

**"School" text of the XIX century: A.P. Chekhov**

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**Abstract.** The article deals with the peculiarities of depiction of "school" in the creative work of the most outstanding author of Russian literature of the end of XIX century - A.P. Chekhov. It is shown that A.P. Chekhov, as distinct from such authors of the XIX century, as N.G. Pomyalovsky, F.M. Dostoevsky, N.G. Gagarin-Mikhailovsky, depicted all, what happened in the educational institution, not from the viewpoint of students, but in the outlook of the character-teacher: the school becomes the sphere, where the personality of many characters is revealed. The analysis of stories "The Teacher", "The Teacher of Literature", "The Man, who Keeps Himself in a Cotton Wool", the play "Three Sisters" helps to reveal negative dominating pathos in Chekhov's depiction of school. Stable component of "school" text, the opposition "school-house" supplements the creation of the image of pre-revolutionary school, as a space of bondage, in the creative work of the classicist. It is underlined, that Chekhov continues the tendency, which clearly outlined in the literature of the XIX century, to depict school negatively.

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**Introduction**

Despite the fact, that the topic of school in the Russian literature of the XIX century does not refer to key ones (it appears either in connection with the development of other topics, or is revealed in terms of minor and middle genres), by the end of the XIX century, the definite tendencies in depiction of school life were formed. With the whole variety of creative personalities of authors, describing educational institutions in pre-revolutionary Russia, it is possible to speak about single image of school, formed in Russian classical literature. The school can be depicted by writers in the outlook of pupil or teacher ("The Essays of Bursa" by Pomyalovsky, "A Raw Youth" by Dostoevsky, "The Childhood of Tema" and "Grammar-School Boys" by Gagarin-Mikhailovsky), bureaucrat, called to supervise the teaching process ("The Inspector General" by Gogol), but, irrespective of whose point of view is presented in the text, the relation to school frequently turns out to be negative [1]. Metaphors, revealing the essence of relation of Russian classics to school (hell - prison - court - the authority of deanery - police box), are lined up into one semantic range. A stable component of the "school text" of the XIX century is the opposition "school - house", where the house, according to archetypical presentations, is perceived as idyllic space, where the hero feels happy and protected [2], and the school is an alien, severe world, challenging a man for strength [3].

The works of the most outstanding author of the end of XIX century A.P. Chekhov present the valuable material to study the way, how the school topic was developed in native literature.

**Procedure**

The procedure of study is determined by the principles of historical-typological and structural-semantic methods of analysis of literary works.

**Main part**

In the stories and plays by Chekhov, we meet numerous different teachers - gymnasium, rural, home - and become the witnesses of lesson and examination situations, get to know about the relations in scholastic collective. The names of Chekhov's stories - "The Teacher", "The Teacher of Literature", "The Tutor", "Dear Lessons", "Examination", "Ideal Examination" - show, that school becomes the sphere, where the personality of many characters is shown.

In the whole, Chekhov continues the tendency, formed in the literature of the XIX century, to depict school negatively. The play "Three Sisters" is illustrative in this plan; its action takes place in provincial town, similar to Perm. The house of Prozorovs, presented on the stage, becomes an island of intelligence, spiritual aristocratism among grayness, routine, squalor [4], where life, according to the words of the youngest of Prozorovs, Irina, "blankets" the sisters "as weed" [5]. The out-stage space, turns out to be principally important for Chekhov, as a playwright-innovator; it is impossible to understand the specificity of dramatic conflict without this factor. The gymnasium in "Three Sisters" is an important part of this space; we get to know about its life from the stories of Olga Prozorova and Kulygin, who teach there.

The Chekhov's play lacks the direct details, pointing at the vices of educational system,

contemporary to Chekhov. Spiritually sophisticated Muscovite Olga, who speaks three foreign languages from childhood, is not subject to persecutions in the gymnasium; she even succeeds in life - in the last action we get to know, that she becomes a chief. Kulygin, with all his narrow-mindedness, primitiveness and absurdity, is not a monster, he is good-natures, indulgent, honest, hard-working and involved into his work.

However, at the same time, the gymnasium in the play becomes the implementation of provincialism, routine, gray commonness - all that, what the sisters try to escape, going to Moscow. In the beginning of the play, Olga complains of how the life seizes her. Despite the fact, that finally Olga becomes a chief, the gymnasium stays an alien world for her. However, this world is comfortable and natural for Kulygin; it is indicative, that communicating with close people, he continues to speak in his habitual manner of school teacher, although makes his speech with the subtle shading of humor.

It is Kulygin, who becomes the embodiment of gymnasium dogmatic spirit in the play, and, it is not for nothing, that he becomes the author of the book about the gymnasium history, which he presents to everyone, not understanding the irrelevance of his gesture. Appearing in the living room of Prozorovs in Irina's name day, Kulygin turns to surrounding people with instruction.

The opposition dream/reality plays an important role in the structure of "Three Sisters" [6]. A.P. Skaftymov determines the essence of conflict of Chekhov's plays as "chronic contradiction between the bearing dream and the power of imperious circumstances" [7]. The circumstances for Olga present loveless, exhaustible, irritative work in the gymnasium, not providing the psychic income; for Masha it is a life with annoying, narrow-minded, unable to understand her inner state husband - the teacher of gymnasium Kulygin [8].

The hero of the Chekhov's story "On the Lorry" (1987), the rural teacher Maria Vasilyevna, the same as Olga Prozorova, is to work in school due to circumstances, which she cannot withstand. The teacher's labor in the story is depicted as something prosaic, having nothing in common with creative work, taking away physical strength, health, stultifying, depriving of the ability to think and dream, not providing an opportunity to self-actualize, to create your own family.

The reader faces a dull picture of rural school routine, familiar to Chekhov very well, who, as is known, was interested in the state of rural schools.

The opposition school - house, typical of the

literature of the XIX century (N.G. Pomyalovsky, N.G. Garin-Mikhailovsky), is presented here in reduced view: A recollection about paternal home, lost forever, as about some idyllic space, appears in the consciousness of Maria Vasilyevna, who goes by lorry, as an antithesis to life in uncomfortable, cold flat, located near school.

It is possible to refer to the fact, that the story's character is an earthly, prosaic spirit, not found her real vocation; however, it is impossible to leave without attention the words of the author, that the work in rural school was endured only by "silent draught horses, like Maria Vasilyevna; the same vivid, nervous, impressible people, who spoke about their vocation, ideologic mission, soon became tired and left this affair" [9]. The contradiction of two types of teachers, "thrown" here as if slightly, shall not be left without attention: the teachers, who do not have the talent of "draught horses", who stay in school for the whole life, and "vivid, nervous, impressible" creative personalities, not enduring the school routine. This division is notable from the viewpoint of further development of school topic in native literature, although this contradiction is not the main one in the story. The feeling that the real life passes by tortures not only the lonely rural teacher, but also the characters of other Chekhov's works, those characters, who have nothing to do with the school according to the nature of their activity [10]. Even the successful merchant Lopakhin, who became the owner of the cherry orchard, finishes his triumphal monologue with the words: "Our awkward unhappy life would change anyway as soon as possible" [11]. In the integral system of Chekhov's ideas, it is this idea that takes the main place. That is why we should agree with V.I. Tyupa, who sees the source of dramatism of the situation, depicted in the story, in unconformity of internal determination of personal existence with its external entity [12].

The school (gymnasium) has a sleazy appearance in a well-known Chekhov's story "A Man, who Keeps Himself in a Cotton Wool" (1989). A history and geography teacher Kovalenko, with whom the author partly associates himself, although not identifies, furiously reveals the "stifling", "unclean" atmosphere, predominating in the gymnasium, the abnormality of which he feels, as an outside man. The main character of this story, the teacher of Greek language Belikov, is seemed to be among those, who create this unbearable atmosphere for creative people. However, for Belikov himself, the world of gymnasium is presented as not just alien, but even hostile and dangerous; it is not for nothing, that the teacher Burkin, being a narrator, mentions: "...in the morning, when we went to the gymnasium together, he was dull and pale, and it was seen, that

the crowded gymnasium, where he went, was terrible, disgusting to all his nature; it was difficult for him, a lonely person by nature, to go nearby" [13].

G.N. Kozlova, reasoning about the types of teachers, presented in the works of Russian writers, states, that Chekhov depicted the type of "conservative" teacher in the satirical image of Belikov, concentrating in his figure "the traits of such pedagogue, dispersed in the multitude of real prototypes" [14]. However, it would be a mistake to study the story "A Man, who Keeps Himself in a Wool Cotton" only as a work about school, despite the fact, that almost all characters, including the narrator, are connected with the gymnasium by nature of their activity. Chekhov shows not so much the type of the pedagogue, but a definite social-psychological phenomenon; the story of the teacher Belikov is its frequent manifestation. According to true notice of V.I. Tyupa, Belikov "is a kind of starting point in the range of Chekhov's images of human self-isolation" [12, 15].

Nevertheless, "A Man, who Keeps Himself in a Wool Cotton" has a direct relation to the topic of our research, as this story shows the important aspects in depiction of school life, absent in Chekhov's predecessors. M.V. Vlasova fairly notices, that "the tradition to reveal the image of the teacher in professional community is absent in pre-Chekhov literature" [16]. In "A Man, who Keeps Himself in a Wool Cotton", much place is given to relations inside the teachers' collective" [16]. The story, told by Burkin, about unsuccessful attempt of colleagues to marry Belikov and Varenka Kovalenko, characterizes badly not only the "man in a cotton wool", who did not endure the challenges of "real life", but also the whole teachers' community, which, for the lack of anything better to do, decided to carry out this cruel and awkward experiment.

The relations between teachers are also shown in the other Chekhov's stories: "The Teacher", "The Teacher of Literature", "Slander", "Order". M.V. Vlasova fairly mentions, that "the communication between teachers in Chekhov is a social-role communication: rumor, denunciation, compliments etc." [16].

The story "A Man, who Keeps Himself in a Wool Cotton" is also notable by the fact, that the subjects, taught by the characters-teachers, become the important traits in their portraits. The fact, that Belikov - the teacher of ancient languages, and his antagonist Kovalenko - the teacher of geography and history, can be interpreted in the context of important for the story opposition "restraint - sociability". The narrator tells directly about the fact, that ancient, dead languages were a peculiar case for Belikov, where he hid from life. The teacher of

geography, by nature of his activity, is open to the whole world in all his variety. The character of school discipline as if additionally "arrange" the image of the teacher.

### Conclusion

All Chekhov's stories and plays, which became the research object, show, that school becomes the sphere of personality manifestation of many characters of this author. Assuming, that the depiction of school was never a goal in itself for Chekhov; the professional belonging was only one of the details of his image. If in the works of the XIX century (Pomyalovsky, Dostoevsky, Garin-Mikhailovsky), the school is shown from the viewpoint of students, then, in Chekhov's works, perhaps for the first time in Russian literature, all happening in the educational institution, is frequently presented in the outlook of the character-teacher, who does not always express the author's position.

In literary researchers of last decades, the second half of the XIX century is not named as "the epoch of critical realism" any more, and the validity of this term itself is in doubt, however, the critical pathos of pieces about school, created in that period, is not in doubt and is perceived as dominating. The works by A.P. Chekhov prove this tendency.

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