

Of Chekhov, Dickens, Henley and Pascal

by Theodore Dalrymple (April 2015)

Chekhov says somewhere that a writer should be able to write a story about an ashtray. Although I have not tried the experiment, I think he is right and in fact it would not be all that difficult to do so. If ashtrays could speak, what tales they could tell! Many have been flung in anger in the course of an argument, but even without such violent drama they would practically all have witnessed (if they had been capable of witnessing) untold emotional crises. Cigarettes are, after all, for many the emotional prop of first and last resort, the heart of a heartless world, to adapt slightly Marx's dictum about religion. They are not the opium, but the nicotine of the people. [more>>>](#)