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A.P. Chekhov as a Philosopher: «Game» Phenomenon and «Existence in the Face of Death» in his Dramas

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Analyzing Chekhov's dramas reveals his spiritual connection with the problem of finding an authentic existence, a problem which has been at the centre of modern philosophic research since the beginning of the 20th century. The analysis considers, from the point of view of abstract thought, the unity of philosophy and art where formal and contextual difference allow us to see something whole, a meta-situation, a meta-language, through which an understanding of the universal human situation is achieved.

Keywords: Russian thought, Russian aesthetics, Russian literature, game phenomenon.

1. The dispute of Chekhov's place in Russian THOUGHT, Russian ESTHETICS is a dispute of recent times. Most (people) consider the question itself to be absurd, that one can see inclination for «the knowledge in the sphere of thought», hidden energy, aimed at comprehension of words about truth among Chekhov's lyric stories. Chekhov seems to be too simple, ordinary for that, there is no «two chasms», no religious intensity; one cannot see that, what is considered to be family signs of Russian thought. But Chekhov is gladly given a place of artist -realist, psychologist, diagnostician, landscape painter... A place of anybody, but of philosopher-thinker.

During recent years this traditional rejection of «philosophic dimension» in Chekhov's works has acquired its characteristic form. Though new works, dedicated to Russian peculiarity and Russian Idea, appear, Chekhov's name is not mentioned at the works at all or mentioned in the

negative meaning, and thus, Chekhov turns out to be out of the range of people, expressing and determinating Russian thought peculiarity. For example, famous book by G. Gachev «Russian Thought»: there are writers, poets, of course, Gogol, Dostoievskiy, Tolstoy, there is Blok and even Yesenin («Russian Slang») in the brilliant row of those, who has made contribution to the Russian Thought development. Chekhov has not been included into this row. To the author's opinion, Chekhov is a social critic, critical realist, subtle artist, but not a thinker. This is the point of view of very many modern historians and literature theoreticians.

We would like to change to some extent the existing opinions and to show, that Chekhov's influence over Russian culture spiritual space is as huge as universally recognized influence of Turgeniev, Dostoievskiy, Tolstoy. Exactly Chekhov, having come to Russian literature after

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majestic absolutists, each one prophesying each own truth, told that «nobody knows the real truth» (**, 14, 152), and as an artist he concentrated on the comparing of different kinds of truth, which turned out to be «false notions» or «personal view of the situation». He raises a problem of tragedy in a different way, the problem which is one of the central in art. Chekov says: «Between «there is God» and «there is no God» there is a whole huge field, which is crossed with big difficulties by a true man of wisdom» (**, 17, 56). Speaking about that nobody knows the truth, Chekhov, like Goethe, saw, that between «yes» and «no» there is no emptiness, but there is a problem. Chekhov contributed to Russian literature a new element, having added considerably and in essence to its spiritual sense. In his works there are always heroes of two types: those, who suffer from life target absence and those, who suffer from an idea. He became the first writer in Russian literature, who had researched the pathology of idea influence over a man, the pathology, which appears, because of naïve and spontaneous perception of the idea. He described a lot of different variants of a man becoming silly and blind of ideas, and that makes his works most actual nowadays. But he saw both sides of the coin, considering that the inclination to “I know everything” statement is accompanied by the inclination to “I know nothing”. Russian intelligentsia, by Chekhov’s, «willingly denies everything, because for a lazy mind it is easier to deny, than to make statements. » (**, 14, 458).

A man cannot live only by denying. Chekov was sure, that a man needs «higher and distant targets», and that «meaningful life without definite world outlook/weltanschauung is not a life, but a burden and a horror. » (**, 14, 242). He wrote about it at «Dull Story» and «Black Monk», where his yearning for «common idea» is revealed. In comparison to Dostoyevsky F.M. and Tolstoy L.N., he did not create a concrete, definite belief content, which gives sense to a human’s life, but

he accomplished something much more rare, may be unique: he raised the question of true belief criteria and answered it.

Below, we represent the analysis of Chekov’s drama, at which his spiritual connection with the problem of existence authenticity will be revealed, the problem, which has defined the philosophic research nerve of modern philosophy, beginning from the border of 19-20 centuries. The analysis will be done from the point of view of the abstract thought space unity of philosophy and art, which formal and contextual difference allows to see something whole, a meta-situation, meta-language, by means of which universal human situation of understanding is realized. Philosophy and art (already - literature) are two sides of the coin, edges of the whole, and that is why their comparative mutual addition becomes, on principle, possible.

At first, the world of Chekov, as the world of Dostoyevsky, “makes an impression of “kaleidoscope” of random photo shots of pessimistic grumbling” (Bulgakov S.N.), and only a deeper gaze can reveal the whole mosaic picture, his common world outlook.

Philosophical and artistic unity of the world of Chekov’s master-pieces does not mean that his works are tendentious. The art cannot serve for popularization of these or those philosophic statements, dogmatically perceived and taken in by an introduced way. “Tendentious art is not artistically sincere, it is an artistic lie, the result of a weak or distortedly directed talent” (**, 135). Chekov remains an independent artistic thinker; he is at full rate characteristic of that peculiar intuitive synthesis, which makes the art unique. So, it was not without reason, he was so often reproached of imaginary unscrupulousness.

Taking this into account, we will not though insist on the necessity of taking Chekov as a thinker, appealing to his statement of human problems and their salvation. Then another

question is raised, if the dramatist's work will be just an illustration to the philosophic theory? The question is natural and needs a special answer. The answer is both yes and no. Chekov's drama can really be presented as an illustration of this or that philosophical conception, but there is nothing deteriorative in that for artistic work. The thing is, that such "illustrating" is possible, only if there is some common spiritual field, which gives an opportunity to connect a philosophical idea and a literature image. This common field is a real situation of UNDERSTANDING, which in reality is never being parted into different components – rational understanding on one side, artistic understanding on the other side, and mystical understanding is also apart. Human situation of understanding demands all the human means of cognition, including philosophical and artistic.

Moreover, there are such ideas, which, as matter of fact, can be revealed only at the reciprocal reflection of philosophical notion and artistic image. We consider such a notion to be a "game", and one of the leading traditions of modern philosophy - phenomenological hermeneutics - sees ontological content of art in the game content. Exactly, the drama realizes itself with the help of theatrical "game". And what concerns Chekov, till up to-day his play "Seagull" still remains obscure, we consider that, there a "game of the game" is revealed in a special compositional formula.

2. In the second half of the 20-th century the big role of the game notion becomes clear in the ontological sense, it is a new turn which philosophy makes (ex. ** ** **). Game phenomenon attracts attention of the researchers, mostly; because a wide range of human possibilities is revealed during the game process for making contact to the multi-dimension of the world. The subject can be transformed by a person not only by one, but by many directions. Both numerous possibilities of human interaction with the

surrounding world are revealed, and complexity of the very inner human attitude towards the world is displayed as well. Game turns out to be a necessary condition of natural (non-forced) human personality development. Showing ontological sense of the game, Kemerov V.Y. writes: "Since philosophy is now oriented to comprehension of cognition, thinking, ethic and esthetic forms of the very human activity as EXISTENCE BONDS, so turns out to be the game one of the most important models of these bonds functioning.

Philosophy makes accents in the existence structures interpretation on their (structures) repetition, process durability, changeableness, so the game becomes a pattern of mobile interactions, stating and transforming the bonds of existence elements " (**, 194-195). The same researcher pays attention to the fact, that some time ago the game notion was peripheral for philosophy, but now it becomes its most important modern instrument for understanding of fundamental relations between people, between a man and natural and artificial systems. So, to the mind of V.Y.Kemerov, in social existence structures interpretation, the game itself becomes a fundamental bond, which provides concord existence and stimulates social individuals to assimilate and support the rights of such a concord. The game works in the gaps of social existence – it can create such gaps on purpose (making carnival of the routine, turning of the common social behavior forms upside down). There can be used such methods as: creative research, gaming creation of absent social bonds, and gaming substitution of ineffective bonds. Game is contrasted with serious behavior and utilitarian object action or other people interaction. But its mobile opportunities – to get the role and to reject the role, to change the roles freely- makes a person be a master of his own forces and possibilities, makes him revise his living in one dimension, his simplicity and one line interaction with other people. That is

why, though, it is not oriented to the outer benefit, game allows a person by a non-forced way to pay attention to the inner self creation and to person's relations with the outer world (first of all, with the world of social existence). Though, inner dialectics of the very game is outstandingly difficult. It is possible to reveal it, for example, with the help of masterpieces. Inner connection of the art ontological sense and the game ontological sense is quite vivid. More over, in G. Gadamer's philosophy the game on-tological sense defines the art ontological sense. Game is the very force of art, which involves the spectator or listener, allowing opening the world's reality not by a logical notion (category) application into the thinking process, but by a free thinking manipulation in the game. Precisely this was written by V. Ivanov and Russian symbolism theoreticians about the game sense in art on the board of 19 and 20 century.: "Shall we have at last art to be a merry craft, which it would like to be, - but not a jeremiad and satire, as it has defined itself almost from the very beginning of our written language, - not teaching and even not prophesying, but clever merriment? For not only because of the wine merry is a man, but because of any play of his divine spirit. And shall the artisan of a merry craft full fill merry orders, but shall not grieve and keep the fast, like John, - and like John, call himself "a voice crying in the wildness"... The fate of our art is the fate of our culture, the fate of the culture is the fate of people's merriment. This is the name of culture: clever people's merriment "(V. Ivanov. About a merry craft and clever merriment //Native and universal. p. 65). In this reference one can feel indubitable influence of F.Nietzsche and his term "merry science", but, nevertheless, the problem is raised, and one of its possible salvations we shall find in Chekov's world of art.

The very genre of drama and widely researched writer's personal relations with the theatrical environment of Russia of that time

draw attention to the game phenomenon research in Chekov's drama. However, special attention is paid to the comedy-play "Sea-gull" and not only by the fact, that both leading heroines are actresses, and the main hero is a play-writer, but by the play composition as well. The comedy "Sea-gull" begins with the game situation and ends with it too. Apparently, the artistic reality sup-poses tough symbolic text surface, presence of sense in every image, in every turn of the plot; otherwise it would not differ from a routine narration of real or fabricated events. That is why "a play in the play", "a game in the game", and frequent use of the word "play" on the whole in the "Sea-gull" play cannot be accidental. At the beginning of the comedy the heroes gather together to watch "a play without action". Everything is mixed up in the situation: Arcadina actress becomes a spectator, and her son, a young dramatist Treplev, makes a performance of "new forms" especially for her. "It is difficult to act in this play, there are no alive people in it", - says Nina, a comedy's heroine (**, 13, 10). But, may be, in this artistic reality there are no alive people at all? Here, the leading persons are actors themselves. So, the "Sea-gull" comedy does not only begin with a game but ends with it too:

" Arcadina: ...We shall PLAY and drink. Let's sit down, sirs. And every-body sits down to play at the table ".

Such drama framing by game situations and the play beginning after Treplev, having committed suicide in the last act, makes us, as well, decide what before us is – it is not just simply a lotto play, or a home performance game, it is a symbol of a certain image, which demands further research.

Let's examine the "Sea-gull" play dynamics, proceeding from its in-ner logic, which is set by the initial game-performance, given by Treplev in the first act of "Sea-gull". At first, let's try to understand, what the "new forms" mean? What kind of old forms are rejected by him? What kind

of play does not he want to play? He himself speaks about it:

“When the curtain is raised and the evening lights are on, in a three-walled room, these brilliant talents, the priests of divine art depict, how people do eat, drink, love, walk, wear their jackets; when they try to fish out some moral from commonplace pictures and phrases, the moral which is small, comfortable, useful at domestic utensils; when I am given one and the same, one and the same thing in thousand variants, - then I am running and running away, like Maupassant ran away from the Eiffel tower, which pressed upon his mind by its commonplace” (**, 13, 8).

This multi-words dialogue is suddenly interrupted by Sorin’s retort: “It is impossible without theatre”.

In G. Gadamer’s and J. Hasing’s research of the ontological game sense as a method of human existence, they come to a conclusion that, the player subjective state does not matter so much, as the existence of the game itself: “Even if we are speaking about the games, where they strive for full filling of independent tasks, there is always some risk, that the game “will go” or “won’t go” according to the scenario, that a good luck can be with the player or it can be a bad luck, and suddenly the situation can change for the worse or for the better, that fact makes up all the attractiveness of the game. Thus, the person, who tempts his fate in such a way, as a matter of fact, becomes tempted himself. In fact, the game subject – and it is obvious when there is only one player, - is not a player, BUT THE GAME ITSELF. THE GAME ATTRACTS THE PLAYER, INVOLVES HIM AND KEEPS HIM TIGHT” (**, 152).

What kind of game involves Treplev into itself? Apparently, we are again speaking of the “new forms”: not without reason this phrase sounds at first in his retort to Sorin, being repeated twice:

“ Treplev: We need new forms. The new forms are needed, and if there are none, then it is better to have nothing at all...” (**, 13, 8).

These “new forms” will echo in Arcadina’s irritation because of the “decadence” play of her son:

“ Arcadina: For the sake of a joke I am ready to listen to any gibberish, but here, we see pretensions for new forms, for new era in art. And, to my mind, there are no new forms at all, but just a wicked character” (**, 13, 15).

And, at last, the final, on the eve of his death, Treplev makes his con-fession:

“ Treplev: I have been speaking of new forms so much, and now I feel that, I am falling away by and by into the routine myself. (reading)... Yes, more and more I come to a conclusion, that the matter is not in old or new forms, but in that, what the per-son writes, not thinking about any forms, but writes, BE-CAUSE IT IS FLOWING FREELY FROM HIS SOUL...” (**, 13, 55).

If we accept the thesis that, before us there has been presented a theme of new forms from the very beginning to the end, then we may agree to the observation of G. Gadamer: “The player cognates the game as a su-perior reality “ (**, 155). The game, which begins as a performance, where there has been no any “alive person” and “no love”, ends by the act of the last human despair - suicide, where there is no and there will be neither “alive person”, nor “love “.

The Treplev’s game of “new forms” creator has not taken place, be-cause the new forms themselves have not begun working. His game has remained just a convulsive human effort, but anti-pragmatic and anti-utilitarian essence of the game could not have been realized. Treplev “creates”, trying to prove his own importance apart from his mother’s, now to Trigorin, now to Nina. There is no natural easiness and freedom let it be even tragic, but freedom:

“Treplev: ...There is like a nail in my brain, curse my brain together with my pride, which sucks my blood, sucks like a serpent ...” (**, 13, 56).

But, like any free creative work, game demands, strange as it may seem, to be closed in itself: “A spectator is not being supposed even in those games, which... are performed in front of the spectators. More over, they (games) are threatened to lose their playful character, which is so distinctive of them... Consequently, the game is transformed into a performance not by the forth wall absence; but rather by the game being closed in itself and it creates game openness for the spectator. The spectator just realizes what the game being as such” (**, 155).

Inner contradiction of Treplev is in the following: from the very beginning his play does not suppose any spectator, but at the same time, it needs the spectator for finishing the performance integrity. Any creation is made for somebody. Performance needs spectators for giving it some sense and completeness. Treplev’s artistic play about World’s Soul and his personal life play have been cut short by one and the same reason – absence of proper inner sense of the performance, which makes it meaningful for the spectator. This dependence on the spectator is imaginary, and, in fact, it closes the performance as meaningful: the game transformation into art, into an artistic work can not take place. There is a talent, some energy, but there is no capability to perform any ACTION.

On the contrary, Nina Zarechnaya constructs her “game” like an ACTION. May be at the beginning, she has no energy, for the action responding to its maximum degree of the truth: “Undertook she almost constantly for the big parts, but she played rough, tasteless, with much howling, with sharp gestures. There were moments, when she screamed in a talented way, died with some talent, but there were just moments

“ (**, 13, 50). But everything changes, when the real suffering of her life reaches its highest degree: “Now I am not the same... I am a real actress, I play with pleasure, with ecstasy, getting intoxicated while on the stage and feeling myself being beautiful” (**, 13, 58).

Game leads its participants by most difficult ways and paths. The player initial target does not always coincide with the target of the game itself, as far as the game also demands outer space for full filling its integrity. This outer space includes in itself both other people, and life circumstances of the given player, which seem to be not included into the given concrete game. Strange as it may seem, game demands from players and spectators extremely serious attitude towards itself, demands full return, up to self-oblivion, up to being fully captured by game.

Notwithstanding of the complete failure of private life (breaking-off of the relations with her beloved man, her child’s death), Nina, manages to become captured by her own game and come up to the borders of real art, which revealed the reality truth, having been hidden. The other thing is Treplev, who initially has a talent, but he does not realize any possibilities of creative game, as far as the creativity itself does not capture him fully. He always compares himself feverishly with others, with Trigorin, who remains his secret competitor both in art and in private life.

But the contest between Treplev and Trigorin is a one-sided, incomplete game. Only Treplev takes part in it. But the playing competition won’t take place. All Treplev’s challenges are simply ignored by Trigorin, making Treplev perform more and more absurd, rash actions. But absurdness can transform into act of abomination – a murder and a suicide. A bird, a sea-gull is murdered - why, what for? What a cruel game has begun, but do the outer conditions demand such cruelty? Apparently, there is no such necessity. This is jealousy of his mother, jealousy of his

beloved girl, jealousy of the famous writer, of many other people – with easy characters, with good luck; jealousy, conversing into a murder. The famous Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti finds out a formula of suicide in one of his novels: “a self-murderer – is a manqué murderer”.

In common, non-theatrical life, suicide is the most terrifying event for human existence. Death is coming with it for the first time into the human world, up till now there has been no death in this world. Human’s life is a constant overcoming of oneself, a constant overstep of one’s limits. Some life situations vanish, other situations appear – this is the core of life, to be the everlasting transformation. Transformation refusal in any case means death - either slow, under the cover of vegetable or animal existence, or instant – in the form of a murder or a suicide.

Treplev commits both: a sea-gull murder – what would have been his attitude towards the “beautiful bird” murder, if it had been done, for example, by Trigorin? Treplev and Trigorin do not differ as “bad” and “good”. Visa versa, they extremely resemble each other. They are like two comedy centers, and other personages, excluding Nina, shade their relations, make them opposite each other like in the mirror. Nina image symbol is some how more difficult. Nina is her own part, World’s Soul, which is being re-fined in sufferings and her initial talentlessness turns out to be a life full of meanings.

But here, we see two men, undoubtedly talented by nature. And what is out of it?

“Trigorin: ... Day and night I am overcome by one and the same haunting thought: I must write, I must... Hardly have I finished a narrative, for some reason, I have already to write another one, then the third, after the third the fourth must come... I write constantly, as if traveling by relay, otherwise I can’t. And what is here beautiful and bright, I ask you? Oh, what a wild life!.. And in

those years, in my best youthful years, when I was just beginning, my writing was all a sheer torture. A small writer, especially when he is unlucky, seems to himself being clumsy, awkward, unnecessary, every nerve being strained, worried; irrepressibly roams he about people, concerned in literature and art, unacknowledged, ignored by everybody, being afraid of looking directly, daring not looking into somebody’s eyes, LIKE A PASSIONATE PLAYER, WHO HAS NO MONEY...” (**, 13, 29).

“Treplev: Enough! Curtain! Curtain down! Sorry! Я have lost from my sight, that only few of the elite can write novels and play on the stage. I have violated the monopoly! Me... I... (Wants to say something else, but waves his hand and goes to the left)” (**, 13, 14),

Inner feelings of heroes-”like a passionate player, who has no money” – are seemed to be extremely alike. Moreover, their actions are alike at the bottom. One kills the sea-gull. And the other performs his own scenario: “a man has come, has seen and, as for there is nothing to do, has killed her, like the very sea-gull “ (**, 13, 31- 32).

Then why is the play, where there is so much suffering and so many destroyed lives, nevertheless called a comedy? There can be given two answers to the question, as we see. The first one we have investigated at the very beginning. The “Sea-gull” comedy is the play, where the main event is the game. Actresses and writers, landowners and doctors, teachers and stewards perform a play for us, where the decorations are the moon and the lake, and the country estate. Could it fail to be called a comedy – the life, presented as endless game?

The second answer is somehow more difficult and demands to address not an artistic symbol, but a philosophic one. This symbol is a situation of indefiniteness, zombie-situation, situation of

Kafka, creating a “through the looking-glass” world.

This situation is described in details in a work of M.K.Mamardashvili “Consciousness and civilization”. Philosophic sense of the work is to define the circumstances, under which the human consciousness real work be-comes possible. The given problem statement also suggests “unreal” work of consciousness, that is the situation of absurd. The situation of indefinite-ness, the same as the situation of absurd, is characterized by the fact that, outwardly they are revealed through one and the same subject and symbolic nominations.

The situation of indefiniteness includes in itself two moments:

1) A famous phrase “cogito ergo sum” by Descartes - “I think, consequently, I exist”. It means that, when I come into the world, the world is not complete, and there is always a place for me in it. “All the meanings of this world are created by me and through me. In this sense a man is a creature capable to say: “I can, I think, I exist”; and there are opportunities and circumstances of the world, which a man can comprehend, under which he can act as a human, can take responsibility and can know something ... For such a world is being created, and YOU can and may, whatever visible anti-necessities of nature, spontaneously natural compulsions and other circumstances could be “ (**, 110).

2) In the world’s structure there are experimentally discovered ob-jects, subjects, integrities - projects or development conceptions, thanks to which a man, an ultimate creature in space and time, can sensibly perform acts of comprehension by his own experience, of moral action, appreciate, get satisfaction in problem’s salvation and so on. That is that the world could be even meaningless, but sense is possible, as far as there are “special mind-comprehensible objects” in it, guaranteeing this right and comprehension” (**, 111).

Human “normal” situation includes that, “something else is necessary to be turned (again and again) into the situation, subjective to sensible evaluation and salvation, for example, in terms of ethic and personal dignity, that is a situation of freedom or refusal from it as one of the possibilities of freedom» (**, 111).

And what concerns the third situation, the situation of indefiniteness, zombie-situation, so it outwardly does not anyhow differ from “normal” situations. The other thing is that inner acts, including consciousness, do not take place. And then instead of a human consciousness we see a zombie-consciousness, and instead of a human world – a world “through the looking-glass”.

“The situation of absurd is indescribable; it can be delivered only by grotesque, BY LAUGHTER. The language of good and evil, courage and cowardice has nothing to do with it, as far as the situation is not in the sphere, outlined by acts of primary spaciousness. The language on the whole appears on the basis of such acts. Such situations are alien to their own language and do not possess human commensurability... They resemble a night-mare, when every attempt of thinking and self-comprehension, any search for truth would resemble a search for a lavatory by its meaning-lessness... The search for him is a purely mechanic way out of the situation, its automatic salvation – has found, has not found! That is why this indescribably strange person is not tragic, but ABSURD, REDICULOUS, ESPECIALLY IN HIS QUASI-EXALTIATED SOARINGS...

THIS IS A COMEDY OF TRAGEDY IMPOSSIBILITY, GRIM-ACE OF SOME BEYOND “SUFFERING”. It is impossible to take the situation seriously, when a man searches for the truth, as if searching for a lavatory, and visa versa, in fact a man searches just for a lavatory, but it seems to him that it is the truth or even justice... Ridiculous, odd, of every-day use, absurd, it is

like some drowsy quagmire, something beyond” (** 112-113).

A situation of a destroyed consciousness, a comedy of tragedy im-possibility, this is the situation of Treplev-Trigorin. Their behavior very much resemble “authorship”, and very much resemble the actions of “affec-tion”, and very much resemble “torments and sufferings”. But some very important condition is not fulfilled, the condition which anticipates the concrete existence (inclusion of oneself into the world existence, and inclu-sion of one’s own world into it as well, comprehension of this inclusion ne-cessity), and “it is already late” to write, to love, to suffer. If Trigorin’s situation could be solved by a reference to the past - “there” was “love”, there was striving for talent, there was a possibility to live a real life, but for Treplev, being a young man, the situation “it is already late” does not have any approval.

Thus, existence authenticity of Chekhov’s heroes– Treplev and Trig-orin - remains undecided. One self’s existence, a possibility of being one-self in the ontological game act, leading to a genuine creativity, has been realized by neither of them. And even the suicide - neither the first attempt, nor the second one, the really committed suicide, has failed to make Tre-plev’s sufferings meaningful, because up to the last moment his inner life has been divided between love and envy, between striving for an independ-ent free creativity and a constant jealous of the other man, between his own existence and the existence of others in himself, between the truth and non-authenticity.

Psychologists affirm that a suicide materializes, makes substantial the inner condition of a man before direct death. More often, it is destruc-tion, a real emptiness - “has there been a boy at all?”

The “Sea-gull” comedy as a work of literature carries in itself a con-crete essence of any work of art. In 4 century B.C. Aristotle defined for the

first time the essence of art as an imitation in his “Poetics” treatise. By the ancient thinker, various kinds of poetical literature differed according to the forms and methods of imitations. But under the word “imitation” Aristotle meant something bigger, then simply coping of reality.

One can understand Aristotle, if addresses to the esthetics of his teacher, Platoon, for whom art is an imitation of objects, but objects them-selves do not have their own essence and that is why they are an imitation of their ideas. That is why art is an imitation of imitation (in detail **, 32-56). In 20 century philosophy and art theory were interested by active char-acter of the imitation, when objects are not copied but created over again in the creative work of a master, who reveals the core of the object, its real es-sence.

Gadamer answers the question, what the ancient imitated, the follow-ing way – they imitated the world order and the spiritual order. We have to perceive the order through its imitation in an artistic work, though it were poetry, paintings, sculpture, music or drama. A tragedy, comedy or drama also imitate some world order, cease its essence and show it before us, per-form it before us in united art of a dramatist and actors. By the way, differ-ence between drama and poetry was already known to the same Aristotle: “...a tragedy is not an imitation of passive people, but of an ACTION, of life, happiness; and happiness and unhappiness consist in ACTION. And the aim of a tragedy is to depict some ACTION, but not a QUALITY... an EVENT, a legend make up the aim of a tragedy, and the aim is the most important. More over, a tragedy is IMPOSSIBLE without an action, and possible without characters” (**, 652).

If art is a creativity-and-imitation of the world order, then what kind of order is achieved in Chekhov’s “Sea-gull” comedy? Of course, there is no saying about the previous, harmonious universal order of Nature. There is no stable world

of relations and emotional sufferings. The artistic work itself, the drama itself just reminds us about possibility of order in our outer and inner life. Our inner feelings, comprehension, reflections are built around the play. They are fed by the energy of play content, its form and its poetics.

“The artistic work stands as order guarantees among the world falling to pieces, the world of habitual and dear things; and, may be, all the forces of economy and support, the forces having been carrying on them-selves the human culture, having got their basis that, what is presented to us archetypically in the work of painters and in art experience: we do always put again in order, what is falling to pieces “ (**, 242).

Then Chekhov’s play sense is pouring out from itself into the work of our thinking. We shall interpret his symbol-images by the language of commonplace conscious, and by the language of complicated philosophical notions. Subtle inner dialectics of the play heroes’ existence is outwardly depicted extremely stingily – people are speaking, drinking tea, playing the lotto, making home performances. Behind this outward usualness all the existence drama, being revealed in an authenticity – non-authenticity di-lemma, is being slightly open only at some symbolic moments – the murder of the bird, the young man’s suicide. But these symbolic moments attract us, who are reading and watching the performance, us, the spectators, who, by our own existence, fulfill the game of the performance up to its integrity. The drama essence of Chekhov is shown here not in the play of high passions, but in the fact, that exactly his artistic works make us regulate outer and inner order in ourselves, overcoming those situations, in which the heroes of this strange “comedy” have found themselves. The first situation, which we have investigated earlier, is an ontological status of the game, in which the human existence is involved and which sets a row of parameters to it, the parameters, which allow exiting the game

only in an act of a sincere and free creativity. The game notion includes not only characters’ special efforts to realize a commonly accepted condition of a “writer”, an “actress”, and an “affectionate” in them. A common condition of the artistic reality is also revealed in the notion, and its peculiarity is the opening and the hiding at the same time of its playing existence, the opening and the hiding of its fabrication, that is artificialness.

The notion of the truth is widened by an inclusion in it an irrational game condition, which demands from its participant a full and selfless plunge. A game participant creates an invented artificial world inside the game, which changes the structure of its own actions, and continues acting through the structure change even when the game is already visually over. The game notion allows to connect “natural” easiness of playing conscious condition to a creativity without any visual compulsion (but, nevertheless, it goes without saying, that the creativity is necessary.), “Compulsion” of oneself to a game finishes by complete inner self-destruction, as far as violence is being doubled - and from the side of objective (and human) world and now also from one’s own ego. Conjectural freedom turns out to be a double compulsion. An attempt of authentic existence through the game ends up by the ascertaining of its non- authenticity by the act of suicide.

The problem of existence authenticity, as its being true, continues to be developed in Chekhov’s works and through the opening of such method of human existence, which in Heidegger’s philosophy has been called “existence in the face of death”. The game of Treplev’s life has been finished exactly with death. But not only his life. The whole row of heroes of other plays finishes or is trying to end up their lives, committing suicides or with the help of outer forces. Further research will be dedicated to the research of this method of heroes-symbols existence of Chekhov’s drama.

3. At first sight to expose the connection of existential-ontological “existence in the face of death” with heroes-symbolic biographies of Chekhov’s drama is extremely easy: Treplev shoots into himself, uncle Vanya tries to commit a suicide, Tuzenbach is killed in a duel, and cherry orchard is cut down and is perishing from axes... And so on, and so on, and so on... But physical death, as a biological life termination, means very little in the existential “existence in the face of death”, all the more that suicide is so unnatural. If the research theme of human existence were the phenomenon of a suicide, we would have to address to quite another thinker – Albert Camus, for whom exactly the suicide is the only theme, justifying philosophy existence (ref. his famous essay “About Absurd” “Myth about Sisyphus”). For Albert Camus, human existence is absurd from beginning to end; life absurdness admittance, challenge to life in its absurdness – this is the paradoxical salvation of human existence sense problem in philosophy. But in such a case we are oriented to Heidegger’s understanding of “existence in the face of death”. His conclusions are quite contrary to the conclusions of A. Camus. The word “death” does not have masochistic nuance of self-frightening, death is perceived here as “temporariness”, “finiteness”, as a quality of human existence itself. It is temporariness in the sense of the finiteness.

Philosophic point of view at a man brings us to a paradox elucidating: a man can operate an infinity notion, though, at first sight, it is already unclear that, how the notion could be formed at finite and mortal man’s mind, which has got just a limited experience. More over, it is unknown, how a man can operate a law notion, a moral notion, first of all, if the law notion supposes its “ever” fulfillment for any time and space. One of the problem’s salvations is given by M. Heidegger, when he says about death’s presence in any human deed, in any experience. Situation temporariness

makes it (situation) complete, integral. Only for the complete situation it is possible to raise a problem of meaning. Only that thing has meaning, which is completed. So, the problem of history meaning was raised for the first time in the Christian world outlook in the middle Ages, because exactly the Christians perceived their being “before the end of the world”. Jorge Luis Borges has put this world outlook into a capacious phrase: “As always, we are living at the end of times” (ref. **, 89).

Human existence is comprehended and has got meaning only because it is temporal and mortal. All the human senses and moods, and all the human deeds are characterized by the temporariness and mortality. In his dramas, Chekhov discloses a life before us, the life which is already over. His heroes very often experience their present condition as constant, as if dragging out for centuries:

“Astrov: Well... I have become another person for the last ten years. And what is the matter? Overloaded am I with work, like a nurse. From morning till evening I am always at feet, restless, and at night I am lying under the blanket and all frightened of being called to a patient... How could one fail to grow older? And the life itself is dull, silly, dirty... This life is dragging you in. Only odd fellows are around you, nothing but only odd fellows; and if you live by them for two or three years, by and by, imperceptibly you are becoming an odd fellow yourself. What an inevitable fate” (**, 13, 63-64).

Or:

“Olga: Every day I am at gymnasium and then I deliver lessons till evening, and that is why I have got constant head aches and there are such thoughts in my mind as if I am already old. And in fact, for these four years I have been working at gymnasium, I feel as my strength and my youth is leaving me daily by and by, drop by drop.” (The same, 72).

Or:

“Irene: Oh, I am a poor thing... I can not work and I won't work. It is enough, enough! I have been a telegraphist, now I serve at the town council and I hate everything I am given to do...I am twenty four soon, and have been working for a long time al-ready, my brain has dried out, I have grown thin, faded away, became older, I have got nothing, nothing, no satisfaction, and time is passing by, and it seemed I am going away from real, beautiful life, going farther and farther into some gulf. I am desperate, and I do not understand how I am still alive, how I have not killed myself yet ...” (The same, 74).

Almost the bitterest mood is of Andrew's in “Three sisters”; what is worse, that we, the spectators and the readers, know in what a vulgar situa-tion he has found out himself. Here not only one's own life, but here the life of all the world-town is infinite and dreary:

“Andrew: Oh, where is it, where has my past gone away, when I have been young, cheerful, and clever, when I have had dreams and my thoughts have been graceful, when my present and my future have been lit up by hope? Why do we become dull, grey, uninteresting, lazy, indifferent, useless, unhappy, hardly having started our living... Our town is already two hundred years old, there are one hundred citizens living in it, and there is none, who would not be the same like others, no one zealot, neither in the past, nor in the present, no any science devotee, no any zealot of art, no one at least slightly significant man, who would provoke envy or striving for imitating him... they do only eating, drinking, sleeping, and then they die... then are given births others and they are also eating, drinking, sleep-ing, and, in order not to become torpid from dullness, they diversify their lives by an ugly gossip, vodka,

cards, litigious-ness, and wives deceive their husbands, and husbands lie, pre-tend that, they see nothing, hear nothing, and vulgar influence presses upon children irresistibly, and god's flame is fading away in them, and they become corpses resembling each other, as pitiful, as their fathers and mothers” (the same, 181-182).

Most researchers of Chekhov's literary works, as a rule, take such kinds of word-images as a description of “dullness“, “vulgarity“, “insignificance” of the personages in his works. All this really takes place. Even the point of view at Chekov as at a thinker does not change that, what is considered to be the main Chekov's theme: “Chekov raises at full volume and artistically the problem of mediocrity, mental and spiritual narrow-mindedness, spiritual Philistinism, which make life tasteless to both oneself and others, make it dull, hateful” (**, 141).

Though not denying this fact, we would like to widen the formula-tion of Chekov's world outlook. This is not a simple banality, but an endless banality, commonplace infinity, domination eternity of insignificance and vulgarity. There is no sense in trying to go away – the commonness is everywhere. Philosophy of 20-th century tried to give a universal descrip-tion of the phenomenon in many of philosophic directions, M. Heidegger fixed it in his existential “das Man”, and Ortega-and-Gusset called it “a popular uprising“.

In spite of the fact, that Chekov's heroes deliver not only mournful, but also full of anguish monologues (they have said a lot of words, contain-ing hope for the better future, for a new, bright life), we see, that there is no any future RIGHT NOW. “Now and here” people are dieing of anguish and hopelessness. Chekov's persistence makes pay special attention to his own world outlook, which is defined by the philosopher S.N. Bulgakov as “Weltschmerz (world sorrow) at the full meaning of the word” (**, 145). It makes

Bulgakov compare Chekhov to ...George Gordon Byron. An incredible comparison: "The same as at Byron's, the main Chekhov's creativity motive is a sorrow about man's impotence at the fulfilling of a clearly or vaguely sensed ideal into his life; the dissension between the due and the existing, between an ideal and the reality, poisoning an alive human soul - all these made our writer sick more than anything else... Chekhov... mourned of man's winglessness, of his inability to reach even that height, which is quite accessible for him, of weakness of his heart longing for the good, which is unable to burn the boring foam and the rubbish of the commonplace" (**, 146).

This impotence comes out of the commonplace eternity vision:

"Ivanov: If not a silly, educated and a healthy man begins without any visual reason to bemoan his fate and goes downhill, then he goes downhill without any brakes, and there is no salvation for him! So, where is my salvation? What is it? I cannot drink – my head aches of wine; I am not good at bad poems; shall I pray to my daytime laziness and see something elevated in it? – I cannot. Laziness is laziness, weakness is weakness – I have got no other names. I have perished, perished – and there is nothing more to say!" (**, 12, 71-72).

Situation of despair brings Ivanov to death. And not only him! Though Christianity regards suicide despair as the most horrible sin, Chekhov like an author, is extremely merciful and indulgent to his personages. In spite of the mildness of the artist himself, his heroes reach the last limit in their despair. But their death is not the death, in the face of which the sense of life uncovers itself for the first time, and human existence becomes authentic for the first time. Chekhov's heroes' suicides are not an authentic life, but the most real, the most horrible death. The only excuse of theirs is the fact, that they kill themselves, but not

the others. But it is no coincidence that attempts of suicides are twice preceded by attempts of murder in Chekhov's plays – Voynitskiy tries to kill Serebryakov ("Uncle Vanya"), Treplev kills a bird instead of a man ("Sea-gull"), Lyvov challenges Ivanov to a duel ("Ivanov") and at last, Solyoniy kills Tuzenbach in a duel ("Three sisters"). The "Cherry orchard" play seems to stay apart from others, but here not a man is going to non-existence, but the whole world, all the previous habitual world is going away under the sounds of the axe, killing the cherry orchard.

Heroes' death, as far as it has been accomplished, is leaving nothing for their existence. It is impossible to speak about authenticity or non-authenticity in the face of death. Suicide puts an end to the hero's existence, but makes us to analyze the fact, why it has turned out to be inevitable.

Authentic "existence in the face of death" uncovers itself quite for different people. There are very few of them, and often they are so discordant to the common twilight mood of Chekhov's plays, that seem to be unexpected and as if coming out of some other world.

The most pure image of Chekhov's drama is Sonya from the "Uncle Vanya" play. Her full name is Sophia. The best Russian philosophic thought, beginning from Vladimir Solovyov and ending with P.A. Florenskiy, has been sophiology – the teaching about Sophia as the personification of an ideal world, as a come-between the Creator and the world, created by him, as Eternal womanhood, perceiving God's love and giving it into the human world. The mystical ending of the "Uncle Vanya" play "is not an anguish or delirium of young creatures crushed by life, but a hint of hidden thoughts and hopes of the author himself" (**, 151).

"Sonya: We, Uncle Vanya, shall live. We shall live a long, long row of days, long nights; we shall patiently undergo many severe or-

deals, whatever the fate will send us; we shall work for others, in our old age, not knowing any rest, and when it is high time for us, we shall humbly die and there, after death, we say, that we suffered, that we cried, that we were miserable, and the God will feel pity for us, and you and I together, uncle, dear uncle, shall see a life radiant, beautiful, fine, we shall rejoice and turn around and have a look at our today's misfortunes with a tender emotion, with a smile – and have a rest. I believe, uncle, believe passionately, with all my heart “ (**, 13, 115).

This monologue is not a naïve vision of unhappy girl, consoling her beloved uncle like a child, - this is a pure soul knowledge, which uncovers itself to her together with the knowledge about the end of any earth existence, and which comprehension is inevitable.

In three years after the “Uncle Vanya” play has been finished”, in the “Three Sisters” play there are depicted three sisters, to whom the end of their earth existence and earth suffering is also uncovered mystically and out-of-the-plot, and then both the comprehension of their existence and the understanding of common existence sense do sound in their monologues:

“Masha: Oh, how the music is playing! They are going away from us, one has gone already, for all, for ever, and we shall be alone to start our life again. We must live... must live...

Irene (puts her head on Olga's breast): The time will come, and everybody will know, what it is all for, what all these sufferings are for, there will be no any secrets, and for the time being we must live... we must work, just work! Tomorrow, I shall go alone, shall teach at school and shall give all my life to those, who need it, may be, they need it. It is autumn now, winter is coming soon, and will cover everything with snow, and I shall work, shall work...

Olga (embraces both sisters): The music is playing so merrily, cheerfully, and I want to live! Oh, my God! The time will pass by, and we shall go away for ever, we shall be forgotten, forgotten will be our faces, voices and how many there have been of us, but sufferings of ours will be transmitted into the joy of those, who will live after us, happiness and peace will come to earth, and those, who live now will be spoken well and blessed. Oh, darling sisters, our life is not yet over. We shall live! The music is playing so merrily, so happily, and it seems that in a little while and we shall know, why we are living for, and what we are suffering for... If I knew, oh, if I knew!” (**, 187-188).

As a religious thinker, S.N. Bulgakov finds the proofs of sincere religiousness of the author himself in these scenes. We suppose, that it is impossible to say anything exactly instead of the dramatist himself, who was always keeping off one-sidedness and rough simplification of his opinion, but sincere confession of Sonya: “I believe passionately, with all my heart...” illustrates the possibility of belief in superhuman termination of Chekhov's sufferings, or, at least, it illustrates his deep respect for faith itself. Thus, to our mind, the dramatist solves the problem of existence authenticity, the existence which becomes possible for him and his heroes “in the face of death”. The confirmation of these words one can also find in the situation salvation of Nina Zarechnaya, who has come to the very brink of ruin - “ occasionally, a man has come, has seen and, as for there is nothing to do, has ruined...” (**, 13, 58). She continues living, but not in that blind way, but realizing her life finite meanings in her existence:

“Nina: Now I know, I understand, Kostya, that in our business it is indifferent weather we play on the stage or we write, the main thing is not fame, not glory, and not that I

have been dreaming about, but an ability to endure. Be able to bear your cross and believe. I do believe, and it is not so painful for me and when I think of my vocation, I am not afraid of life” (**, 13, 58).

In the work of Y.M. Lotman “Death as a Plot Problem” is written: “Linear culture building makes the death problem one of the dominant in the culture system. Religious consciousness is the way of the death over-coming “death is trampled by death”. But the culture is too much plunged into the human space, in order to be limited by it and simply to decline the death problem, as an imaginary one. Notion of death (the end) cannot be solved by a simple negation as far as, here cosmic and human structures are intersected” (**, 420). But further he says that “a special form of victory over death and its overcoming is suicide...” (The same, 421). And in spite of the fact, that Chekov’s heroes act very often right this way, the multi-dimension-ness of author’s narration allows to disagree with this decision.

The complicated logic of suicide is in the following, that suicide, as a definite human condition negation, is necessary, but not as a murder of one’s own life and not as a physical suicide. Rejection of the previous con-scious condition, when a man cannot solve the arisen problem by the previ-ous, habitual for him means; when it is demanded, a sort of, “to be born over again”, is a paradoxical necessity for the human existence itself. A man continues living, but we say, that he “has become quite other person”. It has happened to Nina, and to tree sisters, and to Sonya. And what con-cerns, so called, a “real” suicide, existence vanishes together with it for ever, and in Chekov’s plays, ending by the hero’s suicide, the curtain falls down immediately after it. Eternal death obviously celebrates a triumph. The only thing, which can be set off against such death is making life tran-scendent in creativity,

patience and labor (compare to Heidegger’s existen-tial “care”).

Y.M. Lotman writes: “In literature work, if the theme of death is be-ing implemented into the plot, then in fact it must be subjected to a negation” (the same, 422). Death is absolute in life, in art it is relative, but it does not prevent us from “having an experience of death tragedy and at the same time feeling it almost deeper than in the reality itself” (the same, 423).

“Death negation” in Chekov’s works is not out loud, not of pathos. Lev Shestov calls him, not ironically at all, but with respect - “the quietest writer”: “The leitmotiv of the last Chekhov’s works is: “You feel, that peo-ple hardly hear you, that you should speak out loud, should cry. But it is abominable to cry. And you speak quieter and quieter and soon you may stop speaking at all” (**, 641). The philosophical existential “existence-in-the-face-of-death” helps to hear the voice of “the quietest writer” so, as if he cries about it.

An accomplished suicide looks like an act of despair in Chekov’s drama, appearing before eternity of vulgarity and commonplace, but it cannot be the truth (authenticity) of human existence. It means inability to submit and incomprehension of simple labor possibility, of simple care as a sense of human existence. It means the death of not only the body and the soul but of the spirit, which is a possibility of free immortal creativity. “There is no happiness in the world, but there are peace and will” – this is the meaning, “peace and will” which are uncovered to the best, the purest, the real heroines of Chekhov’s art:

“Sonya: We shall have a rest! We shall hear angels, we shall see the sky all in diamonds, we shall see, as all the earth evil, all our suffer-ings will be flooded by the charity, which will overwhelm the whole world, and our life will become quite, gentle, sweet, as tenderness itself. I believe, believe... “ (**, 13, 116).

There is just the same truth in almost childish ingenuous words, as in a discourse of a very serious philosopher G. Hegel: “Death, if we call the mentioned reality this way, is the most horrible thing, and in order to keep the dead, the supreme force is needed. But not that life, which is afraid of death and only protects itself against destruction, but that one, which endures it and preserves itself in it, is the life of spirit. The spirit reaches its truth, only having found itself absolutely disrupted. The spirit is that force, but not that positive, which makes eyes turn from the negative, like, when we call something insignificant or false, we finish with it immediately, turn away and pass to something else; but it is the force, when it faces the negative and stays in it. The staying is the very magnificent force, which converts the negative into existence” (ref. **, 475-476).

Whatever strange it could seem, but in Russian religious philosophy neither the game phenomenon, nor the phenomenon of “existence-in-the-face-of-death” is considered as the truth (authenticity) content of human existence. “Game” cannot be the subject of religious philosophy at all, because from the point of view of religious world outlook the human existence takes place not only in time and space, but in an

absolute dimension, which takes everything for “serious”. What concerns death phenomenon and suicide, this is just the same. They, by themselves, irrespectively of existence eternity, cannot be the subject of Christian philosophy attention. As far as Christian philosophy considers, that soul is immortal and body is subjected to resurrection, all this removes the drastically raised problem of death as a condition of fallen and transient. The only exception is L.P. Kar-savin, the author of “A Poem about Death”, who considers that the main drama of universal existence spreads around a sacrificial death as the centre of its plot. Raising and solving most difficult metaphysical problems, connected to the existence truth and authenticity of thinking, in the beginning of 20 century the Russian philosophic thought comprehends the game phenomenon and the phenomenon of death as the inevitable moments for human being in the world outlook, taking the artistic form, the form of literature. The problem of meaningful human existence as real (authentic) existence has been drastically raised and solved in Chekhov’s drama, filling in the problems of the philosophic world outlook, the problems connected to the raise and salvation of the truth problem as human existence authenticity in the Russian philosophy.

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