

Intersections of Poetics in lyrical short stories in Vietnamese and Russian literature: The case of Thạch Lam, Chekhov, and Paustovsky

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Abstract

This study compares the lyrical poetics of Thạch Lam (Vietnam), Anton Chekhov, and Konstantin Paustovsky (Russia) using four representative short stories: Thạch Lam's *Nắng trong vườn* ("Sunlight in the Garden") and *Dưới bóng hoàng lan* ("Under the Hoàng Lan Tree"), Chekhov's "A Joke," and Paustovsky's "Morning Rain." It explores both convergences and divergences in their approaches to narrative voice and mood, focusing on character portrayal and narrative tone as defining features of the lyrical short story. Methodologically, the study employs a comparative, text-centered approach based on close reading and cultural contextualization rather than tracing direct influence. The analysis shows that all three writers prioritise interiority, atmosphere, and suggestive imagery over conventional plot development, yet each embodies a distinct sensibility: Thạch Lam's gentle humanism amid Vietnam's transitional modernity, Chekhov's subtle irony and narrative compression, and Paustovsky's romantic idealism and harmony with nature. These findings affirm Thạch Lam's innovative role in modernizing Vietnamese prose and situate Vietnamese lyrical narratives in dialogue with Russian counterparts. Significantly, this comparative study enriches cross-cultural literary discourse, with

relevance to world and African literatures where interiority and lyrical expression remain central.

Keywords: lyrical short story; comparative poetics; interiority; Vietnamese prose; Russian prose

Introduction

Within the evolution of global modern literature, the lyrical short story has emerged as a distinctive narrative form, valued for its expressive power and its nuanced reflection of the human inner world. Despite its significance, there are few studies that systematically compare Vietnamese lyrical prose with its Russian counterparts. This gap forms the basis for the present study, which explores how lyrical short stories from Vietnam and Russia reveal both shared artistic principles and culturally specific divergences.

In Vietnamese literature, Thạch Lam (1910–1942) is recognized as one of the foundational figures of modern lyrical short fiction. A leading member of the **Tự Lực văn đoàn** (Self-Reliance Literary Group) in the 1930s, Thạch Lam championed a prose style that was romantic in tendency yet close to everyday life. In Russian literature, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860–1904) and Konstantin Georgiyevich Paustovsky (1892–1968) stand out as exemplary

voices of lyrical prose, marked by their understated, contemplative, and profoundly humanistic storytelling. Although these authors wrote in different cultural contexts, the outlooks of their stories share notable parallels. Each was deeply influenced by periods of social upheaval – colonial transition in Vietnam for Thạch Lam, the twilight of the Tsarist era for Chekhov, and the Soviet interwar years for Paustovsky. All three had a keen eye for the beauty in ordinary life and a commitment to portraying the inner emotional world of common people. It is perhaps no coincidence that Chekhov and Thạch Lam both passed away at the height of their creativity (around the age of forty), leaving behind works that would profoundly influence the literary traditions of their countries. These biographical and temperamental affinities set the stage for an illuminating comparative exploration.

This study places two representative short stories by Thạch Lam – *Nắng trong vườn* ("Sunlight in the Garden") and *Dưới bóng hoàng lan* ("Under the Hoàng Lan Tree") –

alongside Chekhov's "A Joke" and Paustovsky's "Morning Rain". The goal is not to trace direct lines of influence, but to highlight the "accidental yet inevitable encounter" among three kindred literary spirits in their approach to expressing human interiority. These texts were selected for their representative use of lyrical narrative techniques and their exploration of delicate emotional states. All the four stories tend toward narrative minimalism (an anti-plot structure), forgoing dramatic twists to expand space for introspection and atmosphere. Their shared aesthetic objective is to explore the silent, complex, and sometimes contradictory beauty of the inner self. In its many emotional and philosophical manifestations, love emerges as a central theme in the selected stories (whether it is romantic first love, ironic unfulfilled love, or even the affectionate nostalgia of familial love). A comparative analysis of these works within the same lyrical narrative model not only helps delineate the contours of Vietnamese prose in the early twentieth century but also positions Vietnamese literature in a dialogue with Russian literature – a tradition that significantly shaped the modernization of Vietnam's literary landscape.

Accordingly, the article is organized into four main parts: (1) a review of relevant literature and a theoretical foundation

defining the lyrical short story in a comparative context; (2) an overview of the authors' contexts, artistic styles, and aesthetic philosophies; (3) a comparative analysis focusing on character modelling, the theme of love, and narrative tone in the selected texts; and (4) a discussion of convergences and divergences in lyrical poetics, culminating in a reaffirmation of Thạch Lam's contributions to modern Vietnamese prose.

Literature review

Scholarship on Lyrical Short Stories

The term "lyrical short story" has been discussed in various literary traditions, although it does not always appear under a single universal label. In Western scholarship, what now identifies as lyrical short fiction overlaps with concepts of the poetic short story or *mood story*, exemplified by authors such as Katherine Mansfield and Ivan Bunin who infuse prose with the qualities of lyric poetry. This trend has been broadly mapped by recent genre histories: Einhaus (2016) emphasizes the centrality of impressionistic, mood-driven narration in the modern English short story, while Head (2016) situates the rise of such condensed and emotionally charged narratives within a global literary evolution. Russian literary critics have long noted the poetic, introspective

qualities in Chekhov's and Bunin's stories, even if they did not explicitly use the term "lyrical short story". Russian writer Konstantin Paustovsky made this affinity between prose and poetry explicit in his essay *The Poetry of Prose*, included in the collection *Alone with Autumn*. Paustovsky argues that genuine prose must be interwoven with poetry – otherwise it degenerates into "wingless naturalism" (Paustovsky, 2004, pp. 13–14). This assertion underscores that lyrical short stories are not merely hybrids but organic forms of prose imbued with poetic sensibility, resonating with both Russian and Vietnamese critical views.

In Vietnam, the lyrical short story became a recognized category largely through mid-20th-century criticism. Hoàng Ngọc Hiến (1985) observed that an important feature of the modern short story is its affinity with poetry, noting that many modern stories "approach the condition of poetry" in their mood and technique (p. 113). Similarly, Phan Quang Lữ (2003) describes a reciprocal influence between poetry and prose in modern literature: just as poetic language became more prosaic in the twentieth century, prose in turn absorbed poetic qualities. He views the "blending of poetry back into prose" as an inevitable evolution of the modern short story, which is especially evident in

literary works of 1930–1945 (Phan, 2003, p. 51). These scholarly perspectives establish that the lyrical short story is characterized by a high degree of subjectivity, musicality, and emotional depth; it also stands at the intersection of narrative and lyric modes.

Later scholars have formalized the concept of the lyrical short story as a mode that prioritizes mood, interiority, and suggestive, condensed language over plot mechanics and twist endings. In Vietnamese criticism, this tendency is well-documented. For example, Văn Giá (2014) identifies a subtype built on "tình huống tâm trạng" (psychological/mood situations) in which narrative depends on interior states rather than external action; Bùi Việt Thắng (2000) argues that such stories often have an "internal (psychological) plot" and "cannot be retold" in the conventional sense; Nguyễn Kiên (1996) describes the "infiltration of poetry into the short story" as an intrinsic law of artistic development; and Nguyễn Thị Duyên (2007) highlights recurrent features—diminished drama, impressionistic description, and a subjective, contemplative voice. Taken together, these studies ground the lyrical short story in a poetics of musicality, atmosphere, and interior reflection rather than event-driven causality. As

Gumbrecht (2012) argues in his theorization of *Stimmung*, atmosphere and mood function as central aesthetic effects that literature communicates beyond direct representation, a view that directly illuminates the lyrical qualities observed in these short stories.

In Western criticism, the lyrical or "poetic" short story has similarly been described as privileging mood and epiphany over plot, with writers such as Mansfield and Bunin frequently cited as exemplars; this aligns closely with the Vietnamese theorization summarized above. Indeed, Baldeshwiler (1969) traces the lyric short story's emergence in Western fiction, highlighting its focus on atmosphere and impression rather than conventional plot.

Vietnamese and Russian literary intersections

From a methodological standpoint, Hutchinson (2018) stresses that comparative literature today must move beyond the linear models of influence-tracing to identify structural affinities across literary traditions. This perspective informs the following discussion of intersections between Vietnamese and Russian literature. Although rich, the history of cross-cultural resonance between these two traditions remains under-explored.. Vietnamese critics have

often drawn parallels between Thạch Lam's storytelling and Chekhov's. For instance, literary essayist Nguyễn Tuân once praised Thạch Lam as a "master of the short story" in Vietnam, in much the same way that Chekhov is regarded in Russia. While Thạch Lam's direct influences came primarily from French symbolism and realism, Vietnamese scholarship (e.g. Trần Thị Quỳnh Nga, 2010) has noted that early 20th-century Vietnamese prose writers often, perhaps inadvertently, echoed techniques found in Russian realist and lyrical prose. Nga's research into the reception of nineteenth-century Russian literature in Vietnam indicates that authors like Chekhov and Turgenev were widely read in translation and admired for their subtle, psychological, nuanced narratives. Although there is no evidence that Thạch Lam directly read Chekhov, both writers employ polyphonic narrative techniques and an understated style that converge in spirit. Meanwhile, Konstantin Paustovsky was introduced to Vietnamese readers largely after 1945, but his work resonated deeply with them. Translator Phan Hồng Giang remarks that Paustovsky's evocative, romantic prose serves as "a mirror reflecting the kindred spirit of the Russian and Vietnamese soul," pointing to a remarkable emotional affinity between the two cultures. Despite these

observations, there is a dearth of comparative studies that specifically focus on lyrical poetics across the Vietnamese and Russian contexts. Most existing studies in Vietnam, such as Đào Ngọc Chương (2010), compare themes or general narrative techniques across literatures but do not explicitly focus on the lyrical mode. This study builds on the above scholarship by directly comparing how three writers from two traditions independently developed a lyrical short story form. In doing so, it fills a gap in comparative literary studies, moving beyond influence-tracing to a nuanced examination of parallel lyrical poetics.

Theoretical framework

Defining the lyrical short story

In the history of literary genres, the lyrical short story is a narrative form that harmoniously integrates elements of lyric poetry—particularly personal emotion, mood, and a subjective narrative voice – into prose. According to M. Khrapchenko (1974), the most distinctive feature of this genre is the dominant presence of subjective feeling and an intimate perspective that emanates from the narrating consciousness. In other words, the author's and characters' inner emotions permeate the narrative texture. Lyrical short stories are often described as "anti-dramatic" or "anti-plot," because

they eschew fast-paced external events in favor of subtle internal developments. Time and space in such stories tend to be organized symbolically or thematically, rather than chronologically or causally. The form foregrounds memory, interior reflection, and delicate imagery as primary narrative drivers. Through understated description and atmosphere, it transforms private sentiments into a shared aesthetic experience, effectively blurring the line between storytelling and lyricism.

In twentieth-century literature, this hybrid form flourished across various traditions. Russian writer Anton Chekhov, English modernist Katherine Mansfield, and Russian émigré Ivan Bunin are notable pioneers who infused short fiction with poetic sensitivity and psychological nuance. Their works demonstrate how narrative can capture *moments of being* – epiphanies, fleeting emotions, and unspoken longings – in lieu of conventional plot resolutions. In Vietnam, the lyrical short story emerged clearly in the 1930s and 1940s. Thạch Lam is often cited as a representative figure of this mode: he brought Vietnamese prose closer to a poetic ideal, laying the groundwork for an expressive, interiorized style of storytelling centered on emotion, atmosphere, and memory. According to Vietnamese criticism, Thach

Lam's short fiction is defined by "plotlessness": "the stories have no plot... they primarily aim to render a mood or a mental state" (Le Duc Tu, 2001, p. 20). As Le Duc Tu's survey shows, critics consistently underscore Lam's inward orientation and impressionistic poetics: Ha Minh Duc argues that Lam "does not reproduce reality so much as sense it through impressions, emotions, and memory"; Nguyen Tuan notes his focus on "moods, feelings, sensations"; and Nguyen Hoanh Khung affirms his "introverted" tendency (Le Duc Tu, 2001, p. 22). These convergent views support our claim that Lam's lyrical short stories shift narrative emphasis from external action to interiority and sensuous atmosphere).

Notably, lyrical short stories typically do not emphasize a chain of external conflicts. Instead, they center on emotional introspection, using what we might call a lyrical "I" or a subjective narrative voice. The narrators (and often the focal characters) filter reality through subjective perception, emphasizing sensory details, recollections, and internal responses – turning the act of narration itself into a poetic experience. Consequently, imagery and scenes in this genre are often constructed through suggestive, impressionistic techniques, a loosely associative structure, rhythmic

cadences, and sometimes a contemplative or philosophical undertone regarding human existence. This theoretical understanding of the lyrical short story provides a lens for examining the texts at hand in this study. As Gumbrecht (2012) argues, in his theorization of literary *Stimmung*, mood and atmosphere function as central aesthetic effects that literature communicates beyond direct representation, thereby illuminating the lyrical qualities of these narratives. Similarly, Ikeda (2014) has shown that memory and personal recollection serve as essential lyrical devices in short fiction, reinforcing the primacy of mood and interiority in this genre.

Comparative approach and poetic models

Modern comparative literature as a discipline has evolved beyond tracing one-way influences to exploring dialogues, parallels, and structural affinities between literatures. Foundational studies in the 19th century – such as Jean-François-Michel Noël's *Cours de littérature comparée* (1816) and Alexander Veselovsky's historical poetics – established principles for comparing literatures across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Building on these global perspectives, Vietnamese scholarship has also emphasized the value of comparative poetics. According to Nguyễn Văn Dân (2003, p. 41), comparative literature "not

only investigates influence, but also compares similarities and differences in poetics, artistic worldviews, and value systems." Similarly, Đào Ngọc Chương (2010, p. 22) suggests that comparatists can identify shared patterns arising from analogous cultural sensibilities or literary evolutions, even between societies that developed independently.

In this study, we adopt a cross-cultural poetics approach to discuss Thạch Lam, Chekhov, and Paustovsky. The purpose is not to imply direct interaction, but to examine how each writer, in his own milieu, developed a kindred form of storytelling. Our methodology is text-centered and analytical: we conduct close readings of four selected stories to identify hallmarks of lyrical narrative (e.g., internal monologue, descriptive symbolism, open or understated endings) and we contextualize these features within each culture's literary tradition. Rather than asserting influence, we view each work as part of a broader poetic model of short fiction that emerged from parallel artistic logics. This enables us to articulate both convergences (shared techniques or themes pointing to universal aspects of lyrical storytelling) and divergences (differences reflecting unique cultural and historical contexts). In sum, our comparative framework treats

the lyrical short story as a point of convergence between Vietnamese and Russian poetics, demonstrating how a similar literary form can blossom in different soils. Such an outlook resonates with contemporary world-literature approaches: Damrosch (2009) argues for reading literature transnationally, and Gunn (2015) advocates expanding comparative frameworks beyond conventional boundaries.

Comparative analysis

Character modeling: Ordinary individuals and the subtle inner world

Within the framework of lyrical short story poetics, all four texts under examination (Thạch Lam's "*Nắng trong vườn*" and "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*"; Chekhov's "A Joke"; Paustovsky's "Morning Rain") operate according to a core organizing principle: they shift narrative focus from external action to inner life and construct meaning through atmosphere (*Stimmung*), micro sensory signals, and silence. This configuration aligns with the characterization of the "poetic/mood-oriented short story" – a type of story that privileges impression, restraint, and suggestion (Baldeshwiler, 1969; Head, 2016; Einhaus, 2016), while also resonating with Vietnamese criticism on "mood situations" and inner plots that are "almost impossible to retell" (Văn Giá,

2014; Bùi, 2000). At the level of aesthetic effect, *stimmung* demonstrates that atmosphere is textualized as an affective experience rather than merely a descriptive backdrop (Gumbrecht, 2012). From this foundation, we can identify in turn how each author constructs the figure of the "ordinary person with a rich inner life," and distill a consistent comparative model.

For Thạch Lam, "*Nắng trong vườn*" exemplifies a micro-aesthetic approach: the emotional coming-of-age of the character Hậu is "written" through glances, blushing cheeks, and a progression from bashfulness to boldness – rather than through dramatic events. Lines such as "...whenever I looked up I saw her staring at me... that shy demeanor brought a rosy flush to her cheeks" (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.10) and "Hậu was now utterly different... she had become a coquettish, dreamy young woman..." (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.12) illustrate that the inner transformation takes precedence over incident. A language of silence assumes the narrative's emotional weight: "She looked at me silently, her lips slightly parted... her velvet eyes moist and sparkling" (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.15); "...even the silence of the space enveloping us seemed to be listening in" (p. 12). By the

conclusion, memory becomes "the dwelling place of true action": "Since returning to Hanoi, I have not written her a single letter..." (Thạch Lam, 2023, p. 21); "Is she happy?... who knows if that love still left in her heart an afterglow as radiant as sunshine in the garden" (Thạch Lam, 2023, p. 23). In other words, action is transmuted into emotional resonance, consistent with the inward-oriented character model of the lyrical short story.

In "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*", Thạch Lam still maintains the inner life–atmosphere axis, but unfolds it along two interwoven strands: familial affection and a subtle romantic undercurrent. The character of Nga is constructed through olfactory and tactile impressions and everyday rituals: "Nga... only picked at her food... constantly put down her chopsticks to serve Thanh more rice... [she] glanced back at Thanh... with such tenderness" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p.167). The romantic layer is encoded through scent and touch: "Nga's hair carried a faint fragrance as if she had tucked ylang-ylang blossoms in it... 'Those days when I came here to pick flowers, I missed you so much'" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p.168); and "Without hesitation, Thanh took Nga's hand; she stood quietly... 'I should be going now,' she whispered" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p.169). As in "*Nắng trong vườn*", the structure of

meaning does not rely on events but emerges from atmosphere, rhythm, and subtle sensory details – true to the spirit of the "mood situation" (Văn Giá, 2014) and the "aesthetic atmosphere" (Gumbrecht, 2012).

In contrast to epic "heroes," the narrator and Nadia in "A Joke" are two entirely ordinary young people; what matters is not their biographies but an inner life activated by a fragile utterance of love. At the "critical moment" of each sledge run down the slope, the narrator whispers "Nadia, I love you!", then immediately attributes it to "the wind," creating a poignant dissonance between the declaration and its retraction. Notably, this whispered phrase is repeated exactly five times; the text affirms: "each time we hurtled down from the hilltop, I would whisper those words again: 'Nadia, I love you!'" (Chekhov, 2012, p.25). This very repetition models the increasingly intricate psychological process of an ordinary young girl: from fear and doubt to emotional dependency ("she grew as accustomed to hearing those words as to drinking wine or taking morphine... only wanting to be intoxicated" (Chekhov, 2012, p.25)), then testing it herself by sledding alone –"her face pale... she walked as if to her execution" (Chekhov, 2012, p.26) – yet at the foot of the hill still "did not know whether she had heard

those words or not". These minute shifts unfold through micro-signals (Nadia "stares fixedly at [my] lips" to locate the source of the words), through silences (muffled behind a handkerchief, swallowed by the wind), and finally settle into memory with the coming of spring – "Nadia gave a soft cry... a radiant smile" (p. 26) – while the narrator closes the story with belated regret: "As for me, now that I am older, I cannot understand why I uttered those words, how I could have jested so..." (Chekhov, 2012, p. 26). Thus, Chekhov's character model is established not through outward action but through an "emotional plane": an ordinary young woman is portrayed with finely resolved interiority (anticipation, doubt, dependence, disillusionment), and the narrator, likewise, emerges as an ordinary young man defined by emotional immaturity and his belated guilt. As modern short story criticism observes, Chekhov did not dismantle the form but refined it: he orchestrated a repeated pattern of speed-concealment-silence as a structural device, making implicit meaning (meaning left unsaid) the guiding principle of storytelling (Head, 2016; Einhaus, 2016), and mobilized atmosphere as a key mode of reader engagement (Gumbrecht, 2012). In this way, character is established not by "outward behavior" but by the "emotional

plane" (inner life) that manifests in the interpretive gaps of the text.

Both Thạch Lam's "*Nắng trong vườn*" and Chekhov's "A Joke" share a reunion-ending motif: the young man meets again the girl from years past, now that she is married and settled. That moment does not lead to a plot reunion but instead triggers emotional retrospection – a wave of wistfulness, longing, and self-questioning – thereby shifting the focus from the plane of action to the plane of affect. This retrospective structure models characters as ordinary individuals defined by subtle inner transformations, in line with the lyrical short story poetics that place memory and atmosphere at the center of meaning-making.

Meanwhile, Paustovsky in "Morning Rain" constructs character through sensory atmosphere and restrained dialogue, emphasizing silent communion over outward incident. The story opens with a moist, fragrant setting: "A light drizzle was falling; droplets of water clung to the honeysuckle fence, and the air was heavy with the fragrance of damp leaves" (Paustovsky, 2004, p. 93). Kuzmin's first impression of Onga is rendered thus: "A youthful figure with shining, deep, and slightly misty eyes... left him astonished" (Paustovsky, 1985, p.94). The emotional climax resides in a small gesture and a

silence: "In the narrow cloakroom, Kuzmin helped her on with her raincoat... The two of them... walked side by side in silence along the dark street" (Paustovsky, 1985, p.100). In Paustovsky's hands, weather and setting function not as background, but internal sensorium – peeling back layers of defense to open up compassion and connection, a hallmark of Russian lyrical realism (Gumbrecht, 2012).

From the four cases above, one can outline a micro-aesthetics of character modeling: characters are shaped not by "outward behavior" but by "inner life"; meaning is not driven forward by a chain of events but lingers in atmosphere, rhythm, silence, and memory. In Thạch Lam, first love blossoms and is then preserved in memory ("*Nắng trong vườn*"), while familial affection and romance blend into the fragrant ambience of the home garden ("*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*"). In Chekhov, a joke turns into an inner tragedy through the disjunction between words, wind, and silence ("A Joke"; see also A. I. Bordanovich's remarks on the story's melancholy aftertaste). In Paustovsky, a single rainy night is enough to open up emotional salvation through everyday beauty ("Morning Rain"). Despite differences in cultural atmosphere and

worldview – transitional Vietnamese sensibilities (rural/urban, traditional/modern) in Thạch Lam; Chekhov's understated existential irony; Paustovsky's humanistic romanticism – the three authors converge on emotional authenticity as the foundation of character construction. This configuration, as will be explored in the following section, allows the theme of love to operate as a 'lens' that is both universal (in emotional essence) and particular (in cultural inflection), thereby illuminating the aesthetic identity of each tradition.

The theme of love: Polyphonic expressions of a universal emotion

Love is a timeless theme in the history of world literature. In lyrical short fiction, love is not only the emotional nucleus but also a crucial vehicle for revealing psychological depth and worldview. In "*Nắng trong vườn*", "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*" (Thạch Lam), "A Joke" (Chekhov), and "Morning Rain" (Paustovsky), love is portrayed in diverse forms, spanning a spectrum of nuances from pure, bashful innocence to ironic wistfulness and redemptive solace. These variations reflect not only different facets of a universal emotion but also reveal the distinct cultural sensitivities of each author. This perspective is consistent with

the comparative aim of the study, which is to examine how lyrical poetics reconcile a universally shared human experience with expressions tied to each cultural context.

In Thạch Lam's "*Nắng trong vườn*", love emerges as a gentle, wistful, and quiet emotion, deeply bound to the rural summer setting. This is the story of first love between a young city student and a country girl named Hậu. Their feelings are evoked through summer memories, shy encounters, and cautious exchanges. Thạch Lam does not employ direct declarations of love; instead, he lets love infuse into subtle details: a lingering gaze, the slight flutter of a dress, a passing hint of sadness. First love appears with an intimate, pure, and melancholy rhythm. Thạch Lam has no need for grand pronouncements; he writes love through bodily closeness and sensation: "As soon as we stepped off the boat, Hậu threw her arms around my shoulders... We blended our breaths together..." (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.17) – a tactile close-up capturing the flavor of youth, set against the nocturnal riverside scene. The tone then shifts to the sorrow of parting: "Summer was over... a touch of bitterness had crept into our kisses" (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.18), etching the lingering resonance of an unfulfilled romance. Even

so, the beauty of that love lies in the purity of youthful emotion and the sweet aftertaste that lingers in memory.

In "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*", love is seasoned with everyday fragrances, touches, and rituals, interwoven between familial warmth and a subtle romantic undercurrent. A single utterance is enough to "name" the longing: "Those days I came here to pick flowers, I missed you so much" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p.168), immediately followed by a gesture of family intimacy ("The old woman looked at her fondly: 'The blossoms are still so young; why pick them so soon, my dear?' Nga replied: 'My brother picked them for me,' and she smiled at Thanh). These details establish a wordless language of love, where the home garden's atmosphere – sunlight, the scent of ylang-ylang blossoms –substitutes for direct avowals.

Chekhov, by contrast, writes love with existential irony, employing a "repeat-conceal-silence" mechanism. Notably, the five-fold refrain of the whispered phrase at each critical moment of speeding downhill – followed by its denial into the "wind" – propels Nadia into an orbit of yearning, doubt, dependence, and disappointment ("I saw her off... she tried to walk slowly... I felt her soul was in torment" (Chekhov, 2012, p.25)). By the

story's end, with nothing more than the spring breeze and a whisper, Chekhov creates a "silent tragedy": that episode becomes "the happiest, most moving, most beautiful memory of her life" (Chekhov, 2012, p. 26), while the narrator retreats into belated regret. Here, love is no longer idealized; it becomes a metaphor for the fragility and absurdity of modern relationships.

Paustovsky's "Morning Rain" constructs a redemptive romance through the atmosphere of a rainy night and subtle dialogue. Here, love arises as a simple ritual between two lonely people: "Wait... Let us sit together for a moment before you leave. As in the old days" (Paustovsky, 1985, p. 99). Then they quietly don their coats, step out into the dark street together, and listen to the train whistle announcing their parting. Their closeness is depicted through small actions and silence – an aesthetic that emphasizes emotional salvation through everyday beauty, without the need for verbal confession.

From this comparison, we can discern three dominant "voices" of love: innocent and nostalgic (Thạch Lam), ironic and poignant (Chekhov), and fleeting yet redemptive (Paustovsky). These choices are not merely artistic techniques but also reflect each author's understanding

of the human condition within a cultural milieu. At the same time, in all four stories, love is rendered atmospheric (through gaze, scent, touch, rain, wind) and placed on the emotional plane, which affirms the poetics of the lyrical short story: meaning is allowed to settle in space, tempo, and memory, rather than being propelled by a chain of events.

Narrative tone: Expressive nuance and artistic philosophy

Narrative tone is defined as "the attitude, emotion, ideological stance, and moral viewpoint of the writer toward the phenomena being described, expressed through language – manifested in the mode of address, word choice, emotional shading, degree of distance or intimacy, reverence or colloquialness, praise or irony..." (Hàn et al., 2004, p. 134). In the aesthetics of the lyrical short story, "tone" is not just a manner of telling but the emotional-intellectual stance of the writer toward the world depicted, conveyed through choices of language, rhythm, degree of distance or closeness to characters, and the orchestration of silence. In the four texts examined, narrative tone simultaneously constructs the aesthetic atmosphere (*Stimmung*) and carries an artistic conception of humanity: privileging the "emotional plane" and the micro-processes of mood over the event-driven axis.

For Thạch Lam, the tone in "*Nắng trong vườn*" leans toward nostalgia and stillness, established right from the opening lines as a gently rapturous atmosphere: "Late in the summer... brilliant sunlight... The sky was clear and the breeze was cool..." (Thạch Lam, 2023, p. 4). The first-person "I" narration dissolves into the space and memory, quietly guiding the mood rather than recounting action. The pacing is slow, rich in visual and auditory detail ("we listened to the silence of the noonday..." (Thạch Lam, 2023, p. 14)), turning stillness into emotional drama; passages where "a distant singing could be heard... then when she fell silent, even the stillness... seemed to be listening" reinforce a restrained tone, allowing silence to become a form of emotional speech. In "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*", that tone is modulated to one of gentle warmth and sincerity: the garden scene "was so quiet... a faint scent of fresh leaves" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p. 163) establishes a soothing, courteous tone, rendering family life and romantic stirrings as naturally as breathing. Each minute gesture and everyday interaction – "the meal was so cheerful... she only ate daintily, taking small portions... her smile blossomed" (Thạch Lam, collected works, 2004, p. 167) – is narrated in a warm, restrained voice, showing that

intimacy is "spoken" through the rituals of daily life rather than direct discourse. The quiet parting at night – "the faint scent of ylang-ylang... Thanh took Nga's hand... she stood silently" – marks the tonal climax: feelings are sealed within the atmosphere, not allowed to erupt into overt drama.

By contrast, Chekhov in "A Joke" employs a tone that blends lyricism with a light irony, establishing its foundation through a winter palette at once cold and bright: "one clear winter afternoon... it was bitter cold... the long slope of the hill glittered in the sunlight like a mirror" (Chekhov, 2012, p. 24). This sets up an aesthetic atmosphere (*Stimmung*) that guides the reader's receptivity even before the narrative voice fully emerges. At the critical peak of each descent, the whispered words "Nadia, I love you!" ring out (only to be disowned into the wind), underscored by a deliberate hush in volume – a technique that deepens the ironic layer of the tone. The narrative voice repeatedly reprises the structure of slide–whisper–denial, leaving the young woman suspended between hearing and not hearing, understanding and not understanding: "I saw her staring fixedly at my face, watching my lips. But I raised my handkerchief to cover my mouth and gave a slight cough, and when the sled sped down halfway... The mystery

remained a mystery!" (Chekhov, 2012, p.25). The narration is laconic yet suggestive, allocating interpretive work to the reader. In the final movement, the tone shifts into belated self-interrogation: the scene of "a spring breeze... tears quietly rolling down her cheeks... 'Nadia, I love you!'" (Chekhov, 2012, p.26) is counterpointed by the narrator's admission that "now... I cannot understand why I said those words," crystallizing a tone at once lyrical and morally self-reflective.

Paustovsky in "Morning Rain" adopts a tone that is romantic and tranquil, creating a sensory space as a resonance chamber for the soul: "In the garden there was the smell of wet sand, the late-night chill. It was an old garden, black with tall bodhi trees. They had shed all their blossoms and were somewhat frail." (Paustovsky, 1985, p.100). The narration is slow and rich in description, allowing the setting "speak for" the characters. Reflective dialogue about the ephemerality of beauty – "all that is good... only glitters for a moment, yet we wait for it all our lives" (Paustovsky, 1985, p.98) – establishes a philosophical-lyrical tone that relies on metaphor and suggestion rather than explicit authorial commentary. The tonal climax arrives in the low-key farewell: "Ongi extended her hand to Kuzmin. He kissed her hand and

again caught that faint whiff of perfume... amid the whispering rain. The two of them... walked in silence side by side through the dark streets... but the train down by the river had already let out a long, mournful roar... Onga said something, but so softly that he didn't hear it. He suspected that she had uttered only one word, 'In vain...'" (Paustovsky, 1985, p. 102). The intensity of feeling is achieved not through eventful conflict but through pacing and soundscape.

In summary, all four texts adopt a lyrical narrative tone, though in different shades. Thạch Lam favors a still and nostalgic tone (the home atmosphere, life's small rituals); Chekhov combines lyricism with irony and ethical self-questioning (a rhythm of repetition-concealment-silence); Paustovsky prefers a calm, romantic voice (space and time seemingly "slow down" to let emotion surface). Despite these differences, all three authors share a common aesthetic principle: using tone to shift the focus from "outward behavior" to "inner life," making atmosphere and silence into means of constructing meaning. In doing so, they establish an artistic philosophy that exalts the subtlety of emotion and the spiritual dignity of the "ordinary person."

Cultural differences: From social context to narrative aesthetics

Alongside the convergences in lyrical short story poetics, the four texts also reveal fundamental differences in cultural, social, and aesthetic orientations between the Vietnamese and Russian traditions. These disparities are not merely a historical background, but are structured into the artistic worldview and the portrayal of the human condition.

First, at the level of socio-cultural context. Thạch Lam's prose places characters amid the gaps between countryside and city, tradition and modernity, in a Vietnam at the crossroads. At the very beginning of "*Nắng trong vườn*", the narrator "I" leaves bustling Hanoi and its "dry and useless school lessons" to return to a quiet hill country – a gesture of withdrawal from urban life to the rural that is rich in social and cultural significance. By the end of summer, however, urban impulses pull him back: "the summer holiday... was nearly over... I longed to quickly get to Hanoi" (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.18), while Hậu is submerged in the sorrow of parting – a psychological "fracture" born of the differences in lifestyle and sensibility between the two worlds. In "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*", the moral foundation of family and the

home-garden setting are clarified through the ritual of the communal meal ("eating all together"), the respectful, deferential speech, and the way Nga "sat modestly... constantly serving Thanh rice" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p.167) - micro-sociological details that reveal a kinship-based way of life in a still-cohesive community.

By contrast, the two Russian stories evoke a modern horizon with their own spiritual upheavals. "A Joke" opens with a winter tableau - "...it was bitter cold... [the] hillside ... like a mirror" (Chekhov, 2012, p.24) - setting the stage for an emotional experiment imbued with existential irony. Amid the changing seasons, the narrator drops a line about departing: "I... am preparing to go to Petersburg, for a very long time, perhaps forever" (Chekhov, 2012, p.26), leaving Nadia in a moral-emotional void - a void the narrator later can only reflect upon with "I cannot understand why I said those words" (Chekhov, 2012, p. 26) - marking a trace of distance and alienation in the modern world. Paustovsky's "*Morning Rain*", though set in the post-revolutionary era, harkens back to a Russian humanist-romantic vein: a brief parting is conducted "as in the old days" (Paustovsky, 1985, p.99) - a vestige of ceremonial consciousness and placed within the rainy-night atmosphere

and the sound of a train whistle, everyday signals that anchor human emotion amid life's upheavals.

Second, at the level of narrative aesthetics. Thạch Lam deliberately minimizes plot to prioritize atmosphere and inner life. In "*Nắng trong vườn*", the slow, sensory prose builds an aesthetic of stillness: "we listened to the silence of the noon" (Thạch Lam, 2023, p.14), where space becomes a sensory organ, replacing event conflict. In "*Dưới bóng hoàng lan*", the gentle, soothing tone of the garden scene - "so quiet... the faint scent of fresh leaves" (Thạch Lam, 2004, p.163) - together with the decorous interactions between grandmother, grandchild, and neighbor, reveals an aesthetic ethos: feelings are expressed through the atmosphere of everyday life, not through direct discourse.

Chekhov does not shatter the short story form but refines it through restraint and suggestion: the downhill rush, the whispered "Nadia, I love you!" and its attribution to the "wind" repeat like a structural refrain, suspending Nadia between hearing and not hearing, understanding and not understanding - an aesthetic of silence rather than of outward drama. Paustovsky constructs a lyrical realism: he opens the story with drizzle, a nighttime quay, a dim lantern;

then draws the narrative forward through subdued dialogue and small actions (helping her with a raincoat, walking side by side in silence (Paustovsky, 1985, p.100), so that narrative tempo and soundscape replace any climactic event.

The cultural differences among Thạch Lam, Chekhov, and Paustovsky do not undermine their shared lyrical orientation, but rather illuminate the distinctive aesthetic identity of each tradition. In Vietnamese prose of the transitional era, memory, family ethos, and the home garden are key aesthetic-ethical coordinates (Thạch Lam). In Chekhov, restrained irony and moral silence explore the condition of modern alienation. In Paustovsky, humanistic romanticism finds emotional salvation in an ordinary moment. From social context to narrative aesthetics, all four stories center the individual, but each culture "crafts" inner life through a unique atmosphere - a persuasive demonstration of comparative literature's capacity to reveal the universal constants of human experience while also highlighting region-specific differences.

Conclusion

This study has examined the intersections of lyrical poetics in short stories by Thạch Lam, Chekhov, and Paustovsky, highlighting how each privileges

interiority, mood, and atmosphere over external plot development. Despite their distinct contexts - colonial Vietnam, late nineteenth-century Russia, and the Soviet mid-twentieth century - their works converge on a lyrical mode that values suggestion, silence, and resonance. Close readings of *Sunlight in the Garden*, *Under the Hoàng Lan Tree*, "A Joke," and *Morning Rain* demonstrate how ordinary moments acquire symbolic depth and fleeting emotions become enduring experiences.

Cultural divergences, however, shape this shared form. Thạch Lam anchors lyricism in Vietnamese familial bonds and nostalgia; Chekhov's ironic understatement reflects Russian uncertainty at modernity's threshold; Paustovsky's romantic realism expresses faith in beauty and human connection. These contrasts demonstrate how common devices - ellipsis, imagery, and open endings - assume distinct inflections across traditions.

This comparative lens also resonates with African literatures, where short stories often blur narrative and lyric modes. Works such as Ousmane Sembène's *Tribal Scars and Other Stories* (Senegal), Owuor Hellen's "Memories" (Kenya), Andrew C. Dakalira's "A Flicker of Memory," and Lesley Nneka Arimah's *What It Means*

When a Man Falls from the Sky (Nigeria) exemplify how memory, landscape, and everyday speech embody both personal and collective emotion. By situating the Vietnamese–Russian dialogue within a broader global spectrum and placing it in conversation with African traditions, the study highlights the lyrical short story not

merely as a national artifact but as a transnational aesthetic resource. Future comparative work that brings Asian, African, and European traditions into dialogue can further illuminate how lyricism continues to shape short fiction worldwide.

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