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“Do silly things. Foolishness is a lot more vital and healthy than our straining and striving after a meaningful life.”- Anton Chekhov, *The Portable Chekhov*.

Chekhov saw much tragedy during his life. His father was abusive and deeply religious, his older brothers struggled with alcoholism and mental illness, and much of his life was spent treating peasants as a physician through several epidemics. Perhaps Chekhov’s misfortunes are why he felt the stories of the suffering were important to tell, and why he went through great lengths attempting to do so. For example, in 1890, he traveled for 81 days to a remote penal colony beyond Siberia, nearly dying in a train accident along the way, to interview prisoners and guards so he could tell their stories. These stories inspired him to travel, socialize, treat the sick, and plant gardens, while he suffered with on and off sickness throughout his life. Even when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, and knew he was dying, Chekhov continued to draw inspiration from suffering, leading him to write *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) before dying in the summer of 1904.

Chekhov drew from his own experiences and relationships to create complicated relationships between family members in his plays, embodying a realness to which most people can relate. Many of his characters are suffering from physical and emotional pain, and *Uncle Vanya* explores how they cope with that pain while living alongside one another at the estate. Reflecting Chekhov’s struggles with his loved ones, the characters express their pain in all too familiar ways – through denial, anger, resentment, addiction, and even violence. People spend a lot of time attempting to avoid and remove pain, rather than accepting and facing hardship with healthy coping mechanisms.

Chekhov’s world was one in turmoil, something he knew all too well as a doctor treating peasants while epidemics swept Europe. Through his upbringing and later travels, Chekhov gained a deep understanding of Russia as an agricultural society struggling to find its footing after the serfs were emancipated, and where the worldview of many, including his family members, came from their Russian Orthodox faith. He drew upon that knowledge to build the world of his plays, notably *Uncle Vanya*. Chekhov’s own perspective might be heard in Astrov who describes treating peasants and seeing forests destroyed across Russia. Unlike others at the estate, Astrov’s awareness of the world expands the scale of his struggles from himself to the whole of Russia. And yet, Chekhov also presents the characters in *Uncle Vanya*, their reaction to misery and their failure to tackle the source of their problems, in humorous ways. By sulking in misery, suffering becomes a shield for these characters. By examining Chekhov’s personal life, we can see from where he drew insights for his characters. Likewise, his plays—most notably *Uncle Vanya*—reveal why writing these stories about suffering were so important to him. Through his creativity, Chekhov attempted to heal his own pain and the pain he witnessed in the world around him.