

New Chekhov's Idea by Creation of New Humor Characters

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Abstract

Main axis of Chekhov's stories is an anxiety about "absence of human interrelationships and mutual understanding" and "slump of human moral values". Due to their characters and events an atmosphere that is a result of prevailing despotism on the one hand and consequence of human inadequacy and lack of idea about human relationships is created. Behind the sarcastic and humorous condition of that atmosphere pain and regret is hidden.

Keywords: Chekhov, Humor, Character, Story, Play.

1. Introduction

Chekhov's characters are collection of different social stratum of people starting from intellectuals and noblemen until ordinary people who are objects of "Chekhov's satire". Course of Chekhov's works often begins from one point, the audience quickly gets acquainted with characters and atmosphere and then suddenly unexpected event or unserious and insignificant incident takes place and at last the works has a completion peculiar to Chekhov's satire. Mainly, at the end of Chekhov's works in spite of availability of funny events the audience becomes a witness of iteration and returns to first point, thus becoming reason for creation of amusing atmosphere full of anxiety, trouble and sorrow.

We can say that Chekhov's comedies were written by modern style of comedies where new tasks of different spheres are assigned and people's abilities and potential are disclosed; in other words union of detailing and commonality. Modern development of comedy is depended on characters complexities. Characters of traditional comedy are famous, they have an ability, are famous, weak from appearance, look like other and it is easy to recognize them, and the author according to the play requirements may describe them. So, in case of traditional comedy we have no need in appliance of special technique to recognize simple characters mainly be reason that their abilities are too weak in comparison with modern comedies. New methodology is required to develop traditional comedy in quite different direction (laughable and stable idea). In this case contradictions occur. First novelty is conditioned by abilities of characters, e.g. characters of modern comedy due to their own (and not public) strength of will could lead the reader or audience astray. (E.g. it is incomprehensible weather character X is comic or tragic one). To understand this theme it is necessary to know that potential of characters of modern comedies is higher than potential of characters of traditional comedy. So, to research these peculiarities some methods must be applied.

2. Result & Discussion

Some people adhere to an opinion that Chekhov's plays and other works are full of sadness, grief, depression and disappointment; though it seems so or even when Chekhov himself develops such problems in his works, and if we deepen into these works from "Contextual Point" of view and got acquainted with the writer's epoch, his private and public life, certainly we will not meet problems on misfortune and troubles but fully will perceive his compassion towards commoners, obedient strata and, in general, society, and we should accept his warns about disagreements between persons and to make step to remove them.

“Chekhov’s characters came to life. They do not bathe in their own sorrow. Quite the opposite; they seek joy, laughter, courage; they want to live and not stagnate. I felt the truth in this view of Chekhov’s heroes, this encouraged me, and I intuitively understood what had to be done.”(Allen, 2000)

In this case the story about a small person who is belittled by officials would become an emotional one. Before Chekhov there were many works in Russian literature that had been written to gain the readers sympathy. But Chekhov breaks this custom and discusses it in a new way. Who is mocked in the story? General? Of course Not, He is described naturally. He only counteracts to behavior of other character in the story. Indeed at the end of the story by giving a kick he cries, “Vanish” but finally it’s a reaction of any person when he is driven out of his wits. Here “petty officer” is a subject of mockery who gained sympathy in Russian literature in prior. He (petty officer) is both laughable and pitiful in this story. His senseless insistences are laughable and refusal and humiliation of human merits is sad.

“Most of Chekhov’s characters simply repeat popular ideas, enacting the life and thoughts of someone else.”(Ulea, 2002)

It seems as if Chekhov chooses his characters to be new and attractive for readers that is differed from some works of past, which have historical and cultural prerequisites, as Shakespeare’s historic plays; Chekhov doesn’t resort to classic heroes to show life’s failures but skillfully discusses and examines simple characters and in this case he uses influential fib of humor but not worthless satiric genre that was prevailing in that time. Chekhov’s characters are laughable but simultaneously they are pitiful. One of peculiarities of Chekhov’s works is that he doesn’t focus on a particular character but on any of his created pictures that was widely spread in his works.

Peculiarities of characters (as mutual intolerance) is putting his created environment and pattern means on one way, a slow speed of time, immobility of characters and time uncertainty, which are noticeable in Chekhov’s works are just the adopted results. One of the peculiarities of Chekhov’s characters is lack of dialogues between them in the meaning of essence. Just in lack of this dialogue through keeping silence and slowing the performance rhythm, it is possible to open sub contexts or not pronounced words - words that are some emotional and dreamy mobile world. In great performance each word or item is changed into “Essence” by keeping interval from the action. Maybe that’s why pretexts and items of Chekhov’s characters are equally filled with semantics (comprehension). Chekhov doesn’t preach, make conclusions and reproach. He is just a dodger who realized Admits misfortunes or concretely misfortune of being Admits that due to thinking and speaking is higher than tree and more unlucky than stone.

Characters being presented by Chekhov in his stories and plays are a crowd of free and careless and irresponsible people who by the satiric invention created on the base of nonexistence of mutual understanding towards each other become similar to aimless characters being showed in works of writers following “Absurd Theatre”, like heroes of Samuel Becket of - “Waiting for Godot” – Vladimir and Estragon. This is just the method of Chekhov’s work, moreover he doesn’t centralize his characters and consequently “Heroism” in classic form in his works, as well as in works of writers of absurd theatre doesn’t take place.

“Chekhov's characters imagine that they are heroes or heroines in a genre suffused with romance, heroism, great theories, and decisive action, or else they try to play the lead roles in tragic tales of paralyzing disillusionment and emptiness. They consider themselves to be either heroes or "heroes of our time." But their search for drama unfolds in Chekhov's universe of prosaic.” (Morson, 1999)

Secondary characters of Chekhov’s works are important to the extent that principal characters (heroes). This style of writing became a reason that these characters remained more stable in readers’ mind and don’t disappear in other characters. This mechanism also became a reason for creation of balance in the form and content of his plays that in its turn is convenient mean for comparison of peculiarities of satiric and dramatic methods.

One of the circumstances of Chekhov’s writing style is that all characters of all plays and stories either know each beforehand or immediately get acquainted with each other at once. None of them appears suddenly and disappears at once, and destiny of all is simple and is determined, so the author can express his emotional thoughts and points of view in the best way.

Though we don't see heroes showed in Chekhov's stories and plays in traditional form and many of characters suffer from mental instability but Chekhov never divides his characters into "bad" or "good" groups. His characters are composition of positive and negative features running cause-effect course.

We may conclude that Chekhov's characters are rather ignoramus than charlatan. There is no inborn malignance in them but faintheartedness, egoism and their inborn yielding become reason for misery and destruction. Chekhov has few works without humor and just this gives bright beauty to his work. He embellishes content of his stories and plays with humor that even the simplest persons are inspired, laughed and gladdened, and of course such people read his works with enthusiasm and get acquainted with his created thoughts and ideas hidden under humor but expressing sadness and bitterness in his works. Chekhov adhered to the opinion that any fanny event is exciting, which are reflected in his works in the best way. "Chekhov's characters became part of the landscape, like trees or clouds; they lived amidst nature, dissolved in it and died amidst the beauty of its indifferent world. The main sound effect was the seagull's cry, but it was not so much poetic as oppressive, disturbing, expressing the theme of an endless circling in search of something that might comfort the soul." (Smeliansky, 2000)

He uses a special method "To make an ass of people" which created "Chekhov's Humor" in the genre of comedy through transfer of expectations. Heroes are in unexpected positions and the reader meets such characters whose position is not expectable in the work. At the same time when we look characters from the side they seem comic but when we put ourselves in their place we feel depth of their pain and sorrow and the created tragic atmosphere. If we pass from exceptions and exception such as Lopakhin from "Cherry Orchard" characters are representative of rich and wealthy strata and it is natural, as Chekhov has known such persons since his childhood up to youth as a commoner and was a witness of their conduct full of haughtiness, pretense and foolishness. It seems as if there were no other reasons especially for wealthy high strata.

We can say that many of Chekhov's characters don't have qualities to resist incidents and their presence in the stories, it's just due to the place and role in the society, e.g. officers, lovers, teachers, writers, etc. So, by appliance of such mechanism not only their important place in the society is impeached but also misfortune and disappointment of the whole society are ascribed to them who must be among the educated people. Prishibeyev (in the similar story) and Trigorin (in the play "Sea-gull") are today's people.

Many of Chekhov's characters are in fancy, they even fall in love or don't know how to love or fail at achieving the aim and never succeed. Treplov is among such people.

In most parts of Chekhov's plays and stories, doctors have main role and perhaps it is due to that Chekhov was a doctor and connoisseur on their psychology and conduct and had expectations from doctors as educated strata of the society. But it is interesting that in most parts of his stories, where doctors play main role, he emphasizes people in uncertainty and intricacy: doctors who didn't mastered in their specialty or reject medicine. Of course, there are characters that are good examples of perfect doctors, like Kirilov in the story "The Enemies".

Names of individuals may be used to describe the characters abilities. One of the problems remaining a puzzle for the audience is that Chekhov's characters are inevitably pessimistic as none of them chose the way of better life and on the whole they don't pay attention to "better life" phrase but only repeat it frequently. Chekhov's characters – scientists, arts critics and doctors have unhappy end and often blame their friends or society.

This problem may be formulated in another way: from Chekhov's point of view reality and the world creation are combined, i.e. it is not possible to avoid reality at creation of the world. This combination is showed in his plays and short stories. Creation of link between false or symbolic names and their environment, their usage to leave impression on the audience may be considered too measure of the author's ability to create characters.

Although a kind of disillusionment and melancholy prevail in Chekhov's works it doesn't serve a ground to conclude that they (characters) don't have any purpose and lead the way for it. If it were so it wouldn't correspond to Chekhov's realistic nature.

Chekhov's characters according to their aims may be divided into three groups:

- 1 – Characters having common aims corresponding to the society's aims (as Treplov's aims in the "Sea-gull").
- 2 – Characters having private aims, which don't correspond to the society's aims (as Prishibeyev in the similar story).

3 – Characters achieving the aims though they may be simple from the author's point of view (Tchimcha-Gimalayski in the story “Gooseberries”).

Chekhov never used hyperboles in his works and advised his friends not to use it. In his works he approaches to human usual conduct with persuasion as in everyday life, and be reason of it in a letter addressed to Olga Kipper he writes, “...I wrote to Meierhold, and urged him in my letter not to be too violent in the part of a nervous man. The immense majority of people are nervous, you know: the greater numbers suffer, and a small proportion feels acute pain; but where—in streets and in houses—do you see people tearing about, leaping up, and clutching at their heads? Suffering ought to be expressed as it is expressed in life – that is, not by the arms and legs, but by the tone and expression; not by gesticulation, but by grace. Subtle emotions of the soul in educated people must be subtly expressed in an external way. You will say – stage conditions. No conditions allow falsity.” (Chekhov, 2008)

Tolstoy who was tired of his plays and though wasn't fond of Shakespeare's plays but considered Chekhov's plays worse than his works, adheres to another opinion about Chekhov's stories and writes on this occasion. Unlike Tolstoy and even Dostoyevsky, Chekhov pictures everyday life of middle strata in his stories and plays. Plots, characters and environment in his works are clear and comprehensible not only for Russian people but people of the whole world.

In his works he returns to conservative morals and manners described in works of Gogol, but his actions and expressions impeach and criticize in a new way (by using humor) with braveness and adroitness.

Taking into consideration themes used before and after Chekhov by himself or his contemporaries, it seems that by various works of form and content Chekhov challenges other authors to a duel and expresses his thoughts newly. E.g. in the story “Death of Government Clerk” he adheres to the opinion that misfortune of lower strata of the society, especially of ordinary officials must be sought just in them and not in other plays.

Taking into consideration Chekhov's plays let's return to their folklore peculiarities by appliance of comparative method.

2. 1. Folklore Elements

2.1. 1. Manifestation forms of Symbolism:

Without any doubt, in formation of characters and creation of proper atmosphere in the works a symbol has an important role. Though at first sight it seems that Chekhov and some writers of that period by reason of stifling atmosphere occurred in consequence of heavy political atmosphere used language of symbolism but we can say that Chekhov was aware of meaning of symbolism and its appliance in dramatic works. In depicting of responses and reactions of characters Chekhov uses symbolism not any as an aesthetic mean but as a bridge for making a link with the audience. According to Fray, “In comedy and humor moral standards must be used to the point and make social classes symbols of comedy and humor”. (Stott, 2005)

Characters and the mysterious atmosphere created by Chekhov are wonderful for the audience and he uses theses “coded” symbols in his dramas and finds their real consequence not only in social reality but also in the literature. Chekhov advances it and tries that his plays were not unilateral and mixture of humor and drama and at the end leaves the conclusion on the audience. E.g. in the play “The Sea-gull” ruling party is considered symbol of Nina but it doesn't seem that all characters are sea-gulls and their lives will become empty.

The way Chekhov uses symbols is similar to the way used by Gogol, Ostrovski and Goncharov; his works stand out for combination of music and very deep philosophic poetry. Chekhov's characters disclose own and author's thoughts and life reality in their speech. Time of Chekhov as a symbol of realism has its unique place. All expressions, dialogues and patterns were interconnected. Theme, lake, sun, characters' inward world in the play “The Sea-gull”, and overthrow of nobility class and family irreproachableness in the play “Cherry Orchard” are noticeable symbolically and identification of realistic symbols with characters and the created atmosphere is a result of Chekhov's creating thought and entrepreneurship.

In the play “Cherry Orchard” each character is a symbol of different classes of the society. “Cherry Orchard” itself is a symbol of union of Lyubov Andreyevna’s family, and at the end it is destroyed, which some people consider a forthcoming revolution of Russia and prototype of traditional society destruction, but in case of deeper examination we may say that in reality before destruction of “Cherry Orchard” they are characters that chose an idea for the ideal world that sank, as they became entangled in time uncertainty: they don’t have the way back and program for the future and in this condition they are satisfied only by expression of own ideas to be able or wish to make a step at aiming his purposes. The voice of musical instrument or the shot weapon from the scene is symbolic purposeful and voice effects that declare voice of characters’ wrong belief and destruction.

“The symbols and poetic images have a role to play in Chekhov’s characters’ search to understand life. The only occasion in the plays when a symbol has significance for the audience – beyond what it means to the characters – is in *The Cherry Orchard*, where at the end the audience only hear a sound, described as that of a ‘breaking string’. This suggests that this play begins to break the boundaries of realism previously observed.”(Whyman, 2011)

Symbolism in characters and dully atmosphere in the play “*The Three Sisters*” is fully obvious; each of the character is a representative of psychological reality, which is known to Chekhov. Atmosphere of the town barrack is similar to the atmosphere prevailing in Russia in that period and how wonderful it was when it was decided to move the barrack from the town and approve new rules there. Characters only want to move to Moscow but do nothing to achieve the aim, that’s why persons like Olga and Irina are criticized and it is proclaimed that before public improvement humanity must be improved. Everybody philosophizes, pretends that knows the ways out but characters are representatives of people who underwent intellectual icing and can’t response to own or others’ voice inside.

In the play “*Uncle Vanya*” another state of mind is prevailing. By describing intellectuals like Serebryakov and creating funny scenes Chekhov criticizes their morals and manners. Embodiment in the play “*Uncle Vanya*” becomes softer as besides Uncle Vanya who intends to commit suicide another important event doesn’t take place. Sonya is the only person we can sympathize and Chekhov feels compassion for her as he put her among the women whose striking side is their ugliness being not acquired but inborn. Though he also doesn’t use all facilities and the only criteria became compassion for Uncle Vanya and making him kindness.

Symbols in Chekhov’s works are used to show atmosphere and peculiarities of characters. Chekhov realized that due to the mixture of humor and symbol he could afford pleasure to his audience.

2.1.2. Monologue

The thing that is obvious in four plays is a soft appliance of monologue. One of the ways to disclose the characters’ inward life is usage of monologue, through which the author gets acquainted with heart secrets of characters. Usually it’s a wide part. But monologue in Chekhov’s dramatic works assigns main psychoanalytic role of characters in the sense that even when characters talk to each other and there is a dialogue in the play, in reality they tell about their inward life and these dialogues are changed into monologue, as conversations don’t bring to a special event. This approach not only makes an inside fuss by which each of the character without listening to words of others talks about him and gives ideas regarding the approaching method of dramatic plays. As an example we can bring one part from the play “*Cherry Orchard*”.

“Charlotta: ...(she takes a cucumber from her packet and munches at it.) I don’t know a thing. (Pause) I long to talk so, and there’s no one to talk to, no friends or relatives.

Yepikhodov: (playing the guitar and singing) “what is the noisy world to me? Oh, what are friends and foes? ...” how sweet it is to play a mandolin!

Dunyasha: that’s a guitar, not a mandolin. (She looks at herself in a hand-glass and powders her face.)

Yepikhodov: to one mad with love it is a mandolin. (Singing) “Oh, that my heart was cheered by the warmth of requited love.” (Yasha joins in)

Charlotta: how shokingly these people sing! Fie! Like jackals howling!

Dunyasha: (to yasha.) what happiness it must be to visit foreign lands!

Yasha: yes, I quite agree without you. (He yawns and lights a cigar)

Yepikhodov: that goes without saying. Everything abroad has attained a full complexion.

Yasha: it certainly has.

Yepikhodov: I am a well-read man, I have studied various remarkable books, but I cannot make out the trend of my preferences. I don't know whether I should live or, speaking bluntly, shoot myself. But I always carry a revolver in my pocket, just in case. Here is it. (Shows revolver)

Charlotta: that's done. I'll be going now (slinging the rifle over her shoulder) you are a clever fellow. Yepikhodov; and very alarming. Women must fall madly in love with you. Brrr! (going.) these clever people are all so stupid – there is no one to talk to. I am always alone, always alone – I have no friend or relatives, and nobody can tell who I am, or why I live. (She walks out slowly)” (Chekhov, 1973)

2.1.3. Time Dependence

Element of time dependence is an influential factor of Chekhov's humor formation. In real, Chekhov creates such characters not belonging to their time or missing their past (like Luba Andreyevna in the play “Cherry Orchard”, Voynistky in “Uncle Vanya”, Olga in “Three Sisters”, Arkadina in “The Sea-gull”, separate heroes fly in uncertain future (Sonya in “Uncle Vanya”, Nina “The Sea-gull”, Andrey “Three Sisters”, Gaev “Cherry Orchard”).

People like Lopakhin from bourgeois class by reasons of past, present and future isolation, in fact live in doubt. Creation of such atmosphere between characters becomes paradox and base for Chekhov's humor.

2.1.4. Unity of Place

These four plays, by reason of unity tissue and the occurred events, are too similar. There are concrete characters that come, talk, argue, make decisions, then leave.

“Cherry Orchard” is a place where Luba Andreyevna comes and after its sale again leaves it. A garden, where Serebryakov and his young wife come and then leave. Heroes who come to the house of “Three Sisters” then enter Surin's garden and at last everybody mind their own business. Having compared place of actions Chekhov created suitable atmosphere for the characters presence and avoid variety of places that may be considered a reason for centralization of audience on characters.

By the way there is a disagreement in the widespread between abstract world and superficial fuss of characters. In its turn it's a suitable for movement of audience expectations that is one of the main provisions of comedy.

“Although Chekhov's characters may lose sight of, or fail to perceive at all, that far-off horizon, we, the audience, should not, because it allows us to see those characters' situations—and perhaps our own—in perspective. By seeing the background in productive interplay with the foreground, we may see beyond ourselves and may re-imagine our life and our world.”(Young, 2009)

2.1.5. Commonness

Funny characters being pure or criminal are not changed in that world, even in case of funny characters.

Death doesn't affect preliminary balance of their world. Chekhov's comedies are strict example that everyday life is not changed into death. Chekhov's characters suffer from commonness and it is obvious in many of his works, in particular in these four plays. Chekhov himself is a businessman and criticizes the pretended enlightenment of Russian people which is manifested in Serebryakov's character in the play “Uncle Vanya”, philosophers in the play “Three Sisters”, Trigorin in “The Sea-gull”, Gaev “Cherry Orchard” – people who consider their past lives empty and in vain but obstinately continue to live in the same way. It seems that commonness has changed into customs and destiny deprived of any possibility for review and improvement. In these works having used an event (e.g. Helena's entrance to Uncle Vanya's garden, or Trigorin's entrance to Arkadina's life, etc.) characters try to get free from the boring life. In other words comprehensions like “falling in love of heroes” are means to change the condition but from Chekhov's point of view this understanding is similar to love comprehension forming the drama stone.

Love of Astrov and Uncle Vanya towards Helena who is married, Arkadina's amorousness towards Trigorin that is only whim, Andrey's love towards a woman having illegal link to the chief. First, all these from Chekhov's point of view is unpleasant and damnable, second by reason of obstacles in each of them there seems no end to it and again boring life continuous.

"The comic gestures that Chekhov's characters make in their inept attempts to realize their dreams are juxtaposed with the seriousness of those aspirations for a better life. The failure of Chekhov's characters to achieve their aims or to live up to their potential is often presented in a comic manner, but their failure is not in any sense inevitable. Part of what makes some of the behavior of Chekhov's characters ludicrous is the fact that they could have done better but instead have wasted their lives." (Geoffrey, 2006)

Though from the first it seems as the characters being involved in some problems, like falling in love, raised from the lower level of life to upper level, which is elucidated as an event, but by reason of failure and disillusionment again they sink into the lower level and realize their downfall, uselessness and boring life. Although these events take place in cheerful and attracting atmosphere and some of characters make the atmosphere of the performance funnier due to their expressions and conduct, scenes of disillusionment and misery are pictured behind them, which is a style of "Chekhov's humor".

3. Conclusion

Problem of integration of details and commonness of Chekhov's comedies and farces are shown simpler. The most important point of such kind of comedy is that direct answer is not given to the set above question as in traditional comedy, and special detailed analysis is required to answer the question in the result of which abilities, talents and preparation degree will be revealed. This problem in traditional comedy that only required a quick and emotional analysis is different. In traditional comedy according to its rules at meeting funny characters the audience doesn't feel astonishment and doubt but give a quick response to it; in other words all torments of author, director and actor blow up. Just this difference became a reason to contradict to Chekhov by many critics and audiences, mainly of his time when Chekhov calls his four famous theatres – "Cherry Orchard", "Three Sisters", "Uncle Vanya" and "The Sea-gull", comedies as Chekhov's characters didn't look like modern funny characters, but more they looked like characters of tragedy. Chekhov's conception was formed in one place though it was spread in Russia and then all over the world; his characters can't be made-up as they should live in a certain time and place keeping peculiarities of that atmosphere but it is against traditional comedy as characters are stereotypes there. Chekhov created great heroes, such as Trigorin, Trepleff, Astrov who have another way of thinking in global atmosphere and can't adapt themselves to new conditions. So, without analyzing these heroes from general and intellectual-social point of view it is impossible to study their principal restrictions that are very important.

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