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SPECIFIC FEATURES OF A. P. CHEKHOV'S SHORT STORIES

У статті розглядаються особливості оповідань А.П. Чехова. В ній проаналізовано стиль А.П. Чехова, розглянуті різні підходи до його бачення реальності, вивчено методи, що були використані в його прозі, і описано деякі інші особливості оповідань А.П. Чехова.

Ключові слова: *Chekhov's style, vision of reality, scientific approach, character, characterization, objectivity, finale.*

В статье рассматриваются особенности рассказов А.П. Чехова. В ней было проанализировано стиль А.П. Чехова, были рассмотрены разные подходы к его видению реальности, изучены методы, использованные в его прозе, и описаны некоторые другие особенности рассказов А.П. Чехова.

Ключевые слова: *Chekhov's style, vision of reality, scientific approach, character, characterization, objectivity, finale.*

This article deals with specific features of A. P. Chekhov's short stories. It provides an analysis of A. P. Chekhov's style, outlines different approaches to his vision of reality, studies the methods used in his prose and describes some other peculiarities of A. P. Chekhov's short stories.

Key words: *Chekhov's style, vision of reality, scientific approach, character, characterization, objectivity, finale.*

It is not an exaggeration that A. P. Chekhov revolutionized the genre of short story; his subject matter and technique influenced many future short-story writers.

Chekhov's laconic precision, deceptively simple technique, unusual plot and a special kind of atmosphere attract many scholars. The current article is concerned with the **problems** connected with Chekhov's specific technique and other peculiarities of his short stories.

The **topicality** of the present research lies in popularity of Chekhov's short stories not only in post-Soviet states, but also in many other countries.

The **aim** of this study is to provide an analysis of specific features of A. P. Chekhov's short stories.

In order to achieve this aim it is necessary to solve the following **tasks**:

- to outline the interpretations of A. P. Chekhov's vision of reality;
- to analyze the peculiarities of A. P. Chekhov's prose style;
- to do a detailed analysis of the techniques Chekhov employs in his short stories;
- to examine the ways, in which the concept of scientific objectivity is realized;
- to review the peculiarities of plot in A. P. Chekhov's short stories.

A. P. Chekhov's short stories evoke a lot of controversial issues, such as many interpretations of Chekhov's vision of reality, laconic style, story structure, objectivity, attention to detail, deep subtext. This article concentrates on some of them.

The analysis of last researches and publications. The peculiarities of A. P. Chekhov's short stories have been reviewed by many literary critics. A. Gornfeld, T. W. Clyman, R. Lynd, J. A. P. Katzer made significant contributions to the problem.

This article is devoted to such **insufficiently examined issues** as speech as a means of characterization in A. P. Chekhov's short stories, the author's attitude of indifference to his characters, a means of implementing implication.

The **scientific value** of the research lies in presenting new insights of A. P. Chekhov's short stories.

Chekhov's minimalistic prose style avoids any extended descriptions, too many details and repetitions as well as superfluous comments. The peculiarities of his compositional devices are most spectacular in those instances where the author confronted the problem of chronologically depicting a process extending over a period of years. The stages of his heroes' lives pass before the reader. Chekhov shows the entire life of a man in a brief manner that, nevertheless, allows depicting the most essential events that help to reveal the inner world of a character.

The dominant features of his style are detachment from his characters, a cool, gaunt and economic diction, relieved only by periodic bursts of lyricism, and the substitution of nuance and symbol for statement.

Chekhov's vision of reality is a very disputable question. Some critics argue that the view expressed in Chekhov's plays and short stories is pessimistic, others that it is progressive and optimistic. There have even been critics who deny that Chekhov had any overall vision at all. For instance, Maurice Valency assumes that a writer can simply describe life without having any world view underpinning that description. According to Valency, Chekhov «had no theory of life to expound, no point to make, no thesis. It is quite unnecessary for the understanding of his drama to discuss his world view. If he had anything of the sort, it was irrelevant to the subject of his art. His great talent lay in his sensitive depiction of life around him, the physical and psychic landscape in which he lived» [10, p. 184].

The nature of Chekhov's vision of reality expressed in his short stories attracts both critics and readers. This interest can be explained by the fact that Chekhov's world view is concerned not only with the artist, but with the whole man. The analysis of Chekhov's works proves that the sense of social responsibility takes an important part in Chekhov's overall vision of reality. It was not Chekhov's manner to outline his world view in the explicit form, but his vision is always implied in his works.

It is necessary to differentiate the text and subtext in order to communicate Chekhov's vision of reality. The text shows «life as it is», while the subtext implies «life as it ought to be». Chekhov's characteristic method of creating a subtext is to suggest that his characters live two lives. One is the external life presented in the text which includes the characters' actions, their environment, and how they appear objectively to other characters. The other life is an internal one which includes the characters' hopes, beliefs and aspirations, as well as their subjective view of themselves and of life. To reveal both inner and outer lives of his heroes Chekhov uses narrative commentary.

The meaning and intention of all Chekhov's works extend far out beyond the contemporary social context. Chekhov depicts a world with its purposeless absurdity because humanity has failed to make life meaningful. His works imply that it is of high importance to have some purpose in life and some degree of social conscience.

It deserves to be mentioned that Chekhov believed the literary artist should perform the dual function. The first function of the artist, Chekhov claims, is to depict life accurately but the second function he suggests expresses the artist's vision of reality, his attitude towards life [3, p. 243].

Chekhov developed a means of showing 'life as it is' and 'life as it should be' by finding a way to present the second function indirectly, through implication.

Chekhov is a master of internal drama. In a typical Chekhov's story the drama is conveyed indirectly. It occurs within a given character. Suggestion and significant detail are techniques he employs to achieve psychological realism. Every detail in Chekhov's stories has its own function in penetrating into the inner world of the character. Insignificant events, as they seem first, help the author to capture the drama of his characters.

Chekhov's works prove that he was a materialist. In his short stories he gives the analysis of human behaviour in a wholly scientific manner [3, p. 143-144]. The scientific methods are applied in all his writings. In particular he employs the concept of scientific objectivity in all of his stories. According to A. P. Chekhov «a writer should be as objective as a chemist» [6, p. 42].

Chekhov was against clichéd literary stereotypes. He chose simple, everyday themes and ordinary people. R. Lynd pointed out that «there has, I think, never been so wonderful an examination of common people in literature as in the short stories of Tchekov. His world is thronged with the average man and the average woman» [9, p. 171-177].

Chekhov expresses no viewpoint in his depictions of life. He does not place judgments on the actions of his characters. He believed in a good side of man [6, p. 136]. Chekhov is considered to be a realist because he asserted that «literature is called artistic when it depicts life as it is» [6, p. 41] and always tended to implement this idea in his writings. Vladimir Yermilov singled out one of the main techniques that Chekhov employed in order to emphasize a gap between the beauty of nature and the ugliness of human behavior: «The beauty of nature is used as a constant criterion in evaluating a given social reality and as a reminder of what it could and should be like on this lovely earth» [8, p. 126]. Chekhov depicted this gap to show his readers «how bad and dreary your lives are!» [4, p. 14].

Chekhov keeps his artistic vision clear by his attitude of indifference. Indifference helps him to see things clearly and make no judgments.

A. P. Chekhov portrays his characters instead of labelling them; but the portrait itself is the judgment. The absurdity of their behavior makes them ugly, both morally and materially.

Speech is one more peculiarity of Chekhov's style and his greatly favoured method of characterization. In his works the devices of speech characterization reached great depth and stylistic subtlety. Incomplete sentences, repetitions, colloquial language are bright features of speech in Chekhov's stories. The significant role in characterization also belongs to lengthy pauses, which occur in the tensest situations.

Chekhov tried to avoid descriptions of the mental states of his characters. He asserted that characterization should be based on depicting the heroes' physical actions rather than thoughts [6, p. 37]. Chekhov uses brief statements to describe the actions. Adjectives and adverbs do not provide any information concerning the author's attitude toward the events. Andrew Durkin truly notes that «the one verb dealing with inner experience – 'he thought' – does not specify the content of that thought» [7, p. 124]. Thus Chekhov leaves to a reader to determine his attitude to the actions described.

Another peculiar characteristic of Chekhov's style is signposting. Signposts follow various lines which often intersect. This literary device is widely used for describing the path of Doctor Starcev's life [5, p. 55-72].

Chekhov ignores traditional ideas of plot. There is no outcome in his stories, no problems are solved. It's not his manner to answer questions, but to ask them. He leaves to a reader to sort out the controversial issues.

There is something scholarly in his approach to the structure of a story; he divided it into distinct parts, and for each of them he had carefully reasoned methods for the creative embodiment of his ideas [2, p. 107-118].

In the beginning he does not give any complicated descriptions or biographies of his characters. A hero is usually characterized in several lines. Chekhov believed that even without the help of specific introductions an active reader would reconstruct what was most important in the hero's past life; he would do this through a skillfully depicted present, and if something in the past remained unknown to such a reader, then to balance it, a more substantial danger would be avoided: that of the diffusion of an impression which a superabundance of particulars creates.

Of the three classical elements of structure – the beginning of the plot, the development of the plot, and the finale – it seems that Chekhov was most concerned with the finale. It is not without good reason that in his statements on matters of structure, considerations about the finale occupy the foremost place. The sharp changes in Chekhov's poetics over the course of years are observable best of all in his finales: both the theory and practice of the writer's early years not only differ from those of his later period, but they are often in direct contrast.

A classic example of his finale characteristic of the highest level of his creativity can be observed in «The Lady with the Little Dog» – one of Chekhov's masterpieces. There is a description of the story's two protagonists in one of the stolen moments of bitter «happiness» which seldom fell to their lot:

«And it seemed that in just a short while the solution would be found, and then a new, wonderful life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that the end was still far off and that the most complicated and difficult part was only just beginning» [5, p. 28-42].

This ending deserves very close attention. Here, with direct, exact words, the very thing which is the real essence of Chekhov's finales in almost all the works of his mature stage of creativity is expressed openly, leaving nothing to implication.

Even if it is accidental, with no deliberate intention on the part of the author, that the quoted «end» of «The Lady with the Little Dog» ends with the word «beginning», it does not keep us from seeing that the same word could have been used in the finales of «The Duel», «The House with the Mezzanine», «The Betrothed», «My Life», «An Unknown Man's Story», and many other stories, which are still read with deep interest in spite of the fact that «the particular situations» from which they were created have almost completely disappeared into the past. These endings of Chekhov's stories announce that in the life process depicted by the author a certain stage was completed – and only that. The process continues, a new phase begins which is more important than the one depicted, but it is the reader himself who must create it: Chekhov places his courageous hopes on the creative cooperation of the reader, for whom he nonetheless has created all the necessary prerequisites for successful understanding.

A. G. Gornfel'd in his article «Чеховские финалы» noticed a peculiar feature of the finale in many Chekhov stories: the author breaks with his hero at the moment when the hero falls to thinking, becomes absorbed in thought after experiencing the events described. This, of course, is not a chance repetition of a device. The thoughts and reflections of the hero are a projection of the presumed thoughts of the reader. They are the sort of thing which comprise the goal of the author's efforts. It is natural that the most intensive work in the reader's mind be directed towards the crowning of the work, toward the completion of the work when all the images and events before the reader's eyes which constitute the segment of life portrayed have passed. Hence the attention Chekhov gave specifically to the finale [1, p. 168-179].

Finales are extremely important structural elements in A. P. Chekhov's stories, as they encourage readers to think deeply and perceive the familiar things clearly.

Anton Chekhov is recognized for his originality. He wrote about ordinary events and the relationships of people in small towns and villages. Chekhov employed a variety of techniques, including pacing and word choices that paint imagery, create his characters and reveal their changing moods.

The main principles of his style are laconic precision, total objectivity, truthful descriptions of persons and objects, implication, extreme brevity, audacity and originality as well as compassion.

The results of the current research can be used in lectures on literary disciplines and in practical courses.

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