



FOREIGN RECEPTION OF A.P. CHEKHOV
ЗАРУБЕЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕПЦИИ А.П. ЧЕХОВА

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**The epistemological aspect of conceptual sphere
in the artistic world of A.P. Chekhov**

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to explore the gnoseological aspect of Anton Chekhov's art world conceptual sphere, specifically the disconnect between reality and human perception. The research is grounded in theoretical works on the gnoseological nature of creativity and scientific works on Chekhov's artistic philosophy. The literary analysis focuses on Chekhov's works from the 1880s to 1890s. It is stated that Chekhov's conceptsphere of fiction delves into the existential experiences of individuals, which can either reinforce or erode their belief in positive change of their destinies. The authors demonstrate that Chekhov skillfully portrays the scholastic consciousness imposed on individuals by society, as well as the consequences of erroneous consciousness resulting from dramatic circumstances and leading to fatal tragic consequences. Chekhov's prose avoids excessive melodrama while maintaining an engaging narrative structure and style. It is revealed that the conceptsphere of Chekhov's art world doesn't contain the image of ideal hero, but is based on the position of gnoseological optimism, which lies in the fact that the world can still be cognized, and the discovery of its laws is an infinite trajectory of human knowledge.

Keywords: author's position, hero, plot, text structure, style, gnoseological aspect, gnoseological optimism, scholastic consciousness,

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Гносеологический аспект концептосферы художественного мира А.П. Чехова

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Аннотация. Цель исследования – обоснование гносеологического аспекта концептосферы художественного мира А.П. Чехова, связанного с доминантным принципом несовпадения действительности и воспринимающего ее человеческого сознания. Методологической основой послужили теоретические работы в области концептуализации гносеологической природы творчества и научные труды, касающиеся художественной философии А.П. Чехова. Материалом для литературоведческого анализа стали произведения писателя 1880–1890-х гг. Определено, что гносеологическая направленность концептосферы художественного мира А.П. Чехова обнаруживается во всестороннем изучении индивидуального экзистенциального опыта существования личности, ведущего либо к сохранению, либо к утрате веры в позитивные изменения в собственной судьбе. Обосновывается, что в образах своих героев А.П. Чехов воссоздавал природу схоластического сознания, навязанного личности общественным большинством, и анализировал сущность ошибочного сознания, приобретенного в силу драматических жизненных обстоятельств и ведущего к фатальным трагическим последствиям. Авторская позиция в чеховской художественной прозе лишена излишней мелодраматичности и в то же время избегает пассивного впечатления от предложенного сюжета благодаря особой повествовательной структуре текста и его стилистике. Сделан вывод о том, что концептосфера художественного мира А.П. Чехова не содержит образ идеального героя, но строится на позиции гносеологического оптимизма, суть которого в том, что мир все же познаваем и открытие его законов составляет бесконечную траекторию человеческого знания.

Ключевые слова: авторская позиция, герой, сюжет, структура текста, стилистика, гносеологический оптимизм, схоластическое сознание

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Introduction

The conceptual framework term introduced to science for the first time by the academician D.S. Likhachev has become a fundamental concept in cognitive linguistics and literary studies. The conceptual framework is “a knowledge about the world around us as mental images which turn into abstract symbols” (Tentimishova, 2016, p. 225). In the gnoseological model, cognitive processes are di-

rectly linked to “the synthesis of meanings and systems of signs” (Rtischeva, 2020, p. 39). They verbally represent the conceptual framework of an author’s creative world in literary creativity.

A.P. Chekhov’s creative world conceptual framework is based on the gnoseological idea that deep internal integrity is peculiar to the world around us, even in external chaos. So, in this respect, the ratio of absolute relativity of human knowledge as it is and reality as some absolute value is of great importance. A.P. Chekhov sees a dialectical nature in this ratio and finds its realisation in his creative world structure.

At the present stage, the papers of A.A. Kozakova, N.A. Arkhimenko, E.N. Kedrova, L.V. Baskakova, N.V. Izotova and other researchers discuss the literary analysis of the concepts “belonging to ontological and moral-ethical type” (A. Chekhov's conceptual framework, 2009, p. 15) in A.P. Chekhov’s literary works. Their semantics indicates that the conceptual framework of a writer’s creative world is based on a deep gnoseological approach that determines the peculiarity of a writer’s creative thinking. According to this approach, a literary text represents not only the poetics of finding or understanding some ontological knowledge about the world and a human but also the poetics that plunges a reader into the process of an endless search for the answers to the questions without specific solutions.

Discussion

As a science, Gnoseology explains the cognitive nature of a person’s nature, and A.P. Chekhov explores the existential representation of personal consciousness that “arises during the emotional upheaval of one’s existence” (Abramova, 2021, p. 199) referring to the given reality.

In the short story: “Misery” by A.P. Chekhov (1886), the grief overwhelms and tears the heart of the sledge-driver, Iona, more cruelly than ever. The misery that came back again and the pain of loss are similar to wet, heavy St. Petersburg snow covering Iona and his skinny mare from head to toe. Not even a week had passed before his son died in the city hospital, and Iona is sure that “death mistook the door” (Chekhov, 1983, vol. 4, p. 329), taking away not him but young life.

The grief and the pain of Iona’s loneliness amid the big city whirlwind are so great that he desperately seeks any contact with people. With a look of anxiety, Iona’s eyes stray among the crowd of people fussily moving past him. He hopes to find someone to share his grief with and listen to the story about his son’s illness and death.

Not finding anyone who would sympathise with him, Iona has concluded that it is useless to talk to people. So, his horse breathes on his hands and turns out to be the only listener captivated by his story about the anguish that torments his soul and heart.

The final lines of Chekhov's narrative contain the author’s hidden irony. It completes the hero's image, helps to avoid excessive melodrama in the creation narrative, and in this sense, it is the quintessence of the author's idea.

A.P. Chekhov shows the natural human's need to experience one's existentialism in sympathy and compassion perception of a fellow human being in Iona's image. The writer understands this existentialism as a symbol of the soul that has not died out yet and the beating of a living heart.

In Gnoseology, "any cognitive act includes the reflection of oneself by a person" (Dubrovsky, 2004, p. 42). The given principle is observed in the conceptual framework of A.P. Chekhov's creative world. In the short story: "Anyuta" by A.P. Chekhov (1886), the writer represents the subjective present of the main protagonists referring to the expected future. Showing "existential indifference" (Bashilova, 2010, p. 63) to her destiny Anyuta speculates about the bright future of Stepan Klotchkov, the medical student whom she lives with and is the sixth person in her female camp of the furnished rooms.

Klotchkov dreamed of a future medical career with a spacious professorial study and a respectable wife who does not resemble his unfortunate current companion. However, the presence of the protagonists is connected with despair and bounds with poverty. It is encapsulated in the space of the dirty room with scattered clothes and a wash-hand basin full of dish wash and cigarette ends. It keeps the protagonists. So, according to "Aesthetics" (Chekhov, 1983, vol. 4, p. 342), Klotchkov's desire to leave Anyuta and start a new life is a lack of character and not yet removed traces of human pity.

The writer gives the relativity of the vision of each of Chekhov's protagonists in the form of an internal monologue that clearly shows Klotchkov's egoism and the heroine's passive self-denial who submitted to her women's fate tamely long ago.

In the narrative structure, Chekhov uses a form of non-personalised direct speech, the hybrid nature of which does not produce a passive impression of someone else's gaze or statement on a reader. It inserts moral and ethical accents into the literary text, which are extremely clear to the readership.

The conceptual bases of Chekhov's creative world are revealed in recognition of 'the existential uniqueness of each individual's experience' (Myslivchenko, 2012, p. 97). In the short story: "Sleepy" (1888), they allow the creation of the gnoseological model of reality. In this reality, inhumanly difficult living conditions led the main character to the misconception that pushed her to murder a young child.

The origin of the misconception lies in the life story of a childhood-deprived teenager, driven to an extreme degree of insensitivity by humiliation and hopeless work in the master's house. The child's sleep-deprived mind finds an enemy, the murder of which will give long-awaited peace: "Kill the child and then sleep, sleep, sleep..." (Chekhov, 1983, vol. 7, p. 12).

The views of the narrator and thirteen-year-old insomnia-fatigued Varka are different. This difference is conveyed through the form of indirect speech. It enables the author not only to eliminate the sentimental and compassionate presentation of the plot but also to make a reader critically aware of the tragic aspects of reality in which a living person is forced to exist as spiritually dead.

The opposite turn of the problem is observed in the story “A Nervous Breakdown” (1888), in which not acquired but deliberately false ideas about reality and hypocritical moral principles firmly established in the public consciousness prevent the protagonist from finding a proper solution to the life question that has come him. The epistemological problematics of the presented plot are not only to unmask such social evil as prostitution, the false pathos of which frightens the main character but also to demonstrate the complex and contradictory nature of the problem confronting the main character.

A.P. Chekhov was first and foremost interested in the human being as an object involved in various life circumstances from which he gained observations and insights into the world around him. In the story “A Nervous Breakdown” (1888), the writer indicates the nature of the interaction between the protagonist's personality and the life conflict in which he finds himself. The erupted protest of Chekhov's hero could not challenge the social evil he faced. It leads him to an unfortunate end and drives him into a mental attack. Finally, the student Vasilyev is left with only two prescriptions for morphine and potassium bromide, and the sad realisation that all this treatment had been taken by him before comes to his mind.

In the literary text, the narrator's ironic tone shows the “scholastic nature” (Odesskaya, 2011, p. 127) of human consciousness and the impossibility of solving the problem, which upset the protagonist due to the complete indifference of the public to it.

Fiction and reality determine “the semantic side of the epistemological process” (Schneider, 2022, p. 17), which is realised in the conceptual framework of Anton Chekhov's creative world in a constant conflict of the most opposing worldviews and moral and ethical positions of his characters.

In the short story “In Exile” (1892), A.P. Chekhov explores the protagonist's existential view, which is associated with excluding the entire sphere of emotional and spiritual life in human consciousness. The old ferryman, Simeon, known as Tolkovy (Brainy), survived in the terrible conditions of a prison's hard labour only by killing all human feelings and desires. Desire gives rise to hope, and the unfulfillment of hopes in captivity leads a man to death. Tolkovy does not need sympathy for himself and feels no compassion for others.

The writer does not challenge the idea of the old ferryman Simeon, Tolkovy that a man is the most vulnerable when he has not lost his ability to trust and develop deep feelings. However, he is contrasted with the image of the young Tatar, who passionately disagrees with Tolkovy and is convinced that a man without feelings and desires is not alive but turns into clay or a stone.

However, the author's voice neither comments on the protagonists' arguments nor idealises the old prisoner's character. On the contrary, the character of the Tatar indicates the lack of life experience connected with youth and the still unrealised tragedy of his plight. However, through the prosaic story finale, the author's moral message about the need for an uncompromising struggle for the living human soul, even in the triumph of victorious evil and obscurantism, breaks through.

Chekhov's artistic conceptual framework raises eternal and global questions that the human mind tries to comprehend. The protagonist of the story: "Gusev" (1890), reflects on the vicissitudes and inevitable finitude of human existence after witnessing a dead human body sewn up in a sailcloth and thrown into the sea waves. The idea that it could happen to anyone raises a troubling question in his mind. However, in this case, the writer sees death not as an ethical problem but as an incomprehensible mystery which does not agree with human nature.

Gnoseology is "the problem of the conflict between the world reflected by cognitive cognition and the world that exists objectively" (Bryanik, 2010, p. 117), represented in the dialogical relativity of any viewpoint Chekhov's protagonists. In Chekhov's story "Lights" (1888), the narrator witnesses a dispute between two other people, Ananyev and Shtenberg, based on the idea of human existence frailty, the visible world as a whole and the statement of the uniqueness and the value of each human destiny. Leaving his casual acquaintances, the narrator admits that he has not derived a single resolved question from what he has heard and concludes: "You cannot make sense of anything in this world!" (Chekhov, 1983, vol. 7, p. 140). This statement clarifies the epistemological orientation of the conceptual framework of A.P. Chekhov's creative world, which recognises not only man's powerlessness in the search for the ultimate truth but the sometimes fatal impossibility to finding a reasonable explanation for the connection between a single event or the phenomenon of reality and the infinite variety and contradictory structure of the world around us at a particular stage of human knowledge.

The epistemological conditioning of Chekhov's work was not associated with the embodiment of the image of the ideal hero. However, the writer invariably kept faith in the human being, who can show cowardice and weakness in certain life circumstances, readiness for selflessness, and the most heroic deeds. The content of the writer's epistemological optimism was an unshakable confidence in the ability of a man to make endless discoveries, despite all the relativity and hypothetical nature of human judgments and knowledge about the world around us.

Conclusion

The research results indicate that the conceptual framework of A.P. Chekhov's creative world fully reflects his gnoseological approach to understanding reality and the most critical literary creativity goals and objectives. Through the images of his protagonists, A.P. Chekhov explores the type of individual consciousness as a process of experiencing one's existentialism ("Anyuta", "In Exile", "Misery"). However, the writer's attention is focused not only on the reflection and fixation of the ontological knowledge of his protagonists about the world around them. Chekhov's conceptual framework is based on the gnoseological principle of a person's cognitive activity, which is initially based on the conflict between the world reflected by human consciousness and the existing world ("Lights").

A.P. Chekhov triumphs over pretentious compassion and excessive melodrama by reproducing the existential states of his protagonists. However, simulta-

neously, the author's evaluative orientation acquires a noticeable moral and ethical nature.

The conceptual framework of A.P. Chekhov's creative world excludes the belief in an ideal hero and a person who, in the writer's opinion, can show both the best and the worst sides of one's character.

From the gnoseological viewpoint, the writer explores the error of human consciousness that is generated by dramatic life circumstances and results in a tragic act ("Sleepy"). On the other hand, A.P. Chekhov analyses the inertia of the scholastic worldview, conditioned by moral and ethical norms and ideas imposed on an individual by the public ("Nervous breakdown").

The essence of the gnoseological orientation of A.P. Chekhov's creative world is that human optimism, like acquired pessimism, does not come from slight speculative observations of reality. It derives from rich life experiences based on triumphs attained, tragic mistakes, delusions and suffering endured. Throughout his work, the writer strongly believed in man and the cognoscibility of the world around him despite the impossibility of discovering its laws at the present stage of human knowledge.

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