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**Fleeting Miracles: The Promise and Paradox
of Eucatastrophe in Chekhov's *The Black Monk***

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Abstract. The examined Anton Chekhov's novella *The Black Monk* (1894), focusing on its exploration of eucatastrophe – a term coined by J.R.R. Tolkien to describe sudden turns from despair to joy. The story follows Andrey Kovrin, whose ecstatic visions lead to madness by illustrating the fragile nature of human existence tied to ambition, delusion, and longing for greatness. This study highlights how Chekhov subverts traditional fantasy structures. Through close reading, the analysis examines key passages to explore how eucatastrophe appears in the story with focus on Kovrin's psychological state and transformative experiences. The findings show that, unlike typical fantasy, where eucatastrophe brings resolution, Chekhov twists this by showing that moment of inspiration and quest for enlightenment can end in doom and despair. Future research could explore the blend of psychological realism and supernatural mysticism in Chekhov's works, along with comparisons to other Russian authors, to deepen our understanding of madness and the search for meaning. The contemporary relevance of *The Black Monk* in discussions of mental health and artistic ambition could also be explored.

Keywords: story, fantasy, mysticism, realism, eucatastrophe

Conflict of interests. The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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Мимолетные чудеса: обещание и парадокс эвкатастрофы в «Черном монахе» А.П. Чехова

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Аннотация. Рассматривается повесть А.П. Чехова «Черный монах» (1894), в которой основное внимание уделяется исследованию эвкатастрофы – термина, введенного Дж.Р.Р. Толкином для описания внезапных переходов от отчаяния к радости. История рассказывает об Андрее Коврине, чьи экстатические видения приводят к безумию, иллюстрируя хрупкую природу человеческого существования, связанного с амбициями, иллюзиями и стремлением к величию. Исследование показывает, как Чехов разрушает традиционные структуры фэнтези. При внимательном чтении анализируются ключевые отрывки, помогающие понять, как эвкатастрофа представлена в рассказе, особое внимание уделяется психологическому состоянию Коврина и его трансформационным переживаниям. В результате можно сказать, что в отличие от типичного фэнтези, где эвкатастрофа приносит развязку, Чехов искажает ситуацию, показывает, что момент вдохновения и поиска просветления может закончиться гибелью и отчаянием. В будущих исследованиях можно было бы изучить сочетание психологического реализма и сверхъестественного мистицизма в произведениях Чехова, а также сравнить их с творениями других русских авторов, чтобы углубить понимание безумия и поиска смысла жизни. Неплохо было бы изучить современную значимость «Черного монаха» в дискуссиях о психическом здоровье и художественных амбициях.

Ключевые слова: повесть, фэнтези, мистицизм, реализм, эвкатастрофа

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Introduction

What happens when a miracle changes into a curse? Anton Chekhov's *The Black Monk* (1894) blurs the line between realism and fantasy by exploring the fragility of human perception. According to Claire Whitehead, Chekhov uses ambiguity and shifting narrative techniques to create interpretative hesitation, leaving readers uncertain whether the monk is a hallucination or a supernatural presence (Whitehead, 2007, pp. 601–628). This tension mirrors the protagonist's indecisive grip on reality and it illustrates how internal conflict can manifest itself as external visions. While, Chekhov is celebrated for his realism, *The Black Monk* introduces mystical elements that challenge this classification. K. McSweeney talks about Chekhov's ability to capture human emotions with a photographic eye

(McSweeney, 2007, p. 1). However, in this story, delusions distort realism and make it harder to see the truth clearly. Similarly, Hajjari, Aliakbari Harehdasht, and Mirzaie argue that illusion and reality intertwine in Anton Chekhov, in *The Kiss* and Thomas Wolfe in *The Far and the Near* (Neberman, 2016, pp. 27–28), where characters' idealized perceptions lead to disillusionment (Hajjari, Aliakbari Harehdasht, and Mirzaie, 2017, pp. 8–16). In *The Black Monk*, the protagonist's vision of the monk offers inspiration primarily but eventually it deepens his alienation and echoes this theme of shattered illusions. The story also engages with the concept of eucatastrophe, coined by J.R.R. Tolkien to describe a sudden turn from despair to joy. The protagonist, Andrey Kovrin, has moments of intense joy where he believes he is great. But these feelings don't last long and he falls into madness and despair in the long run. Skyler Neberman argues that sorrow and struggle are intrinsic to human existence (Neberman, 2016, pp. 27–28) and Chekhov's story reinforces how the hope for transcendence falls apart, leaving only isolation and misery.

This paper explores how *The Black Monk* uses and weakens eucatastrophe. It blends fantasy and realism to examine ambition, delusion and existential longing. By applying Tolkien's concept to Chekhov's story, this study reveals the paradox of brief miracles. It also analyzes Chekhov's use of fantasy, delusion and transcendence. It shows how fleeting joy appears in a story like *The Black Monk* that shifts between hope and hopelessness.

Background and Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the presence and subversion of eucatastrophe in Anton Chekhov's *The Black Monk* (1894). It analyzes how the story engages with and challenges traditional fantasy structures. J.R.R. Tolkien defines eucatastrophe as "the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art" (Tolkien, 1984, pp. 109–161). While this idea is important in classical fantasy, *The Black Monk* challenges it by giving only a short-lived sense of transcendence that ends in despair. Toner, in *Catastrophe and Eucatastrophe: Russell and Tolkien on the True Form of Fiction* (2008), contrasts Bertrand Russell's view of tragedy as inevitable downfall with Tolkien's belief in redemption (Toner, 2008, pp. 77–87). Chekhov's story aligns more with Russell's view because the protagonist realizes his delusion but feels more isolated instead of finding relief. This bleak vision reflects Chekhov's own struggles. As Donald Rayfield notes in *Anton Chekhov: A Life* (2013), the author's personal battles with illness and disillusionment shaped the psychological depth of his characters (Rayfield, 2013, p. 1). In *The Black Monk*, this tension between fleeting miracles and existential despair has its deep impact on the protagonist's life. Chekhov's choice of ending makes sense as tragic endings feel more natural

than forced happy ones. Goldman and Kantor, in *The Limits of Poetic License: When Shouldn't an Ending Be Happy?*, find that tragic endings often feel more authentic, as they preserve the author's intent over imposed justice (Goldman, Kantor, 1993, pp. 135–150). Similarly, *The Black Monk* rejects the conventional happy ending by means of offering an illusion of fulfillment. Here, Chekhov highlights the depth and inevitability of human suffering and shows how tragedy leaves a strong emotional and philosophical impact.

Aim of the Paper

This paper examines the ways in which Chekhov's *The Black Monk* challenges traditional literary conventions, especially the concept of poetic justice. Zirker observes that poetic justice, the idea that good is rewarded and evil punished, remains a debated concept in literature, as it often limits the freedom of storytelling (Zirker, 2016, p. 1). Rushdie rejects the idea that literature must always reward virtue. According to him, stories become more engaging and complex when they lack clear moral conclusions, what he calls amorality (Rushdie, 1992). This perspective aligns with Zirker's point that ethical expectations in literature should not limit narrative freedom. *The Black Monk* reflects this view, when Andrey Kovrin's apparent success turns to despair without moral resolution. Rayfield explains Chekhov's rejection of didactic storytelling which is influenced by his own struggles with illness and disillusionment (Rayfield, 2013, p. 1). In *The Black Monk*, suffering is presented as inevitable though it rejects moral absolutes. Traditional stories often bring back order through *deus ex machina* or divine intervention, while eucatastrophe provides a resolution that is more emotionally impactful. However, Chekhov's story challenges this by showing how moments of uplift, insight and revelation lead to tragedy and despair, rather than a resolution. As Heath notes, ancient philosophical poetics analyze the dependence on improbable resolutions like *deus ex machine*. He critiques that it often oversimplifies the complexity of human experience (Heath, 2013). This paper aims to examine how Chekhov blends psychological realism with supernatural mysticism through Kovrin's visions of the Black Monk. It also explores how *deus ex machina* works and whether transcendence leads to salvation or ruin.

Materials and Methods

Anton Chekhov's *The Black Monk* (1894) is a psychological novella that blends realist fiction with elements of the supernatural. This makes it a convincing text for examining the presence and paradox of eucatastrophe. The story is about Andrey Kovrin, a scholar who visits a peaceful country estate and starts seeing visions of a strange Black Monk. This vision gives him moments of great joy and insight, similar to the happy twists in traditional fantasy. It is unknown whether this visualization is born from Kovrin's genius or madness. However, these brief moments of wonder eventually turn into mental decline and deep despair instead of bringing enlightenment. Fulfill the purpose of this study, *The Black Monk* is

analyzed as a text as it explores and challenges the idea of eucatastrophe. This paper examines key passages that show Kovrin's ecstatic visions, intellectual ambition, and downfall. It also explores how Chekhov's narrative structure challenges the traditional fantasy resolution.

This paper uses close reading to examine eucatastrophe and its role in traditional fantasy stories, focusing on Chekhov's *The Black Monk*. In classical fantasy, *eucatastrophe* is a sudden and joyful event that leads to a happy ending. Tolkien describes as "a sudden and miraculous grace" that brings about a "joyous turn" in the story (Tolkien, 1984, pp. 109–161). However, Chekhov obscures this by showing brief moments of wonder that eventually turn into a big tragedy. This study focuses on Andrey Kovrin, the protagonist, whose visions of the Black Monk bring both inspiration and disaster. His inner struggles, ambitions, and mental decline are central to the understanding of how eucatastrophe works or fails in the story. The paper examines key moments in the story, such as Kovrin's ecstatic visions, his heightened sense of purpose, and the eventual disintegration of his reality through textual analysis. These instances are analyzed in relation to Tolkien's concept of eucatastrophe to determine if Kovrin's "miracles" signify genuine transcendence or a tragic illusion. The study uses direct extracts from the text to show how eucatastrophe appears and unfolds in the story and focuses on the paradox of these moments. The paper's methodology centers on a contextual understanding of eucatastrophe by means of using textual analysis to investigate its complexities in Chekhov's work.

Analysis and Discussion

Chekhov's *The Black Monk* presents a distinct exploration of eucatastrophe within a psychological and existential context. The protagonist, Andrey Kovrin, a scholar of intellectual ambition, begins to experience visions of a mystical Black Monk during his stay in the countryside. Kovrin's experiences are characterized by a contradictory fusion of self-destruction and enlightenment. This stands in contrast to many classic fantasy stories where miraculous events result in salvation or fulfillment. Though his moments of euphoria initially give him a feeling of transcendence and purpose, they turn into psychological instability and a tragic demise at the end. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2016) and *Othello* (Shakespeare, 1997) explore themes of destiny and deception, much like Kovrin's belief in the Black Monk's prophecy. Orwell's *1984* (Orwell, 1949) gives Winston a brief hope through his love for Julia, but it is soon destroyed, just as Kovrin's dream ends in tragedy. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 1972) shows a strange transformation that leads to isolation instead of salvation. Similarly, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 2004) depicts Gatsby's dream of transcendence, which, like Kovrin's vision, ends in disappointment. However, the Black Monk's primary miraculous appearances reflect fantasy's ability to evoke awe and wonder. The monk is revealed only to be an illusion. This reveals the darker side of human desire for the extraordinary. This tension between fantasy's promise of hope and Kovrin's downfall allows Chekhov to critique traditional fantasy tropes. He shows

the limits of idealized fantastical experiences through a deeper and more realistic perspective.

1. The First Encounter: A Moment of Ecstatic Revelation.

The first significant eucatastrophic moment happens when Kovrin meets the Black Monk, being deeply moved by the serenity of nature. The monk speaks to him of his greatness and divine purpose. He provides Kovrin with a strong sense of belonging and fulfillment and reinforces his belief in his extraordinary destiny. The description of the Black Monk's arrival is particularly striking:

“From the horizon there rose up to the sky, like a whirlwind or a waterspout, a tall black column. Its outline was indistinct, but from the first instant it could be seen that it was not standing still, but moving with fearful rapidity, moving straight towards Kovrin, and the nearer it came the smaller and the more distinct it was. Kovrin moved aside into the rye to make way for it, and only just had time to do so. A monk, dressed in black, with a grey head and black eyebrows, his arms crossed over his breast, floated by him... His bare feet did not touch the earth. After he had floated twenty feet beyond him, he looked round at Kovrin, and nodded to him with a friendly but sly smile” (Chekhov, 2009).

This scene is similar to the traditional eucatastrophic shift in fantasy fiction, where a revelation is provided by an unanticipated supernatural intervention. However, Kovrin's encounter is unclear, unlike Tolkien's happy endings, which bring empowerment or salvation. Is this vision a sign of divine insight, or is it a sign of his psychological disentanglement? After the monk's appearance, Kovrin experiences an intense sense of joy, as if he has been chosen for a higher purpose or performance:

“In the park and in the garden people were moving about quietly, in the house they were playing – so he alone had seen the monk. He had an intense desire to tell Tanya and Yegor Semyonitch, but he reflected that they would certainly think his words the ravings of delirium, and that would frighten them; he had better say nothing” (Chekhov, 2009).

This passage emphasizes the paradox of Kovrin's experience as it is cheerful but isolating, amazing yet deeply disturbing. In *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality*, T.E. Apter suggests that the “truth” in fiction is not merely about probabilities but about uncovering new possibilities and plausibilities. Apter argues that fiction, whether fantastical or realistic, reveals deeper truths through the integration of character traits and events (Apter, 1982). This aligns with Chekhov's use of the supernatural in *The Black Monk*, where Kovrin's visions act as a tool for exploring his psychological state. Kovrin's experiences of transcendence along with the monk's outward manifestations disclose his fragile mental state. This brings out his anxieties and aspirations that he wouldn't usually disclose in mundane life.

In this context, Kovrin's apparent eucatastrophe, i.e. the sense of divine purpose and grandeur can be seen as a “hypothetical truth” that untie his psychological state. Kovrin's journey aligns with Apter's idea that the fantastic reveals deeper aspects of character. Here, the boundary between the fantastical and the real is indistinct. Although the Black Monk's illusions offer a sense of transcendence, Kovrin's downfall

comes from his growing disconnection from reality and the real persons around him. In this way, Chekhov's use of fantasy reflects Apter's assertion that even the most implausible premises can reveal profound truths about the human condition.

2. The Black Monk as a Fantasy Mentor and Harbinger of Doom.

In classical fantasy literature, the mentor figure often plays a pivotal role in guiding the protagonist toward a higher truth. In *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, Gandalf offers wisdom and helps Frodo to navigate his journey (Tolkien, 1999), while in *Harry Potter*, Dumbledore serves as a guiding force by providing Harry with insight and hope during crucial moments (Rowling, 2018). Despite their difficulties, these mentors aim to guide their pupils toward salvation and empowerment. However, Chekhov depicts the mentor figure in a very different way in *The Black Monk*. Instead of being a benevolent mentor, the Black Monk is a manipulative force who worsens Kovrin's mounting hallucinations and finally results in his demise. In Chekhov's story, the Black Monk praises Kovrin's intellectual superiority. He strengthens his belief that Kovrin is a part of a grand cosmic plan. The monk's words appear to be a eucatastrophic revelation that offers Kovrin a greater purpose and a higher calling:

“You are one of those few who are justly called the chosen of God. You do the service of eternal truth. Your thoughts, your designs, the marvelous studies you are engaged in, and all your life, bear the Divine, the heavenly stamp, seeing that they are consecrated to the rational and the beautiful – that is, to what is eternal” (Chekhov, 2009).

This moment reflects the traditional eucatastrophe in fantasy fiction, where a miraculous event offers clarity and purpose. However, unlike Tolkien's conception of eucatastrophe, which leads to true salvation, Kovrin's encounter with the Black Monk represents a seductive illusion. Instead of leading him to salvation, the monk's words blind Kovrin to his own mental deterioration. Chekhov presents the Black Monk not as a guide to wisdom but a phantom that fuels Kovrin's arrogance. The monk's excessive praise of Kovrin's intellect isolates him from others and drives him toward madness.

De Sherbinin examines how Chekhov often engages with religious and cultural symbols, particularly the Marian paradigm, within the context of Russian Orthodox culture in the 19th century. De Sherbinin argues that Chekhov frequently inverts these religious symbols and offers a more complex and disillusioned view of transcendent figures (eucatastrophic/eucatastrophe) (De Sherbinin, 1997). In *The Black Monk*, Chekhov inverts the traditional role of a divine figure like the mentor, by presenting the Black Monk as a deceptive force. A divine promise ultimately proves to be deceptive, transforming a divine revelation into sheer folly. This twist in *The Black Monk* shows that what appears to be a miracle may ultimately result not in salvation, but in insanity and hopelessness. Through the use of the Black Monk as a guiding figure, Chekhov challenges the idea of transcendence presented by traditional fantasy narratives. Instead of enriching Kovrin's potential, the monk's influence promotes his estrangement from reality. This intensifies his delusions and brings him closer to his tragic fate. It highlights the darker and more intricate facets of human desire for the extraordinary.

3. The Unraveling: When the Miracle Turns to Madness.

As *The Black Monk* moves along, Kovrin's obsession with his visions grows intense ever more. Transcendence gives way to loneliness and paranoia. Kovrin's relationships break down. Tanya, his wife, becomes concerned when she notices his shifting behaviour. She realizes that these eucatastrophic experiences are actually pushing him deeper into illusion rather than giving him direction and clarity. In one particular haunting scene, Tanya discovers Kovrin in the dead of night, speaking with the Black Monk:

“Tanya put her arm round her husband and held him tight, as though protecting him from the apparition, and put her hand over his eyes. ‘You are ill!’ she sobbed, trembling all over. ‘Forgive me, my precious, my dear one, but I have noticed for a long time that your mind is clouded in some way. ... You are mentally ill, Andryusha’” (Chekhov, 2009).

The story takes a significant shift at this point when Kovrin's eucatastrophic illusion breaks. What he first saw as a gift from God becomes something darker. It is now a sign of his deteriorating mental state. His supposed intellectual transcendence turns out to be an uncontrollable sickness instead of an added advantage. He loses his grip on reality, pushes away his wife and surrenders to his delusion eventually. However, the final tragedy of the story unfolds when Kovrin undergoes treatment to recover from his madness and emerges from it as a dull and lifeless version of himself. He mourns the loss of his visionary self, a shadow of his former splendor. In his final moments, Kovrin sees the Black Monk again with a vision, not one of spiritual triumph or divine revelation but of death:

“Kovrin already believed that he was one of God's chosen and a genius; he vividly recalled his conversations with the monk in the past and tried to speak, but the blood flowed from his throat on to his breast, and not knowing what he was doing, he passed his hands over his breast, and his cuffs were soaked with blood” (Chekhov, 2009).

Kovrin's final encounter with the Black Monk weakens the classic eucatastrophe. His vision reveals itself as a fatal fantasy rather than a fair means of salvation. Frye's ‘mythos of spring’ and Campbell's ‘hero's journey’ both describe transformative moments that lead to hope or resolution (Campbell, 2008; Frye, 2020). However, Kovrin's journey deviates from this pattern. Unlike Campbell's hero, who returns wiser (Campbell, 2008), Kovrin's journey ends in alienation and despair. Frye's theory of literature as a “total form” presents it as a cohesive system of recurring themes, archetypes and structures (Frye, 2020). For Frye, literature functions as a unified whole and offers insight into human life. Even if Chekhov subverts it, this idea can be applied to *The Black Monk*. Chekhov distorts the function of the Black Monk, an archetype that is usually viewed as a spiritual mentor. Even Chekhov challenges Frye's idea of literature as a system of renewal and reconciliation (Frye, 2020). Frye sees literature as a connected whole, but Chekhov shows that it can also depict tragedy and despair. *The Black Monk* both supports and questions Frye's “total form” and reveals how literature explores suffering instead of resolution (Chekhov, 2009).

4. The Paradox of Eucatastrophe in *The Black Monk*.

In *The Black Monk*, Chekhov offers an ironic and subversive interpretation of the eucatastrophic moment. Kovrin's meeting with the Black Monk firstly represent the classic joyous turn of events found in traditional fantasy literature. However, the consequences of these encounters bring no salvation except isolation, emptiness and eventual destruction. In Tolkien's or Rowling's works, eucatastrophe indicates a transformative moment of hope or triumph. Chekhov's story, however, offers a stark contrast by exposing the fragility of miracles and their tendency to be fleeting, deceptive and ultimately tragic. Chekhov challenges the idea that miracles always bring salvation as *The Black Monk* explores how transcendence can be fragile and even dangerous. The miraculous does not always lead to joy since it can also bring destruction. Chekhov blends revelation with illusion and makes his readers question if such moments of grace are true blessings or mere illusions to hide a tragic downfall. Johnston introduces dyscatastrophe to describe the darker counterpart of eucatastrophe where moments of joy lead to tragic outcomes (Johnston, 2012, p. 9). This concept helps us to understand Kovrin's journey in *The Black Monk*. As his mental collapse goes on, his initial feelings of transcendence and happiness gradually become illusions. Johnston's concept of dyscatastrophe shows how Kovrin's moments of joy drive him further from reality toward madness.

In a more specific example, S. Metla and Y.V.S. Devi explore the traditional role of eucatastrophe in fantasy literature. In the *Harry Potter* series, moments of eucatastrophe often lead to the triumph of good over evil by means of providing a sense of poetic justice and hope. As defined by J.R.R. Tolkien, these moments of "sudden and miraculous grace" elevate the narrative, by offering unexpected salvation or revelation (Metla, Sudha Devi, 2024, pp. 673–684). However, Chekhov's *The Black Monk* challenges conventional narratives of transcendence and contrasts Kovrin's miraculous visions with his own ruin and despair. This highlights the complexity and ambiguity of human longing for the extraordinary and sheds light on the tragic limits of the eucatastrophic narrative in *The Black Monk*.

Findings

In *The Black Monk*, Anton Chekhov explores the dual nature of eucatastrophe by showing both its promises and its paradoxes. Andrey Kovrin sees visions of the Black Monk, who represents both enlightenment and delusion. At first, these visions seem miraculous as they fill Kovrin with a sense of purpose and potential. However, they also separate him from reality and his dear ones. His moments of transcendence turn out to be illusions. What initially seems like salvation descends into madness ultimately.

Chekhov highlights the tension between the desire for the extraordinary and the grounding force of everyday life. Kovrin's experiences also raise questions about mental health and the line between genius and madness. The story challenges how society views both, showing that the pursuit of greatness often comes at a cost. It also forces readers to question whether eucatastrophe is real or simply an illusion

created by the mind. The sorrowful conclusion of *The Black Monk* emphasizes this paradox. When Kovrin ultimately understands that his visions were mere illusions, he falters both physically and mentally. In contrast to conventional eucatastrophe, which brings joy or salvation after a revelation, his death presents no victory. Rather, it acts as harsh reminder that miracles may be temporary and potentially harmful. Ultimately, Kovrin's downfall forces readers to consider the true cost of seeking the extraordinary. Can a miracle still be a miracle if it leads to destruction, or is it only an illusion?

The Black Monk challenges our understanding of hope, transcendence and the search for meaning. Through this, Chekhov offers a deep reflection on human nature by prompting us to rethink about the balance between ambition and reality.

Conclusion

In *The Black Monk*, Chekhov presents a complex exploration of eucatastrophe by means of challenging the traditional triumphant endings of fantasy stories. Kovrin's visions of the Black Monk bring moments of grandeur and transcendence, but they lead to disillusionment and tragedy ultimately. Unlike the clear moral victories in stories like *Harry Potter*, Chekhov's eucatastrophes blur the line between reality and illusion. His story explores the fragile human psyche and the dangers of seeking the extraordinary. This analysis also examines how Chekhov subverts fantasy traditions by focusing on Kovrin's psychological struggles. His ecstatic visions, instead of bringing resolution or justice, drive him toward madness. *The Black Monk* does not provide the satisfying ending of conventional eucatastrophes. Rather, it presents a complex portrayal of the human condition. The story also connects with modern discussions on mental health, particularly the fine line between genius and madness. Kovrin's journey highlights the emotional toll of ambition and the risks of mistaking fleeting inspiration for lasting fulfillment. Future research could explore how Chekhov blends psychological realism with supernatural mysticism. Comparison of *The Black Monk* to other Russian literary works could also reveal deeper insights into themes of madness and the search for meaning. The story remains relevant today, especially in discourses about mental health and artistic ambition. Ultimately, *The Black Monk* symbolizes both inspiration and destruction. Kovrin's moments of divine purpose come at the cost of his isolation and downfall. Chekhov forces readers to question whether such graceful moments are truly meant for salvation or merely illusions. The story's tragic ending rejects the fairy-tale notion of victorious finish. It offers a meditation on the dangers of chasing illusions blindly. Chekhov redefines eucatastrophe as a brief glimpse of what might have been with focus on the balance between aspiration and reality.

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