solnyško moe! Vesna moja!" (13: 214) '(overcome by tenderness) My sunshine! My spring!' This unconscious declaration of his love for Anja is the last glimpse of Petja's private (and unconscious, unrecognized) feeling. Lopachin with his quest for happiness as gain will put the cherry orchard to the axe, and Trofimov, for whom the cherry orchard is nothing but a reminder of social injustice, will push Lopachin aside and introduce his brand of "new life", the new life of collective guilt, collective responsibility, collective stupefaction and misery which Čechov would not live to see but the presentiment of which, along with an uncannily prophetic characterization of the *dramatis personae* who would bring it about, he left his readers in his last finished work.

Čechov's 1887 story "Sčast'e" ["Happiness"], which he identifies in an 1888 letter to Ja. P. Polonskij as the best of all his stories,²¹ contains a number of textual etyma to the themes of indifferent nature and the quest for happiness, as well as to the "breaking string" sign (both an *icon* and a *symbol* in Peircean terms) found in *The Cherry Orchard*, and thus warrants close consideration. The story is set shortly before dawn in the southern Russian steppe not far from Čechov's native Taganrog; its *dramatis personae* are two shepherds, one young and one old, and Pantelej, a middle-aged inspector in the employ of an estate owner. There is also a flock of sheep thinking their "viscous" ("tjagučie")

thoughts. The old shepherd tells stories about treasures buried in the steppe, and amulets enabling people to find and dig out those treasures. In one of the old shepherd's monologues, there occurs the first parallel to Firs's lines in Act II, spoken just after the sound of the string breaking:

ФИРС. Перед несчастьем то же было: и сова кричала и самовар гудел беспречь.
ГАВВ. Перед каким несчастьем?
ФИРС. Перед волей. (13: 224)

Compare the old shepherd's words:

"Захочет нечистая сила, так и в камне свистеть начнет. Перед волей у нас три дня и три ночи скеля гудела. Сам слыхал". (6: 212)

This correspondence helps establish the genetic relationship between "Happiness" and *The Cherry Orchard*. Further consideration produces results that bear directly on the interpretation of the breaking string motif. Just before dawn, in the middle of the old man's most gripping and personal "buried treasure" story, in which his own brother acquires an amulet and is on the verge of success, a strange sound is heard:

В тихом воздухе, рассыпаясь по степи, пронесся звук. Что-то вдали грозно ахнуло, ударились о камень и побежало по степи, издавая «тх!тх!тх!тх!» Когда звук замер, старик вопросительно поглядел на равнодушного, неподвижно стоявшего Пантелейя.

— Это в шахтах бадья сорвалась, — сказал молодой, подумав.
Уже светало. (6: 2115)

In light of this description, it seems utterly impossible to take Lopachin's explanation of the "sound of a string breaking" in *The Cherry Orchard* seriously. The phrase "grozno achnulo" 'banged menacingly' and the onomatopoeia of the sound itself bear precious little resemblance to the sound made by a musical instrument's breaking string (and let us recall that the only musical instrument in the relevant scene of *The Cherry Orchard* is Epichodov's guitar).

Toward the end of the story, the themes of nature's indifference and man's impassioned search for happiness intertwine. Pantelej is about to ride off, but not before saying to the two shepherds:

"Есть счастье, да нет ума искать его. [...] Да, так и умрешь, не повидавши счастья, какое оно такое есть... [...] Кто помо-

ложе, может, и дождется, а нам уж и думать пора бросить".
(6: 215–16)

Then Pantelej mounts his horse "looking as if he'd forgotten something or hadn't finished saying something", and squints at a view in the distance:

В синеватой дали, где последний видимый холм сливался с туманом, ничто не шевелилось; сторожевые и могильные курганы, которые там и сям высились над горизонтом и безграничною степью, глядели сурово и мертвно; в их неподвижности и беззвучии чувствовались века и полное равнодушие к человеку; пройдет еще тысяча лет, умрут миллиарды людей, а они все еще будут стоять, как стояли, нимало не сожалея об умерших, не интересуясь живыми, и ни одна живая душа не будет знать, зачем они стоят и какую степную тайну прячут под собой.

Проснувшиеся грачи, молча и в одиночку, летали над землей. Ни в ленивом полете этих долговечных птиц, ни в утре, которое повторяется аккуратно каждые сутки, ни в безграничности степи – ни в чем не видно было смысла. Объездчик усмехнулся и сказал:

– Экая ширь, Господи помилуй! Пойди-ка, найди счастье! (6: 216)

Čechov directs his character's glance at a pretext, furnished by the steppe, for his own look at "indifferent nature". In Čechov, nature's indifference to a person's existence (always a particular person's existence, never that of humanity in general) has an important corollary, namely that nature's boundless expanse, spatial and temporal, and the cyclical "neat repetition" of nature's phenomena are in themselves meaningless. "What an expanse, Lord have mercy on us! Who can possibly find happiness here!" This remark resonates in Lopachin's Act II monologue which immediately precedes Gaev's "prose poem":

Иной раз, когда не спится, я думаю: «Господи [cf. "Господи помилуй!"], ты дал нам громадные леса, необъятные поля, глубочайшие горизонты [cf. "Экая ширь [...]!"], и, живя тут, мы сами должны бы по-настоящему быть великанами...» (13: 224)

Lopachin answers the question implied by Pantelej in "Happiness": to find happiness in this expanse, you have to become a giant, you have to set gigantic tasks for yourself and work hard to fulfill them – the way he, Lopachin, works. Ljubov' Andreevna's retort to Lopachin's dream of giants assumes a characteristically human and personal scale: "Vam ponadobilis' velikany... Oni tol'ko v skazkach choroši, a tak oni pugajut". (13: 224) 'You need giants... They're fine

in fairy tales alone, but otherwise they're frightening'. Lopachin's gigantism is both meaningless and frightening. Ordinary human happiness is not even conceivable outside of ordinary human dimensions, outside of the dimensions of a specific private place that gives meaning to a private life (Ljubov' Andreevna's cherry orchard). The temptations of the superhuman, of sweeping gestures and generalizations, of happiness imaged as a treasure buried somewhere in the vast emptiness of the steppe or in the emptiness of the future brought about by the destruction or abandonment of the past (Lopachin and Petja Trofimov), can only be born and borne in a mind as unformed and uncultivated as the expanse of the "silent steppe and age-old mounds". "One doesn't have the intelligence" to find happiness, says Pantelej; and even if one could find it, one wouldn't know what to do with it. When the young shepherd asks what the old shepherd would do with the treasure if he found it, the latter does not have a clue:

— Я-то? — усмехнулся старик. — Гм!.. Только бы найти, а то...
показал бы я всем Кузкину мать... Гм! Знаю, что делать...
И старик не сумел ответить, что он будет делать с кладом,
если найдет его. За всю жизнь этот вопрос представился ему
в это утро, вероятно, впервые, а судя по выражению лица,
легкомысленному и безразличному, не казался ему важным
и достойным размышления. (6: 217–18)

Lopachin and Petja Trofimov, the two ascending powers in *The Cherry Orchard*, do not fare any better than the old shepherd in that regard. Where "Happiness" and *The Cherry Orchard* differ is in the structural and symbolic resolution of the search for happiness theme. In "Happiness", the contrastive juxtaposition of nature's indifference and the human search for happiness is followed by an epiphanic sunrise, the light of the rising sun together with a shift in view point from the steppe to the peak of the Saur, the tallest mound in the steppe, allows the reader a saving glimpse of a different life "which has nothing to do with buried happiness and ovine thoughts". In *The Cherry Orchard*, by contrast, the scene in Act II which culminates in "the sound of a string breaking" begins at sundown. "The sun has set, ladies and gentlemen", Gaev announces, and his announcement, in terms both of the context of the scene and its anagnostic counterpoint, has obvious eschatological overtones.²²

The eschatological overtones have already been signaled in the stage directions at the end of Act I: "Daleko za sadom pastuch igrat na svireli". (13: 214) 'Far away, beyond the orchard, a shepherd is playing his pipe'. In a letter to Stanislavskij of November 5, 1903, in which Čechov gives the director important instructions on various aspects of the stage set and production, he writes: "Vaš pastuch igral chorošo. Èto imenno i nužno".²³ Far from being an insignificant sound effect, the sound of the shepherd's pipe is yet another literary

reference, a self-reference in this instance.²⁴ Čechov intended his audience to recall his "Svirel'" ["The Shepherd's Pipe"], a story also written in 1887, which both structurally and thematically is closely related to "Happiness". Here, too, a passerby in the employ of a landlord encounters a shepherd, engages him in conversation, and then leaves.²⁵ "The Shepherd's Pipe" begins with the sound of that shepherd playing his pipe, yet the sound is described in a way that frustrates the reader's expectation of a pastoral idyll:

Игрок брал не более пяти-шести нот, лениво тянул их, не стараясь связать их в мотив, но тем не менее в его писке слышалось что-то сурьое и чрезвычайно тоскливое. (6: 321)

The ominous implications of this description are borne out by the shepherd's words which tell of the current decline of the natural and human world: rivers and marshes are drying up, land is being deforested, fish and game disappear, people of all classes are getting worse both physically and morally from year to year. The end of the world, "vseochvatyvajuščaja gibel'" 'all-embracing ruin' precipitated by humanity's failure to do God's will, is imminent. The shepherd's prophecy concludes with his interpretation of a recent eclipse, that traditional harbinger of cosmic cataclysms: "Značit, bratuška, i v nebe neporjadok-to! Nedaram ono..." (6: 326) 'That means, brother, there's disorder even in the sky [or 'in heaven']! It's not for nothing...' The shepherd looks at the sky and starts playing his pipe. Just as in the beginning of the story, he plays a few squeaky notes that fail to make a tune:

Самые высокие пискливые ноты, которые дрожали и обрывались, казалось, неутешно плакали, точно свирель была больна и испугана, а самые низкие ноты почему-то напоминали туман, унылые деревья, серое небо. (6: 326-27)

The sense of the approaching catastrophe is enhanced by Čechov's description of the imminent late autumn (the relevant phrases are underlined):

Чувствовалась близость того нечастного, ничем не предотвратимого времени, когда поля становятся тёмны, земля грязна и холодна, когда плакучая ива кажется еще печальнее, и по стволу ее ползут слезы, и лишь одни журавли уходят от общей беды, да и те, точно боясь оскорбить унылую природу выражением своего счастья, оглашают поднебесье грустной, тоскливой песней. (6: 328)

The story ends with the passerby listening to the fading sounds of the pipe as he departs:

[...] а когда самая высокая нотка свирели пронеслась протяжно в воздухе и задрожала, как голос плачущего человека, ему стало чрезвычайно горько и обидно на непорядок, который замечался в природе.

Высокая нотка задрожала, оборвалась, и свирель смолкла. (6: 328)

Thus ends the story, on a high note lingering in the air and breaking off. "The distant sound as if from the sky, the sad fading sound of a string breaking" heard twice in *The Cherry Orchard* echoes that sound, rife with eschatological overtones. It does not just "symbolize"; for the reader who recognizes the etymon, the sound of the string breaking connotes the approaching catastrophe by bringing to mind the significance which the echoed sound in "The Shepherd's Pipe" has, almost in the same way as the shepherd's pipe connotes the trumpet call described by Christ in St. Matthew 24: 30. The atmosphere of impending disaster has been reinforced by the anagnostic presence of "Grešnica", as has the knowledge, through "Grešnica"'s New Testament etymon, that love can save. Of the three quests for happiness – Ljubov' Andreevna's, Lopachin's, and Trofimov's – only Ljubov' Andreevna's is justified ("[h]er sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much..." [St. Luke 7:47]).

4. The Sound of Strings Breaking and Its Etyma

Count A.K. Tolstoj, whose importance in the play is signaled by the role of "Grešnica" in Act III, has a famous poem – famous not only because "standard" and frequently anthologized, but also because three prominent national composers – N.A. Rimsky-Korsakoff, César Cui, and Anton Rubinstein – independently and approximately at the same time set it to music (Tolstoj 1963: 744):

Звонче жаворонка пенье,
Ярче вешние цветы,
Сердце полно вдохновенья,
Небо полно красоты.

Разорвав тоски оковы,
Цепи пошлие разбив,
Набегает жизни новой
Торжествующий прилив,

И звучит свежо и юно
Новых сил могучий строй,
Как натянутые струны
Между небом и землей.²⁶

The phrase "vešnie cvety" 'spring flowers', phonologically (metaleptically), synecdochically, and metonymically related to "víšnevyj cvet" 'cherry blossom' (cf. víšnëvyj cvet 'cherry color'), is echoed throughout *The Cherry Orchard*, beginning with the play's very title, "Víšnevyj sad".²⁷ The poem is echoed in Ljubov' Andreevna's first significant monologue, discussed in part above:

О сад мой! После темной ненастной осени и холодной зимы
 [cf. "разорвав тоски оковы"], опять ты молод ["жизни новой /
 [...] прилив", "звукит свежо и юно / Новых сил [...]"], полон
 счастья ["Сердце полно вдохновенья, / Небо полно красоты"],
 ангелы небесные не покинули тебя... [...] Какой изуми-
 тельный сад! Белые массы цветов, голубое небо... (13: 210)

But the apocalyptic shepherd's pipe sounds at the end of Act I. The doomsday overtones of "The Shepherd's Pipe" contrast dramatically with the songlike, ecstatically optimistic tone of Tolstoj's poem (and the three popular hits it produced). The passage already quoted from the final scene of "The Shepherd's Pipe" ("Čuvstvovalas' blizost'...", see page 35 above) is both thematically and structurally the reverse of the A.K. Tolstoj poem. Čechov's cranes ("žuravli") that end the passage by escaping "the general calamity" singing their "sad, melancholy song" are the seasonal and architectonic opposite of A.K. Tolstoj's skylark ("žavoronok"), whose resonant song heralding the coming of spring begins Tolstoj's hymn. Čechov takes issue with Tolstoj's optimism expressive of the hopeful upsurge of Russia's creative energies that culminated in the reforms of 1861 and the subsequent years.²⁸ The Freedom Act of 1861 is described as "the Disaster" by the very people who were supposed to benefit from it. The old servant Firs, who serves as the "shepherd" not only of Gaev but arguably of the entire Ranevskaja household and who often echoes the old shepherds in "Happiness" and "The shepherd's Pipe",²⁹ speaks of the 1861 Freedom Act as the calamity that destroyed order, however imperfect it was, replacing it only with chaos:

ЛОПАХИН. Прежде очень хорошо было. По крайней мере,
 драли. ФИРС (не рассыпав). А еще бы. Мужики при госпо-
 дах, господа при мужиках, а теперь все враздробь, не пой-
 мешь ничего. (13: 221–2)

The old shepherd in "The Shepherd's Pipe" sums up the situation: "I v nebe neporjadok-to!" 'There's disorder even in the sky!' This disorder in nature and human affairs contrasts stridently with A.K. Tolstoj's "novych sil mogučij stroj" 'mighty concord of new forces'. And if there are any "new forces" in the world as it appears in *The Cherry Orchard*, they are Lopachin and Petja Trofimov. "Nabegaet žizni novoj / Toržestvujuščij priliv" 'The triumphant tide / Of a new

'life is overflowing' is echoed mockingly in the gloating triumph of Lopachin in Act III and in Petja Trofimov's gushingly corny yet sinister apostrophe "Zdravstvuj, novaja žizn!" 'Hello, new life!', emitted to the accompaniment of Lopachin's axes. "Vsja Rossija naš sad!" 'All of Russia is our orchard!'³⁰ Count A.K. Tolstoj's strings³¹ tautly strung between heaven and earth, the strings that bind heaven and earth together in one harmonious whole (*stroj* means "[musical] temperament, concord", cf. German *Stimmung*) imaged like the cosmic cithern of the Pythagoreans³² – it is those strings that break in Act II and at the end of the play, in Act IV, as Firs, the last living link between the past and the present, lies on the brink of death, abandoned in the house destined for demolition.

The image of a taut string about to snap as a metaphor for imminent catastrophe³³ has yet another recognizable source in a famous work by a prose writer whose aristocratic title and last name, although homonymous with the poet's, are sufficient to name him and only him: Count L.N. Tolstoj. In the Epilogue to *War and Peace*, Pierre Bezuchov explains to an intimate circle of friends and family his views of the contemporary situation and his remedy for it:

Всё слишком натянуто и непременно лопнет [...] Когда вы стоите и ждёте, что вот-вот лопнет эта натянутая струна; когда все ждут неминуемого переворота, надо как можно теснее и больше народа взяться рука с рукой, чтобы противостоять общей катастрофе [...] Мы только для того, чтобы завтра Пугачев не пришел зарезать и моих и твоих детей и чтобы Аракчеев не послал меня в военное поселение, – мы только для этого беремся рука с рукой, с одной целью общего блага и общей безопасности. (L.N. Tolstoj, *Vojna i mir*, Epilog, čast' I, glava XIV)

Like a true prophet, Čechov not only predicts and symbolically describes the coming disaster, he also tells his listeners or readers anagnostically what they ought to do in order to prevent the disaster from sweeping them away.

May Čechov's prophecy be re-cognized by more "honest people" among his play's readers and viewers – especially in today's Russia but also abroad – than ever before.

Notes

¹ For this brand of philology, see a useful summary in Boeckh 1968: 3–46.

² This is the first and last occurrence of "intertextuality" in my essay. I reject this term, which Julia Kristeva built on the ruins of Husserl's "intersubjectivity" – after the subject had been deconstructed –, for three reasons. First, I cannot

condone, morally or theoretically, the *léniniste* liquidation of the thinking subject as a philosophical and cognitive category. Second – if we suspend the first and adopt "intertextuality" as a mere technical label –, we see that it is justified if and only if it applies to that relatively rare situation in which literary texts really are *interrelated*, namely, A addresses B and then B replies to A (as in letter-writing). Usually the relationship of literary texts is one-way only. Third, intertextual theory is a hodge-podge of heterogeneous terminologies, ideologies, and formalisms (see Plett 1991 for examples of that type of theoretical discourse). The term "subtext" (a calque from the Russian *podtekst*, made available through the admirable work of Kiril Taranovsky and Omry Ronen), like its traditional counterparts "allusion" and "echo", does not oblige the interpreter-critic to investigate what happens *after* the "sweet moment of recognition". The term "etymon" does. (I use it to denote a text from which a later text is derived.) I also propose the term "anagnosis" (with the matching adjective "agnostic", both from *anagignoskein*) to describe the yet unnamed process of re-cognizing a "subtext", returning with it to the text in question and then imaginatively constructing its new meaning in that text.

³ The last edition supervised by A.P. Čechov: Anton Čechov, *Višnevyyj sad. Komedija v četyrech dejstvijach*. (St. Petersburg: A.F. Marks, 1904). Quotations from Čechov's works are taken from *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij i pisem*, ed. N.F. Bel'čikov et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1974–83); references to *Sočinenija* are by volume and page number, references to *Pis'ma* are so identified, followed by volume and page number. All references to this edition will be included parenthetically in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all of the translations are my own.

⁴ For a good account of Stanislavskij's stereotypical misreadings of Čechov's themes and characters, see Simmons 1962: 611–617. See also Čechov's letters concerning the various problems in Stanislavskij's and the Art Theater's interpretation and staging of *The Cherry Orchard* (to Nemirovič-Dančenko, of 2 Nov. 1903, *Pis'ma* 11: 293; to Stanislavskij, of 5 Nov. 1903, 297; to Batjuškov, of 19 Jan. 1904, *Pis'ma* 12: 15), especially his letters to Ol'ga Knipper-Čechova of 29 March and 10 April 1904:

[...] Акт, который должен продолжаться минут 12 maximum, у вас идет 40 минут. Одно могу сказать: сгубил мне пьесу Станиславский. Ну, да Бог с ним. (*Pis'ma* 12: 74)
 Немирович и Алексеев в моей пьесе видят положительно не то, что я написал, и я готов дать какое угодно слово, что оба они ни разу не прочли внимательно моей пьесы. Прости, но я уверяю тебя. (*Pis'ma* 12: 81)

⁵ See e.g. Clausen 1987, Hollander 1981; in Russian philology, Taranovsky 1976, Ronen 1974, Amert 1992.

⁶ A. Belyj 1904: 47. Belyj reverses the sequence of events in the passage he describes: first, the sound is heard, then the passerby appears.

⁷ Чеховский символический предмет принадлежит сразу двум сферам – «реальной» и символической – и ни одной из них в большей, чем другой. Он не горит одним ровным светом, но мерцает – то светом символическим, то реальным. (Čudakov 1971: 172)

⁸ The title of Maurice Valency's book on Čechov's plays is *The Breaking String* (1966), and the title of the book's last chapter is "The Sound of the Breaking String". Valency describes the significance to him of this symbol in the following passage.

One of the constant complaints of the time centered on the breakdown of communication between fathers and sons, and the abyss that divided the older generation from the younger... The golden string that connected man with his father on earth and his father in heaven, the age-old bond that tied the peasant to the past, was not to be broken lightly. When at last it snapped, the result, we have discovered, was both world-shaking and soul-shaking". (289–90)

David Magarshack ("The Cherry Orchard", in Wellek 1984: 168–182) does not doubt that Lopachin's explanation is the correct one:

It was a sound Chekhov remembered from his own boyhood days when he used to spend his summer months at a little hamlet in the Don basin. It was there that he first heard the mysterious sound, which seemed to be coming from the sky, but which was caused by the fall of a bucket in some distant coal-mine. With the years this sound acquired a nostalgic ring, and it is this sad, nostalgic feeling Chekhov wanted to convey by it. It is a sort of requiem for the 'unhappy and disjointed' lives of his characters. (181)

Francis Ferguson ("The Cherry Orchard: A Theater-Poem of the Suffering of Change", in Jackson 1967: 147–160) refrains from identifying the sound but interprets its significance in the scene:

This mysterious sound is... to remind us of the wider scene, but (though distant) it is sharp, almost a warning signal, and all the characters listen and peer toward the dim edges of the horizon. In their attitudes and guesses Chekhov reflects, in rapid succession, the contradictory aspects of the scene... Lyubov feels the need to retreat, but the retreat is turned into flight when 'the wayfarer' suddenly appears on the path asking for money. Lyubov in her bewilderment, her sympathy, and her bad conscience, gives him gold. The party breaks up, each in his own way thwarted and demoralized. (154)

Georges Banu's note to Lopachin's line in the French translation of the play (Anton P. Tchekhov, *La Cerisaie* [Paris: Flammarion]) takes the bucket ("une benne") explanation even further:

Pendant les années 1870-1873, il y a de très nombreuses ouvertures de mines et la Russie se distingue alors par une forte exploration du charbon. La politique menée par le tout-puissant ministre De Witte, le «Colbert russe», va assurer le développement de l'industrie lourde, ce qui entraîne le triplement de la production de charbon. Le phénomène n'est pas étranger non plus à l'extension du réseau des chemins de fer. (142)

Cf. a similar socioeconomic commentary on the sound in Hahn 1977:

It is the sound of social transition, of the passing away of a particular class, as the wheels of a society begin to turn. As the string snaps in the sky..., the historical process that will absorb them is almost palpable. (17)

J.-P. Barricelli (1977: 121-136) insists that "the background of the sound must be sought in folklore" (127); his search for the meaning of Čechov's symbols (the snapping string, the hooting owl, etc.) takes him to Slovakia, Switzerland, and ancient Egypt (127ff.).

⁹ Čechov's *bad'ja* is translated by different translators as either 'bucket' or 'tub'. The Russian word may denote either a relatively small vessel for transporting coal out of a coal mine (a bucket) or a relatively large one for transporting miners up and down within the shaft. However, Čechov himself indirectly suggests the choice of 'a tub'. The protagonist of his story "Perekati-pole" ["The Tumbleweed"] (1887) narrates an episode in which he nearly escapes death when the *bad'ja* in which he is descending into a mine shaft breaks off its chain; he escapes death but is badly injured (6: 260, with notes, 674-5). the potentially tragic consequences of a *bad'ja* fall make Lopachin's interpretation of the sound all the more ominous. Andrej Belyj provides additional evidence for the translation of *bad'ja* as 'tub' ("anybody can understand that there is horror in that", see the quotation on page 3f.).

¹⁰ See S.D. Balukhaty, "The *Cherry Orchard*: A Formalist Approach", in Jackson 1967: 136-146, esp. 143.

¹¹ In the absence of a more detailed study, I direct the reader to Bitsilli 1983, esp. Chapters 5 and 7, and Čukovskij 1967: 103-22 and 195-200.

¹² Bjalyj 1985: 187 and Kataev 1989: 249-250 mention additional literary precedents for the sound of the breaking string. Bjalyj gives one etymon from Heinrich Heine's poem "Sie erlischt" and one from Turgenev's prose poem "Nimfy", but stops short of demonstrating their relationship to Čechov's text or interpreting their significance (cf. my discussion of Turgenevian etyma

below). Kataev suggests yet another Turgenev parallel (from the story "Bežin Lug"). The parallel does not quite fit (cf. Turgenev's description of his unidentified sound as "protjažnyj" 'long drawn out') but Kataev takes it for granted and proceeds to describe its significance rather nebulously as follows (250):

Тургеневский звук от «Счастья» к «Вишневому саду» приобрел новые оттенки, стал подобен звуку лопнувшей струны. В последней пьесе в нем соединилась символика жизни и родины, России: напоминание о ее необъятности и о времени, протекающем над ней, о чем-то знакомом, вечно звучащем над русскими просторами, сопровождающем бесчисленные приходы и уходы все новых поколений.

¹³ Čechov wanted to emphasize the importance of this quotation by having his Station Master recite the poem in a low-pitched voice (Čechov's letter to V.I. Nemirovič-Dančenko of November 2, 1903 [*Pis'ma* 11: 293–4]: "Начальник станции, читающий в III акте «Грешницу», – актер, говорящий басом". (294)

¹⁴ Quotations are taken from A.K. Tolstoj 1963: 507–512. All subsequent references to this edition will appear parenthesized in the text. First published in *Russkaja beseda*, no. 1 (1858): 83–88.

¹⁵ ГАЕВ. Вышла не за дворянина и вела себя, нельзя сказать, чтобы очень добродетельно. Она хорошая, добрая, славная, я ее очень люблю, но, как там не придумывай смягчающие обстоятельства, всё же, надо сознаться, она порочна. Это чувствуется в ее малейшем движении. (13: 212)

¹⁶ Elisaveta Fen: "God bless you, Mamma!" (Chekhov, *Plays*, translated and with an introduction by Elisaveta Fen [Baltimore: Penguin, 1959]: 385). Similarly Ronald Highley (*The Oxford Chekhov*, tr. and ed. Ronald Highley, vol. III [London: Oxford University Press, 1964]: 187) and David Magarshak (Chekhov, *Four Plays*, tr. David Magarshack [New York: Hill and Wang, 1969]: 232). Stark Young: "I bless you" (Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, ed. Herbert Goldstone [Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1965]: 35) and Eugene K. Bristow: "I give you my blessing" (*Anton Chekhov's Plays*, tr. and ed. Eugene K. Bristow, 1977]: 201).

¹⁷ This is the symbolism intuited and described in Belyj 1904.

¹⁸ Cf. Čechov's use of A.K. Tolstoj's *Grešnica* in his story *Učitel' slovesnosti* (see Julie W. de Sherbinin's "Life Beyond Text: The Nature of Illusion in 'The Teacher of Literature', in Jackson 1993: 115–126.

¹⁹ The editor of *Vestnik Evropy* announces in his introduction to the first publication (October 1882) of the "prose poems" Turgenev's consent "podelit'sja s čitateljami [...] temi mimoletnymi zamezkami, mysljami, obrazami..." "to share with readers [...] those fleeting notes, thoughts, images..." (Turgenev 1898: 64).

²⁰ Cf. Ol'ga Knipper-Čechova's letter of Aug. 25, 1901 to her husband, in which she describes Lička Mizinova's recitation of the most popular among Turgenev's "prose poems", "Kak choroši, kak sveži byli rozy..." ["How pretty, how fresh were the roses..."] at an audition for the Moscow Art Theatre; see *Pis'ma* 10: 336. The other pieces recited by Mizinova were a monologue from Čechov's *Uncle Vania* and a scene from Count A.K. Tolstoj's tragedy *Car' Theodor Ioannovič*.

²¹ The letter is dated March 25, 1888 (*Pis'ma* 2: 219). In it, Čechov asked Polonskij to allow him to dedicate the story to him. "Sčast'e" was subsequently, published with that dedication.

²² Richard Peace is the most recent in a long line of commentators who sense something much larger than just a sunset in Gaev's announcement. Unfortunately, he too is infected with the vulgar sociologism of Soviet critics: "Gayev's setting sun seems like a valedictory symbol for an age and a class". (Peace 1983: 134)

²³ *Pis'ma* 11: 298. In his letter of November 1, Stanislavskij wrote:
Летом я записал фонографом рожок пастуха. Того самого, которого Вы любили в Любимовке. Вышло чудесно, и теперь этот валик очень пригодится. (*Pis'ma* 11: 616)

²⁴ That the sound of the pipe is a literary echo was apparently first recognized by Tulloch 1980: 189.

²⁵ The shepherd in "The Shepherd's Pipe" is described in terms strongly reminiscent of the old shepherd in "Happiness". Cf. in "The Shepherd's Pipe": "starik [...] toščij, v rvanoj sermjage i bez šapki" 'an old man [...], emaciated, dressed in a torn coarse shirt and without a hat'; in "Happiness": "toščie pleči" 'emaciated shoulders' and the pathetic sight of the shepherd's back, "back with sunburn and old age", bared by his "cholščevaja rubacha" 'coarse linen shirt' which keeps creeping up as he gesticulates.

²⁶ First publication: *Russkaja beseda*, 1858, no. 1, 89–90. Incidentally, "The Sinful Woman" was first published in the same issue.

²⁷ Čechov intentionally placed the accent on the first syllable of the word *višnevyyj*; i.e., the unusual *višnevyyj*, not the customary *višnëvyj*. K.S. Stanislavskij (*Moja žizn' v iskusstve*, in *Sobranie sočinenij*, vol. 1 [Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1951]: 268) records this in his memoirs:

Чехов выдержал паузу, стараясь быть серьёзным. Но это ему не удавалось – торжественная улыбка изнутри пробивалась наружу. «Послушайте, я же нашел чудесное название для пьесы. Чудесное!» – объявил он, смотря на меня в упор. «Какое?» – заволновался я. «Вишневый сад», – и он закатился радостным смехом. Я не понял причины его радости и не нашел ничего особенного в названии.

The accent *višnevyyj* "cherry-tree (adj.)" distinguishing it from *višnëvyj*, relating to the fruit (as in "cherry pit"), is somewhat archaically *recherché*. This stylistic (and social) fact may well have been the source of Čechov's alleged hilarity. Čechov may also have had in mind a poem by A.K. Tolstoj, in one of whose stanzas the phrase "*višnevyyj sad*" 'the cherry orchard' appears with the accent on the first syllable. Stanislavskij just did not get it, to Čechov's apparent disappointment. Subsequently Čechov even insisted that Stanislavskij pronounce the play's title "*Višnëvyj sad*" (Stanislavskij 1951: 269).

Here is Tolstoj's poem:

Источник за вишневым садом,
Следы голых девичьих ног,
И тут же оттиснулся рядом
Гвоздями подбитый сапог.
Всё тихо на месте их встречи,
Но чует ревниво мой ум
И шепот, и страстные речи,
И ведер расплесканных шум... (153)

²⁸ Cf. Firs's remark: 'I didn't agree to be freed then, I stayed with my masters... (Pause) I remember, everyone was happy, but why there were happy they didn't know themselves'. (Act II, 13: 221)

²⁹ The parallel between Firs and the old shepherd in "The Shepherd's Pipe" is briefly discussed in Tulloch 1980: 189.

³⁰ In the spring of 1904, Viktor Baranovskij, a Kazan University student, wrote Čechov three letters – a rare testimony of a contemporary's reception – about *The Cherry Orchard*. In his second letter Baranovskij writes:

Your play may be called a frightening, blood-soaked drama; God prevent it from unfolding. How horrible, how frightening it feels, when the dull sounds of the axe are heard off-stage!! It is horrible, horrible! One's hair stands on end, one shudders!... [...] The cherry orchard is all of Russia!" (Čechov 14: 502–03)

Syntomatically, the Stalinist literary critic V. Ermilov recognized in Petja Trofimov a kindred spirit and used his phrase "All of Russia is our orchard!" as the title of the last section of the chapter on *The Cherry Orchard* in his 1948 book *Dramaturgija Čechova* (pp. 265–68). To Ermilov, the Soviet Union of 1948 is a "magical blossoming orchard" (265) into which Russia was transformed by Anja and Trofimov (whom Ermilov compares with Nadja and Saša from "Nevesta" ["The Bride"], Čechov's last story). According to Ermilov, Nadja and Anja "join the revolutionary struggle for the freedom and happiness of the motherland" (267).

³¹ In A.K. Tolstoj's poem, "the mighty concord [con-chord] of new forces" resounds *like* the strings stretched between heaven and earth: it is a simile. In Čechov's play, the sound of strings breaking is as *real* as any other sound coming from the stage; his stage directions leave no room for doubt.

³² See Leo Spitzer's masterful discussion of the Pythagorean etyma of the idea of *harmonia mundi* in his posthumously published book *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony* (1963), esp. Chapters I and II. Čechov's familiarity not only with Greek patristic thought but also with its classical sources (including Cicero and the Stoics such as Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius), although it is well documented, has not been explored in terms of its implications for his creative work.

³³ The image of a snapping string as a symbol of disaster occurs several times in L. Tolstoj's *Anna Karenina*, e.g. Part IV, Chapter XXI:

—Нет, Стива, — сказала она. — Я погибла, погибла! Хуже чем погибла. [...] Я — как натянутая струна, которая должна лопнуть. Но еще не кончено... и кончится страшно.
— Ничего, можно потихоньку спустить струну. [...]

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