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## Unfulfilled Fate of Chekhov's Tales' Characters: “Ionych”, “Literature Teacher”, “Gooseberry”, “About Love”

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*The subject of the study is an analysis of Anthon Chekhov's selected tales which contain a convergence of fiction. The topic of unfulfilled fate seems to be a leading theme in Chekhov's prose of the 1890s. The characters of the analyzed texts share the author's opinion that indifference, everyday life, narrow-mindedness influence the fate not less than regular crimes or wicked deeds. In those narrations anyone should notice the development of Chekhov's attitude to happiness which underlines the influence of the surrounding/environment on shaping human awareness. He claims that it is impossible to gain satisfaction without opposing to shallow opinions and the devoidness of ideas which are characteristic attributes of a petty bourgeoisie, the best example of whom are the characters' stories.*

*Keywords: unfulfilled fate, dreams, happiness, wickedness, commonness.*

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### Introduction

In the second half of the nineties, A.P. Chekhov disclaims general philosophical arguments, as it was in “The Duel” or “House of No 6”, and refers to an in-depth study of social reality. According to G.P. Berdnikov, “These studies lead him back to the general questions of human existence. Again acutely arises the idea of a fundamental insecurity of human life, about the unnaturalness of the prevailing relations between people”. (Berdnikov, 1970, 436). In his works of the 1890s, Chekhov concludes that indifference and vulgarity, immorality and passivity, dispassion and narrowness of outlook

are no less dangerous to humans than injustice and vile deeds.

The destiny of man for Chekhov is related to the effects of the atmosphere, on the one hand, on the other to the resistance of the character to the environment. This implies that the fate is a result of intense struggle. The reason for the protest is the human consciousness disorder and distress, dissatisfaction with life. Many Chekhov's characters come to a hopeless conclusion: “it is not what I need”, this is not real life, it is not true happiness and deep human content. They cannot put up with this order of things, where not everything happens by

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their own will. Reality for them is hostile and meaningless, full of suffering.

Chekhov's artistic manner can be found in the originality of picturing human character. On the pages of his stories, perhaps the first time in Russian literature were various representatives of the intelligentsia – teachers, doctors, students, lawyers, local governmental workers. They are mostly drawn on the basis of everyday simplicity. These are anti-heroes, who are not capable of any bold actions nor strong gusts. The petty-bourgeois environment in which they live, trivial interests, narrow-mindedness, wingless ideals – all this explains the mediocrity of their feelings. Originality of Chekhov's intellectuals is that they are not capable of any meanness, nor of a courageous act. Dishonesty is replaced with pervasive vulgarity, feats – with daily work. Chekhov gives a very peculiar image of evolution of human characters who do not change and cannot change. The writer, in fact with few exceptions, does not have very good or very bad people. Changes in the personality in either direction are slow, gradual, and almost imperceptible to most of the characters.

Many texts show a lost life, unfulfilled dreams of prosperity, love. Serene happiness of Nikitin with Masha Shelestova (*Literature Teacher*, 1894) at first seems to illuminate the whole world around, but eventually gives way to melancholy, banal existence. Dr. Startsev, who dreamt about love (*Ionych*, 1898), gradually comes to talk of hoarding, becomes rude with patients, killing his time for a card game. The character of the story "Gooseberry" (1898), for many years longed to buy a property with a private, not bought gooseberry garden reaches his goal, and it turns out that he has no strength, he is sick and old. Something similar can be seen in the story "About Love" (1898), the protagonist, the landowner Alekhin feels like a prisoner of his own name, which he hates. In addition, Alekhin

is passionately in love with a married woman, but does not dare even to talk to her, because this love is not welcomed by the society.

### **Ionych**

*Ionych* is a story of a young doctor, initially cheerful, fascinated by what he does for a living, a cheerful person, and at the end of the story he falls to state of an insensitive cheapskate, who is not interested in anything other than a card game. In his younger years, Dr. Startsev fell in love with a beautiful girl from a wealthy family of Turkins. He felt on top of the world, of course exaggerating the merits of the chosen one, her cultural manners and intellectualism. The culture of Turkins family turns out to be illusory: Kitty's musical talent, graph maniac writing of Vera Iosephovna, jokes of Ivan Petrovich. For Startsev "after a winter spent in Dializh, among ill peasants, it was so good and new to sit in the living room and to look at this young, elegant and probably pure being and listen to these noisy, annoying, but still cultured sounds..."(Chekhov, 1977, 25). The protagonist correctly perceived the culture of Turkins, but "adjusted to the general good humor, joined a new voice to the chorus of regular praise" (Gurvich, 1970, 17). According to Isaac Gurvich, it was from that when the petty-bourgeois degeneration of Startsev started (Gurvich, 1970, 17).

The Kitty is superficial, too self-centered, emotionally undeveloped, but the doctor is not able to notice this and decides to propose to her. Ekaterina Ivanovna rejects Startsev's proposal in the name of a higher purpose, to which she intends to devote her life. "I want to be an performer, I want to get fame, success and freedom" (Chekhov, 1977, 34). The spoiled girl does not want to be a wife of an ordinary man, especially with such a ridiculous patronymic name – Ionych. "This is one of the most typical situations for Chekhov's world: people are divided, they live each with their own feelings, interests and programs, their

life stereotypes, behavior, and at a time when one needs to receive a response, understanding on the part of another person – the other one, at this moment is to engaged with his own interest, programs, etc.”. (Kataev, 1998, 19).

The feeling of love experienced by Startsev was sincere, but not deep. Once he was rejected by Ekaterina Ivanovna, he was sorry for his feelings, but the heavy mood soon passed. The desire for profit finally overcame him, turned into a passion. Soon he became a part of the establishment of the city “S”, a figure no less famous than the family of Turkins. Startsev turns into Ionych, becomes impenetrable, inaccessible to others, rude and cold with his patients. According to Isaac Gurvich, “Startsev is fully aware of what was happening to him, he loses himself, realizing that he perishes” (Gurvich, 1970.115). However, he does not have the guts to change his live. The family of Turkins, unlike the protagonist of the story, continues to exist in the cyclic manner: “What about Turkins?” Ivan Petrovich not aged at all, has not changed and continues all the jokes and tells anecdotes; Vera Iosephovna reads her novels to guests with simplicity of her heart, and Kitty plays the piano every day for four hours”(Chekhov, 1977, 41).

Whose fault is that Startsev became such a boring person that his fate did become a success? It is very wrong to blame Ekaterina Ivanovna only that she did not see a good man in front of her; it is the character's fault who decided to put up with the existing order. Ionych did not achieve happiness, but only its surrogates: the acquisition of real estate, fearful respect of others. “Turkins remained untouched in their banality – Kataev writes – Startsev degraded. He did not remain even at the level of Turkins; he rolled in his contempt even lower” (Kataev, 1998, 18). Chekhov's character was not been able to notice the moment that decided his fate. The author points to the inevitability of death of Ionych: a

young man full of strength became a heartless money-grubber.

### **Literature Teacher**

Quite different was the life of Nikitin, the character of the story “Literature Teacher”. Just like Startsev he fell in love with a young girl from a good family. He made a proposal and married her. His fiancée – Masha, Manusia, or Marie Godefroy, as her friends jokingly called her, was charming and rich. Nikitin liked everything at Shelestovs, even the word “rudeness”, which the father of the bride was very fond of pronouncing. Manusia's sister Varia, who would constantly argue with everybody and was too self-confident, did not irritate him. He could not only tolerate the animal – a small, ever-barking dog Mushka and the dog Som, who laid his head on his knees, while smearing holiday pants. The protagonist was hardly able to believe his luck. After the wedding, the pleasant and comfortable family life begins, reminiscent of “pastoral idyll”. Nikitin needs absolute, undisturbed peace: “His idea of happiness was not originally associated with the development, but with a kind of sleepy existence” (Timonin, 1999, 43). The world of vulgarity and idleness begins to surround Nikitin on all sides. Manusia arranges her family nest with such thoroughness that seems her husband's stay only frustrates the strict order. Gradually, the teacher begins to feel anxious, and it is unclear why does he feel bad.

A. Esin says that “a moral turning point in the mind of Nikitin begins with a bad mood for some reason: whether because of trifling card loss, whether due to the partner's remarks that “Nikitin has money to burn”, or general “because of nothing” (Esin, 1988, 161). He opened all the vulgarity and hypocrisy of bourgeois life. He felt surrounded by stupid people for whom ideals, lofty thoughts do not exist. The attitude of the protagonist to

his wife started to change. After a romantic love with Masha, Maria Godefroid and his marriage to Maniusia, he turns out to be the husband of Mani. The evolution of the name shows how the halo around the women selected by Nikitin becomes scattered: the dreams about the circus and a rider turns out to be nonsense, they are replaced by worries about the economy, marmalade, breakfasts for a big break. "Until now Nikitin believed that there was only his and Maniusia's love, happiness, and everything else was out there somewhere, behind – says Z. Papernyi. – But then he opens offensive parallels between their love affair and the behavior of a chubby lover of eating and dancing" (Papernyi, 1954, 112). It became clear to Nikitin that his happiness is no happiness at all, but a smug illusion. As if he was guided in the life by the words of the Polish poet-priest Jan Twardowski: "In life it is good when we feel good and bad. When we feel only good – it is bad" (Twardowski, 2001, 100).

All the little things of everyday life, seemingly insignificant in itself, increase a new psychological state of the character: dissatisfaction with oneself and others. Nikitin was unhappy about his profession, speaks contemptuously about the work of the teacher, not calling himself an educator, but a civil servant. "Dwindling illusions. Nikitin begins to realize that his wife, who touched him with her thrift, was really a stupid, limited philistine, that he was not a teacher, but a faceless bureaucrat, that idyllic life in a two-story house was really impossible, unbearable and humiliating for every person" (Berdnikov 1970, 358). Nikitin felt that some new, unknown life awaits for him and, although he was longing for another world, but at the same time he was afraid of it. He gasped, not only in their own home, it was stuffy and disgusting even at school, because his work as well as love were only visibility.

Papernyi wrote: "Why love of Nikitin died? – One is tempted to answer that all the life, surrounding the character, his own way of dowry, this forced idleness, bureaucratic work, the whole atmosphere of idleness, vulgarity and bureaucratic conservatism – all this killed the dream of happiness, a symbol of triumph over this dream – a garden with flowers that stretched to the people, just asking them to confess love" (Papernyi, 1954, 114). Realizing all this, Nikitin came up with only one option – to escape: "Where am I, my God?! I am surrounded by banality and vulgarity. Boring, worthless people, pots with sour cream, milk jugs, cockroaches, stupid women... There is nothing more frightening, abusive, dreary banality. Run away, run away tonight, or I shall go mad!" (Chekhov, 1977, 394)

This is the final of the story. Disappointment comes about what is called personal happiness. The character feels trapped: the circle is closed and he does not see a way out. Nikitin's fate did not take place, although it seemed that fulfilled all his dreams of happiness, love and family life. Chekhov wrote in one of his notebooks: "For insects a caterpillar turns into a butterfly, and for people on the contrary: a butterfly turns into a caterpillar" (Chekhov, 1977, 263). This butterfly, which turned into a caterpillar, is Masha here, and with her, the whole world is full of triviality.

### **Gooseberry**

The main theme of the story "Gooseberry" is the fate of a man who dedicated his life to realize the dream of his own estate with a Gooseberry garden. His brother Ivan Ivanovich Chimsha-Himalaisky narrates the story of Nikolai Ivanovich. The character managed to implement his deep desire but at a price of incredible sacrifices, having married for money and sent soon his unloved spouse to the other world, he eventually bought the estate and planted the gooseberry he longed for. Once Ivan Ivanovich

went to visit his brother. They did not see each other for a long time and even had "a little cry of joy", but you should pay attention to what Ivan Ivanovich had seen before he greeted his brother: "I am walking to the house and see a red dog, thick like a pig. It would like to bark, but do not want to because of laziness. A woman cook came out of the kitchen, barelegged, obese like a pig too, and said that the host is resting after his lunch" (Chekhov, 1977, 809). Description of the estate becomes grotesque, each line exposes disgust.

However, Nikolai Ivanovich considers himself a happy man. It does not prevent him to enjoy life nor the location of the estate, surrounded by plants, nor the death of his wife. He likes everything, and above all his own gooseberry. In fact, it was sour and unripe, but the character felt real satisfaction. Ivan Ivanovich said: "I saw a happy man whose cherished dream came true so obvious that he reached the goal in life that he wanted, who was satisfied with his fate" (Chekhov, 1977, 810). Nikolai Ivanovich was a real landowner, a gentleman. He behaved lordly, eat much, became obese, he sued the company and two factories, and loved when other men would call him "Your Highness". Ivan Ivanovich noted that the brother changed internally – became arrogant, talked in a bossy manner, just like a minister: "Education is necessary, but it is premature for people", "corporal punishment is generally harmful, but in some cases it is useful and indispensable" (Chekhov, 1977 810). He forgot that his father had been a soldier, and his grandfather had been a peasant, and constantly repeated: "we are noble people", "me, as a lord".

The inner metamorphosis of Nikolai Ivanovich is accompanied with an external one, "he aged, became stout, flabby; cheeks, nose and lips are pulled forward – that it looks like he is going to snort in the blanket" (Chekhov, 1977, 809). Z. Papernyi notes that Chimsha-Himalaisky

lost the human face both internally and externally, "And maybe the worst thing in it was his satiety, arrogance, non-breakable indifference to everything that goes beyond his estate" (Papernyi, 1954, 132). We can say that Chekhov was against what is called philistine happiness, because a path to it is the path to calmness and contentment. Yet we must strive not to happiness, but to truth and goodness. Therefore, at the end of the story Ivan Ivanovich exclaimed, "do not stop doing good deeds" (Chekhov, 1977, 811). M. Orlova wrote in her article: "Doing good is a guarantee that you will not feel your own uselessness and limitedness. For someone having gooseberry is enough for happiness, for which the person is ready, having gone out of the city to hide in the estate, as in the case, condemning themselves to monastic life without heroism, without even realizing it" (Orlova, 1999, 134).

Chekhov shows that people who are not engaged in this work, not captured with a useful activity, limit themselves to smaller tasks, lose energy, labor, youth for its implementation, mistaking the goal for a mission in life, for happiness. In the works of the second half of the nineties Chekhov proved that the existing social relations were hostile to man, because the only possible freedom was to enslave the weak, the freedom of greed. G. Berdnikov argues that "such freedom" satisfied many. The real drama lies in the fact that people adapt to these conditions and live, feeling satisfied and happy. The newly landowner Chimsha-Himalaisky can serve an example of such successful people, devouring with relish sour gooseberry; he had finally grown into his estate. Ivan Ivanovich looked at him and saw a truly happy man whose cherished dream came to life filling him with joy and contentment.

Nikolai Ivanovich became a slave of his desires. He looked at his gooseberry with his own tears and did not feel being a sick old man. The character has no regrets about meaningless

life he held. At the end of the story, he does not wake up, does not see clearly. Born the second time – he would start all the same things again. It is difficult to say whether the fate of the character was a success. On the one hand, Nikolai Ivanovich was convinced that his dreams came to life and he did not need more in his life, on the other, his brother denied such happiness, considering it vulgar, possessive.

"Gooseberry" is a story about false ideals, as well as about a spiritually wakeless man, who was alive dead in his complacency.

### **About Love**

In his work "About Love" the narrator and the character of the story is the same person – the landowner Alekhin. The narrative begins with reflections on love. Chekhov here introduces some reservations: "Until now, love was told with only one incontestable truth, namely, that "this is a great mystery", everything else that has been written and talked about love, has been not the solution, but only a statement of questions which have remained unresolved. The explanation, which would seem to fit one case, is not suitable for the other ten cases, and the best, in my opinion – is to explain every case individually without attempting to generalize. It is necessary, as the doctors say, to individualize each case" (Chekhov, 1977, 25). Alekhin's story confirms, on the one hand individuality, singularity of his love affairs, and on the other – the ability to make generalizations. At the end of the story Chekhov does not avoid generalization, but does it on purpose, he wants to brighten and express the basic idea – to do away with unhealthy relationships in the family, not to give up love, to give a real sense of freedom.

At the beginning of the story Alekhin tells students about his concerns on the economy, which he has been engaged in "not without some disgust" (Chekhov vol. 10, 26). This is

not surprising, since he considers himself a desk man, nurtures a passion for urban life. In describing this "cultural Alekhin" we feel Chekhov's mockery because he belongs to the "coffee with liqueur" after breakfast and lunch, and for reading at night "Herald of Europe", but still lives in the main rooms. Action begins when the deputy chairman of the District Court, tradesman Luganovitch invited Alekhin for dinner. So, the character meets Luganovitch's wife, Anna Alexeevna. Seeing a young, beautiful, charming woman, he immediately "felt being close, familiar" (Chekhov, 1977, 27) and fell in love with her at first sight. At the time not only his happiness began, but at the same time the troubles, which were generated by not only the complexity of the situation, but the fear of change and usual perceptions of sin.

The protagonist was afraid to break the prosperous life for people close to him, and this fear was the misfortune of himself and Anna Alekseevna. He thought: "She would have followed me, but where? Where could I take her? Another thing, if I had a beautiful, interesting life, [...] and that in fact one of the normal, everyday environment would inspire her to another with the same or even more everyday" (Chekhov, 1977, 30). The female character thought that her love would not bring happiness to her beloved, but would only complicate his life. She often talked to her husband about a hard-working, energetic wife for Alekhin, considering herself not enough young for him. Alekhin was in doubt, hesitated, did not take anything that would change his life and the woman he loved. As a result, gentle, deep feelings died. Alekhin had no strong will, no energy. All this was destroyed by everyday life, leaving bitter memories and consciousness of its uselessness. Z. Papernyi argues that "Alekhin's love was defeated because he himself was not worthy of this love. He tried to find an excuse for himself, but Chekhov finds no excuses for him.

Alekhin tells himself: my life is just boring and is a humdrum existence, one must renounce love. But it is capitulation to the present life. And the writer judges his character, because he stepped out of love, obeyed his life as it is, gave up the dream, as it should be" (Papernyi, 1954, 134). According to Papernyi Alekhin's love passed by, nothing changed in his life: "He loved and was loved, but love did not take place" (Papernyi, 1954, 134).

The whole tragedy of his fate Alekhin realized when life itself found a way out of the difficult situation. Lukanovitch was transferred to another province, and the whole family had to leave town. Alekhin went to the station to see Anna Alexeevna off, and he was faced with a crisis, which led to the abandonment of moral props of the system of conservative beliefs and feelings: "I realized that when you are in love, in your discussion about this love you must start from the top, from the more important, than happiness or unhappiness, sin or virtue in their current sense, or do not need to talk at all" (Chekhov, 1977, 32). This is a generalization, which was mentioned before. All literary techniques, artistic means are subject to the same goal: to convince the reader that life should always be guided by a sense, it is necessary to follow the voice of the heart. Alekhin concludes that the popular ideas of happiness and unhappiness do not give answers to the complex questions of life, and that you should look for more reasonable and great decisions. His story was a kind of self-incrimination. The character blames himself for indecision weakness and passivity.

B. Tiupa draws attention to the disunity of the characters: Alekhin and Anna Alexeevna remain silent about the main thing together; they talk in "seclusion", each in his (her) own thinking "that creates dramatic collision of their lives": "we cannot live without each other. But for some strange misunderstandings, coming out of the theater, every time we said goodbye and parted like strangers". Symbolic ending of this love story is the following: the two characters after their confessions are traveling in neighboring empty compartments, lamenting not their common grief, but two disadvantaged "I", and everyone – his (her) own" (Tiupa, 1989, 112).

### Conclusion

Chekhov's stories fascinate us because they depict life as it is, but one always feels the life as it should be. Chekhov directly do not talk about it, forcing the reader to ponder about the future fate of the character, to try to understand what the person did wrong, that could change his fate. Chekhov often reveals the meaning of everyday life; he shows the most tragic of the ordinary. Many of his works expressed the idea that a person should strive for a meaningful life, which is not comparable with the peace of indifference. Chekhov appears to us above all as a writer for whom the truth is more precious than anything else, who hates lies and falsehood. He shows the danger of the reconciliation of man with the surrounding vulgar reality, draws the reader's attention to the fact, how harmful a human life can be, when it is devoid of ideology, full of false ideals and illusions.

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## **Несостоявшаяся судьба героев чеховских рассказов:**

**«Ионыч», «Учитель словесности»,**

**«Крыжовник», «О любви»)**

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*Предметом исследования является анализ избранных рассказов Антона Чехова, в которых наблюдается сюжетное сходство. Мотив несостоявшейся судьбы кажется сквозным в чеховской прозе 1890-х годов. Протагонисты анализируемых текстов оправдывают точку зрения автора, что равнодушие, будничность, узость кругозора оказывают не менее вредное воздействие на судьбу, чем обычные преступления и подлые поступки. В повествованиях наблюдается эволюция взглядов Чехова на человеческое счастье и подчеркивается воздействие окружающей среды на формирование сознания персонажей относительно невозможности достижения полного удовлетворения без сопротивления узости взглядов и бескрылости идеалов, характерных для мещанства, к которому относятся герои рассматриваемых произведений.*

*Ключевые слова: несбывшаяся судьба, осуществление мечты, счастье, пошлость, обыденность.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

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