AN ANALYSIS OF HUMOUR IN CHEKHOV'S STORIES
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By

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PREFACE

Chekhov is universally acknowledged to have begun his literary career as a humorist. The conventional critical opinion, however, is that Chekhov, as time went on, took an increasingly sombre view of life and ultimately lapsed into pessimism. This view was contradicted in his lifetime by his friends and those who knew him best. From their accounts it is clear that the personality of Chekhov, despite his many trials, retained its cheerful optimism to the very last.

The purpose of the present thesis is to analyse Chekhov's humour with the aim of showing that the above inconsistency is only apparent and that Chekhov ended his career in the same way as he began it -- as a humorist. By means of a chronological study of his works it can be shown that the optimistic outlook of his early years was not lost, but evolved for itself more serious, responsible and yet still essentially humorous forms of expression. Attention is therefore given in this thesis both to his life and to his stories in an attempt to define the reasons in his life for the changes in his literary technique and to demonstrate that there is in his stories an optimism which is consistent and is rooted in a universal and humane vision of life.
All quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from A. P. Chekhov, 
Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe 
Izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1944-51. The system of transliteration is the one used by the Library of Congress.

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INTRODUCTION

A. P. Chekhov is less known in the west as a humorist than as a creator of moody heroes, a bard of the "twilight" period of the 1880's in Russia. This assessment rests mainly on the evidence of his famous plays. Yet some critics have expressed the opinion that had he not written any plays he would still be regarded as a great writer. During his lifetime he was acclaimed in his own country as a master of humorous short stories, and modern English critics cite him, along with Maupassant, as the originator of the short story. His plays have obscured his greatness as a master of humorous short stories because they were exposed to a wider public and became better known. But without being understood in the larger context of Chekhov's work as a whole, they are open to misinterpretation.

One of the chief obstacles to the recognition of his achievement as a humorist has always been one of translation. Like poetry, humour is difficult to render into a foreign language. Chekhov's humorous stories lose a lot in translation, especially those early ones that were dependent for their humour on the dialects and mannerisms of certain regions of Russia. Humour expressed by language loses a lot in translation, especially when it is introduced into a society entirely different in manners and customs. In addition, humour created by language
is impossible to translate and most stories appear too ponderous when they are translated into the corresponding terms of a foreign language. What is more, Chekhov's works in translation usually did not appear in chronological order and therefore created an image of the author as one without a common idea in his life and art. Only chronological study can show a consistent pattern in the growth of Chekhov as an artistic personality. Through such a study we will come to recognize, as Thomas Mann recognized¹, that Chekhov was essentially a humorist and retained the characteristic qualities of the humorist to the end. The widespread view that he was a humorist only to begin with, and gradually lapsed into pessimism, is attributable to the lack of proper overall perspective. It does not take sufficient account of the possibility that a humorist may evolve different forms of expression and still remain a humorist.

Humour itself is very difficult to define satisfactorily. Different authors have given their own definitions of humour, its use and development. Stephen Leacock in Humour and Humanity defines it as kindly contemplations of the incongruities of life and the artistic expression thereof. Leacock feels that since humour means exaltation, the sense of personal delight in seeing something -- anything -- demolished or knocked out of shape, it has been undergoing in the course of the history upward and continuous progress, from horseplay to the humour of life itself.

where "tears and laughter are joined and our little life, incongruous and vain, is rounded with a smile." But today we are less confident of our "upward and continuous progress" in anything, humour not excepted.

A recent opinion about the state of humour in our times can be found in the editorial of the Hamilton Spectator, November 8, 1969, in Something to laugh about, where the editor mentions that the U.N. had published a book suggesting that the world needs more sense of humour, particularly from its politicians. Since they read too much and think too much they are seldom funny. It takes a rare humorist to find hearty laughs in a book of statistics. The editor concludes that those without a sense of humour are poor indeed and that a sense of humour is better than the best insurance policy, in life and in adversity.

Henri Bergson is more cautious than Leacock. He refuses at first to imprison the comic spirit within a definition. But later he overcomes some of his caution, defining the comic as:

...that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism of movement without life.

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4 Ibid., p. 87.
This is a better definition. In fact Bergson here could easily be describing the typical Chekhovian hero who through poshlost or inertia loses most of the resourcefulness and vitality that distinguishes human beings from mere machines. Chekhov does not, however, treat his characters viciously, as a satirist would. Humour finds no individual fools but only foolishness in a foolish world. Humour, unlike satire thinks about humanity in general and cannot thrive on bitterness. The disparities of life are reconciled by humour on the basis of humanism and love, because one can laugh at people only when one loves them.

The humorist does not attack any one in particular, does not enter into a fight, but all the same he does not look indifferently on life. He is a deeply serious person: it is the purpose of his wit to charm the reader and make him receptive to the serious thought he wishes to convey. The temperament of the humorist needs several conditions to be created; an optimistic disposition in the author, moral nobility in his character and a striving toward an ideal. He is able to penetrate with his observations into the deepest nooks of the human soul, since he is interested in a real concrete human being. He is a unique type of writer, using laughter as a powerful element in his creative talent. Under the mask of humour, the author is able to convey serious thoughts.

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yet he must beware of the sharp tone of a moralist which seldom elicits an enthusiastic response.

Laughter has always been used as a corrective method for whatever ailed society or individuals, pointing out the digressions from what is considered to be a norm, putting everything in its own place. The expression "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" takes us far back to Biblical times. It shows that mankind has always enjoyed a laugh. Basic human nature does not change and the one eternal human failing, vanity, is always laughable. Henri Bergson has the most apt description of vanity in his Laughter:

"It must be deep rooted...and yet superficial...invisible to its actual owner, for the comic ever mistakes of the unconscious, but visible to everybody else, so that it may call forth gen- eral laughter, extremely considerate to its own self, so that it may be displayed without scruple, but troublesome to others, so that they may repress it without nity; immediately repressible, so that our laughter may not have been wasted, but sure of reappearing under fresh aspects, so that laughter may always find something to do; inseparable from social life, although insufferable to society; capable -- in order that it may assure the greatest imaginable variety of forms -- of being tacked on to all the vices and even to a good many virtues."

6 Ecclesiastes 1: 2 (King James Version of the Bible).

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. This kind of humour, dealing with human foibles, weaknesses and pretensions is the humour that will be discussed in this thesis, because it is Chekhovian humour.

Since Chekhov as a humorist is very different from other Russian writers, it might be well at this time to say a little about Russian humour and the most popular devices used by Russian authors to create it. Russian writers, like other writers in other countries, depicted the aspirations and thoughts of their countrymen. Here is a testimonial to M. T. Pisarev, the St. Petersburg actor, describing a Russian:

"One thing is immortal in art as well as in life, and that is truth. The love of truth is the hallmark of real talent. You, M.T., are truly Russian in your art. The whole character of our nation, with all our merits and faults, comes to life in your artistic interpretations. The stormy passion of the Russian soul, his reckless bluck and abandon, his self-lashings and his sadness -- the characteristic sadness of the Russian people -- all this has found in you a fruitful and talented impersonator."8

The climate, the country's vastness and life's conditions generally tend to exaggerate certain human traits. The Russians have always led a hard life and the above factors greatly influenced their nature.

8The Form, "The Younger Russian Writers." October 1899, p. 120.
"The point to be made here is that, more than any other people, Russians have a duality of nature, depending on this or that circumstance prompts them, in great crisis, to fly to extremes." 9

That is why Russian melancholy is often funny; it is a mixture of two emotions, one serious, one comic, which leads to the famous Russian "laughter through tears." That famous duality of nature applies to Russian authors as well, because their humour turns to the extremes too.

The most popular device used by Russian authors for expressing humour was the most extreme form of social lash-satire. Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, or scorn. This form is the closest to the public speech or sermon. The satirist fights daily evils, being more onesided than the humorist. Satirists were baffled idealists comparing life as it is with life as they would have liked it to be and attacking the part they liked the least. As long as they stayed aloof from life and only recorded events, they could exist as artists, but trying to be subjective and to merge life and art they could not stand the strain. Referring to the mental illness of N. Gogol and G. Uspenski, V. Korolenko commented:

Chekhov's personality did not have that conflict.

He displayed the wisdom of acceptance all his life by admitting that things are not always the way we would like them to be, that we ourselves are not so good or so kind or so hard-working as we would like to believe; and yet there is always a new day, a new challenge, new opportunities for doing better. It gave him a serenity bordering almost on fatalism, enabling him to accept life as it is and to understand the law of life as the writer of Ecclesiastes did before him.


While other Russian writers were preoccupied with politics, Chekhov was interested in the psychology of the people, the individual taken out of everyday life, which made him a humorist in his own right, radically different from the other Russian writers by his striving for the utmost objectivity. Chekhov jotted down in his notebook:

"Lord, don't allow me to condemn or to speak of what I do not know or do not understand." \[12\]

His basic philosophy gradually was molded into a motto: 'Sic transit gloria mundi' or 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that A. P. Chekhov was a humorist all his life and to describe his kind of humour which is ageless, universal and humane.

CHAPTER I A

The humour of Chekhov's writings was not the product of a carefree, sheltered life. On the contrary, from his childhood when he endured the eccentric discipline of his father, through his early manhood when he and his family were harpered by financial difficulties, to the illness that began to afflict him in his early twenties and eventually took his life at the age of forty-four, he was dogged by hardships, that would have broken the spirit of many a man. That Chekhov remained serene in the face of continued misfortunes is largely attributable to his tremendous self-discipline and his ability to distinguish the trivia of life from its lasting and meaningful aspects. These qualities are also the basis of his comic vision -- a vision that culminated in the great works of his nature period. The spirit that informed that vision begins to emerge early in Chekhov's life, a product not of good fortune but of adversity.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on January 17, 1860, in Taganrog, a port city on the Azov Sea, in the family of the merchant, Pavel Egorovich Chekhov. At that time Taganrog, once a bustling port, was already yielding first place to Odessa, becoming a dull, undistinguished provincial town. The tediousness of the provincial town and its inhabitants became a leitmotif in later works of Chekhov the writer. However, the boredon
in Taganrog was lifted by the occasional presence of foreign ships in its harbour and the cosmopolitan nature of its populace.

Chekhov was thus exposed to many different cultures during his early years. In addition, Taganrog had a very good theatre, where he had the opportunity as a student to acquaint himself not only with the local repertoire, but also with the classic stage work of Shakespeare, Gogol, Griboedov and others. Moments spent in the theatre in his early youth were cherished through his life and influenced his way of writing.

The grandfather of Chekhov was a former serf, who by virtue of his innate shrewdness and enterprise had finally been able to buy his freedom and that of his family from the landowner. Later, he rose to be the manager of an estate of Count Platov in the village of Kniazhe in the Steppe and visits to him in the summers were amongst the highlights of Chekhov's childhood.

His son Pavel Egorych, however, lacked his business acumen and indulged more in the hobbies for which he had some talent. He played the violin, painted icons and conducted a church choir. All those side activities were time-consuming and as a result the three oldest sons, from tender childhood on, were sent to tend the shop and keep their eye on the other boy helpers. The shop dealt not only in groceries but also in goods for consumption on the premises; it became an unofficial club and was open practically all hours of the day and evening. Under the influence of wine, the visitors would swap jokes, racy and folksy. Little
Anton would eagerly absorb them until noticed and shouted away. At this point he had a similar exposure to Ukrainian folklore to that of N. Gogol in his childhood, giving their early humor a similar tang.

Meanwhile, the unused energies of his talented, ambitious but poorly educated father found expression in all manner of eccentric behavior. He would insist on his family's participation in all the church activities, including regular singing in the choir. Whilst people envied P. Chekhov his well-disciplined, talented family, the boys themselves felt like little convicts. The positive consequences of this rigorous training were that Anton learned self-discipline, orderliness bordering almost on pedantry and the will to work.

A. Chekhov used to say that they got their talents from their father but their heart and spirit from their mother. She was a remarkable woman. Although she did not have the opportunity of a formal education, she had a lot of life's common sense. Out of meagre means, she was still able to create a warm hospitable atmosphere in the home, where visitors could always expect a hearty welcome. She also earned the undying devotion of her six children. In order to please her Anton consequently submitted and got published his first work, Pismo k uchenomu sosedu (1880).

Thanks to her, the atmosphere at home was cheerful, the children arranged home spectacles and practical jokes to amuse themselves and the guests. One of the first vaudevilles played at home was Kotliarevsky's
Moskal-charivnyk. There are many instances in Chekhov's future work where he displays his knowledge of Ukrainian literature, especially the plays. In the letter from Luka (Ukraine) he wrote: "Women remind me of Zankovetska and all men of Sadovsky" or as far as in CHELOVEK V FUTLIARE (1889), Kovalenko calls Belikov "glitai abozh pank". It is a title of the play by M. L. Kropyvnytsky, where the playwright for the first time introduced this word into Ukrainian literature.

Anton Chekhov not only worshipped theatre but he was especially gifted as a mimic and loved to perform. It was a close-knit family and their private jokes were still funny to them when they grew up. For instance in correspondence Anton would address his brother Alexander as "the Pants," alluding to an abortive attempt by Anton as a youth to tailor a pair of trousers for his brother. Anton was a shrewd boy and the names he coined for people generally found their mark.

"Он вообще был неистощим на путливые прозвища и названия".

In their memoirs his siblings maintained that this ability to characterize people was inborn in him and noticed from very early childhood. He named his temperament brother Nicholas "Dzhigalka", and

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"Kosoi" and another brother "Nordokrivenko", sister "Chichevica". In his letters to his brother Alexander he always started with "Gusev", "Gusinykh," "Shtany" etc. He was so observant that he could find a funny side in the smallest details. Once he called one of the editors, Werner Jr., "sobachi vorotnik", ("dog's collar") because he wore an overcoat with a fur collar. The ability of his alert, creative mind to classify people by their idiosyncrasies and label them gave a distinctive flavour to his humorous works later on. It is a mark of a humorist -- a person given to comic insight and expressions.

P. Chekhov's financial situation grew worse and his temper degenerated with it. The boys, besides getting a heavier share of work, were flogged on many occasions. It left in Chekhov a lifelong revulsion for any kind of oppression, physical or mental. Any humiliation of human dignity he could not bear, were it his own or somebody else's. Standing up for his dignity and teaching others to do so became the second leitmotif of his early and later literary works. He called it "squeezing the slave drop by drop out of the system".

The critics point to the fact that the children in his works are not as carefree as children are expected to be, but pensive, sad, laughing seldom, suffering many injustices inflicted by adults, but able to see the adults in their true light with all their funny pretensions and double play. He used to say that he believed in progress. After all, once he used to be flogged but after a time the flogging ceased. That was progress, surely?
In 1876 his father's business folded and they lost their home as well. The parents and the younger children had to join two older sons in Moscow in order to escape debts. Anton was left to fend on his own in order to finish gymnasium. Those years were hard years from a financial point of view, but they spelled for him a personal freedom, something he learned to appreciate and value all his life and thought to be essential for every human being, above all for the artist.

He blossomed from the clumsy, large-headed boy nicknamed "Bull-head" into a witty lively youth, an inventor of pranks and practical jokes. His sense of humour bubbled in him like champagne in a glass, jokes sprouting as if by magic. Thomas Mann described very aptly this side of Chekhov's character:

"What makes its appearance here is the primitive origin of all art, the inclination to ape, the jester's desire and talent to entertain, a gift that was to employ very different forms; it was to ally itself with spiritual principles, to undergo moral ennoblement, and to rise from merely amusing trifles to soul-stirring achievements. Yet even in his bitterest, most serious moments Chekhov was never entirely to lose his sense of the farcical."

Here humour was playing a very important role in his life. He was undaunted by his poverty, his threadbare clothes and torn boots, visiting...
hones and tutoring for a living. Being exceptionally observant and noticing a humorous side where others failed to see it, he was not vulnerable. In any humiliation he could see funny, pitiful sides in his enemies and they did not seem to be undefeatable. Luckily, he was very healthy psychologically, gifted with an exceptional sense of humour, fantasy and witticism serving him as an antidote to his grey existence. His inborn humour served as an entertainment in the form of puns, jokes and mimicry for friends and family and as a defence in a form of parody against injustices done to him. But as humour has to be spontaneous, he did not like to perform to order, an antipathy which left its mark on his later works, when he was forced by circumstances to do so. He portrays this distaste for forced performances in some of his works.

Every writer has a period of inner preparation when his future ideas and the character of his future work are formed. The years of inner preparation were spent in the gymnasium in Taganrog. He was like a sponge, absorbing certain funny traits of the people around him. Some of the characters re-emerged in his stories twenty years later. For example a teacher and inspector of the Taganrog grammar school, Alexander Diakonov, was the prototype of Belikov Chelovek v futliare (1889).

To hide his loneliness, he would write joking letters to his parents in Moscow eliciting only reproaches from his mother who would point out that they had received his letter full of jokes, while they did
not even have enough money to buy bread.

To his brothers he sent humorous letters called Zaika.

Unfortunately, his first attempts to write are lost, but according to his family those letters showed his awareness, even this early, of the insincerities and false human relationships around him. He had seen through the cloak of hypocrisy with which some people attempted to mask their malice or indifference towards others. Now, as throughout his life, he wrote scathingly against duplicity in all its guises. In these letters, one can see already in embryo, the literary personality that he would develop in his subsequent writings with his own unique mixture of dignity and mockery, seriousness and ostensible lightheartedness. By the age of 16 he was relying on his own resources, and his moral code was formed already. He had developed the principles that he adhered to all his life. In a letter to his brother, Mishka, in July 1876 he sounded like a teacher-moralist:

"Your handwriting is good, and in whole letter I have not found a single mistake in grammar. There is one thing I do not like: Why do you call yourself my 'insignificant and unnoticeable little brother'? You admit your insignificance but do you know where? Before God, also before intelligence, beauty, nature, but not before men. Among men one should be

\[4\] Gitovich, Letopis zhizni i tvorchestva A. P. Chekhova, Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literature, Moskva 1955 p. 28.
conscious of one's dignity. Surely you are not a rogue; you are an honest fellow. Well, respect the honest fellow in you and know that no honest fellow is insignificant. Do not confound humbling oneself with admitting one's insignificance."

Chekhov subsequently became an outstanding letter-writer. He wrote about 1800 letters in his lifetime and many of them sparkle with humour, witty comments, literary remarks and apt description of people and events. Like Mark Twain, he was most balanced in his letters, where he could be himself by showing a clear image of his soul and mind, without having to please an audience. Both of them have themes in their works, penetrating insight into foibles and follies of human nature. In 1879 after passing his matriculation exams Chekhov came to Moscow University as a medical student. Owing to his father's inability to find a suitable well-paying job and the irresponsibility of his older brothers, the family lived in the slums. Anton's well-developed sense of fair play and his nobility of character dictated to him that it was his duty to improve the lot of his family. Being practical, he saw that he could make money by contributing all the nonsense that gushed out of his imagination to the humorous magazines, where his brother Alexander already contributed. Several rejections later, his first parody, Письмо к ученому соседу, appeared in the Strekoza on March 9, 1880, marking

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the beginning of his literary career and the first stage in the gradual improvement of his family's situation.

When Chekhov was stretching his wings as a writer, Russia was undergoing hard times. As M. Gorky said, he knew no more dismal years in the history of Russia than the 80's. A two-year war with Turkey lowered the standard of living and a poor crop in the two succeeding years of 1879-1880 brought many difficulties and general dissatisfaction. While the 60's and the 70's in Russia were considered to be a time of creative ferment, the 80's have gone down in history as the years of "stagnation and hopelessness."

In the 70's the worsening standards of life were highlighted by the activities of the populist movement, which was highly idealistic in attributing all the virtues to the peasants, without taking into account the future industrialization of Russia. The Act of Emancipation in 1861 whetted the appetite of the Russian people for more reforms. By 1874 the Populists started a movement - narod - "to the people." Many prominent people including writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Turgenev were under its spell. But the peasants met the populists with suspicion and hostility, and unfortunately for all, the government used terror tactics and ended this peaceful movement. Failing to achieve their ends, the populists became frustrated: the more aggressive faction founded Narodnaia Volia and in 1881 assassinated the Tsar Alexander II. Promised reforms were retracted by Alexander III and harsh political reaction set in. The assassination of Alexander II was the turning-point
in the history of the Russian intelligentsia. The repressions that followed left the intelligentsia frustrated and unfulfilled and many of them became disoriented and gloomy and refused to participate in any political movements. Others approved the theory "of small deeds" or the Tolstoyan idea of non-resistance to evil. One had the impression that the end of great Russian literature was approaching. In 1881 Dostoevsky died, two years later Turgenev, Saltykov-Shchedrin was nearing the end, only Tolstoy was left who wrote for all, whose voice echoed as if in the desert. That period was "a period of mediocrity" as Turgenev said. This vacuum was waiting to be filled, and the accelerating pace of life created a demand for short stories. While in the 80's the Russian intelligentsia was passive and ineffectual, the growing middle class in the cities demanded reading material concerned with the problems of "the little man" and understandable at their level. They demanded material which mirrored their lives, which lacked ideologies and political debates. They were afraid even to think openly in those terms, lest they should incur the displeasure of the authorities. As never before Russians needed humour to alleviate the general feeling of hopelessness and oppression. Apparently humorous magazines provided this channel for letting off steam, because a multitude of them sprang up. Their function was to entertain and to amuse. Dangerous themes concerning politics and government activities were studiously avoided because of censorship.
The appearance of so many magazines reminds us that after the Crimean War a multitude of satirical magazines such as Veselchak, Gudok etc. had appeared, indicating a quickening of interest in politics. But comparison with the humorous press of the 80's ends here. The press of the 80's skimmed the surface only; to write for such magazines required a special skill and talent. The magazines needed material not of high quality, but immediately amusing and soon forgotten. This attitude suited Chekhov as he had no intentions of changing the world; all he needed was money to further his studies towards becoming an M.D. He did not have a lot of time for writing long stories. His stories were always creations on the spur of the moment. Since humorous magazines demanded brevity they were a good training ground for him. His motto became: "brevity—sister of talent", and his own expression describing the length of the story was "shorter than the beak of the sparrow," or "ability to write well is the ability to cross out poorly written material."

Appealing to the taste of the city dweller, who in the evening, by the comfort of the fireside, in dressing-gown and house slippers, liked to relax and have a laugh at the weaknesses of his fellow man, Chekhov wrote about porous officials, mothers-in-law, unfaithfulness, seasonal celebrations with their consequences, the vacation season with its hazards, "dacha" themes, about seasonal suitors and parental snares to catch a groom for their daughter. But themes worthy of laughter
were being repeated all the time, losing their freshness. In the general atmosphere of stagnation, it was required of the writer to show imagination and talent in order to be published. Who were the people directing those magazines? -- those editors that the nature Chekhov remembered with disgust as the men he knew "only from behind" because they never bothered to turn around to face him, unless to criticize. Later, even in his nature works, in order to describe an image of boorishness he would describe a fleshy neck. The editor Kornfeld from Strekoza was a merchant, and the owner of a large factory making rubber stamps. He used the Strekoza as a medium of advertisement as well as one of entertainment. M. Pastukhov, the editor of the Moskovski Listok worked his way up from the post of a clerk to that of a reporter. The tone of the magazines was earthy, racy and a little on the vulgar side; the editors and the contributors to the magazines alike were not distinguished by their "finesse of manners."

When Anton Chekhov started to contribute to the magazines, he was a 20-year-old student in need of money. He continued to work for them for seven years, during which he was unusually productive. Those years were years of material adversity and hard work, but paradoxically they were the most carefree years of his life. Apparently poverty, adversity and hardship are fertile ground for the growth of humour; it seems the better off the person is the less he laughs at the absurd.
His optimistic nature prevailed even when he was getting adverse remarks from the editor.

His productivity soared after he met N. A. Leikin the editor of Oskolki in St. Petersburg. He summed up their meeting in a letter of June 25, 1883:

"Осколки-мою купель, а Вы мой-крестный батька." 6

For inferior stories he used the pseudonyms "a man without a spleen", and "my brothers' brother"; for better stories he used a name, "Antosha Chekhonte", given to him in Taganrog by his favourite teacher of religion, Father Pokrovski. He adorns to all kinds of genres which were used in the humorous magazines. He used to say that, apart from poetry and informing on people to the authorities, he had tried every kind of writing and that he was disinclined that he had started his literary career with such trash. Of course, Chekhov was always self-critical and very self-demanding, so that he was over-derogatory of his early writings. But when he was editing his volumes of collected works, he did not include many of those early writings, saying that what Antosha Chekhonte wrote Chekhov could not acknowledge. Young as he was, his inborn nobility of character and his distaste for the seamiest, less scrupulous environment he was forced to deal with prevented him from contributing to journals.

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such as Moskovski Listok which was printing pornographic material.

Chekhov tried to keep his stories free of vulgarity, a fact that was
admitted grudgingly by otherwise unfair critics, especially Skabichevsky.

Although Leikin's Oskolki was a clean, respectable magazine,
Chekhov was still unhappy in his journalistic surroundings. He was tiring
of the Russian comic press of that time. To his brother he aptly
described his feelings (May 13, 1883, Moscow):

> the word "newspaper-writer" means at the very
least a scoundrel. I am one of them; I
work with them; I shake hands with them;
I am even told that I've begun to look
like one from a distance... All I get,
out of my writing is a nervous twitch. 7

In the same letter, he mentions that he would rather look after V. D.
than make a joke out of a drunken merchant. Any degradation of human
dignity irritated him and the high moral quality of his character was
influencing people near him. With him around, life was becoming nobler
and more fun.

All his friends liked the visits of Chekhonte, who brought a
cheerful spring of healthy humour. He was gentle in his relationships
with others, touchingly delicate, with an inexhaustible fund of jokes.

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At this stage in his career, unlike later on, he enjoyed excellent health and had tremendous joie de vivre and although the banality of some humorous magazines was not to his taste, humour as a thing in itself fascinated him. He was remarkably productive. During the seven years of his early literary activity he wrote over 400 stories, novels, sketches, anecdotes, pastiches, law reports contributing to more than 12 humorous magazines.

Leikin, being himself no second-rate writer of humorous small stories, appreciated Chekhov's contributions and gave him in 1883 a special column in his magazine, a column of newsy gossip under the title Oskolki which had to be presented as humorously as possible. This job Chekhov undertook with certain trepidations and he assured Leikin that he could not guarantee that his humour was not going to be too dry. Hitherto, the structure of his stories had been mostly in the form of anecdote and he had been very aloof in presentation of the story. After 1883 there is more solid content and emotional tone; inner feelings are more the rule than the exception. The job of a reporter developed in him a talent for meticulous observation and provided a lot of material to work with. Chekhov was a man unable to learn from books; he had to experience the event in order to portray it. It may have in part been his training as a medical student that formed one of his most characteristic mental qualities -- an ability to reserve judgment on complicated questions.
The ability to weave elements of reality and fiction together became Chekhov's special trait in writing. He used humour as a means of inculcating a bitter truth, which nobody would listen to if it were presented in a solemn way. He must have been an effective social critic in this column because he was threatened several times and had to change his name from Rover to Ulysses. A. Derman thought that Chekhov as a publicist was very pale because this kind of work was foreign to his nature, but he agreed that still it was an excellent training ground for his future work. One can easily think of many other famous writers, such as Dickens, Zola, in Western Europe, O. Henry, Mark Twain in America and Bulgakov, Leskov, Leonid Andreev, Mamlin-Sibirjak in Russia who wrote for second-rate papers. They could not help but produce stories full of "human interest". That type of work stimulated their common sense and the use of native speech and lore. When they produced a humorous story, it was a down-to-earth type, portraying life as life is. One has to keep in mind that yesterday's journalism may become tomorrow's literature, especially the works of a humorist.

Chekhov was losing something in the haste of writing according to prescription, having to cope with deadlines and pre-selected themes, but eventually this activity worked out in him the pliability, almost the virtuosity, of the artist able to use different genres. Humorous magazines used mostly forms of anecdotes, jokes, aphorisms, parodies
as the standard style. The themes they treated are still considered to be funny even at the present time, but not many people nowadays would have the patience to follow them in such a slow-moving monotonous form.

There are several theories explaining why in the carefree, jesting, verbose, tense, sometimes even slightly vulgar humour of Chekhov after 1883 one can detect lyrical undertones creating sadness in the reader.

First of all, he was developing a more critical attitude towards his writings. An example of it can be the fact that in his first edition of Pestrye rasskazy (1886) he did not include a single story of the period 1889-82.

"Chekhov entered literature through the back door, and his progress from the kitchen to the front parlour was not easily achieved."

Some of the stories later were mercilessly revised. The revision of Pest is an example:

a. "Исправник попел за сцену, поцеловал там за шею г-жу Безбактову и приглашал артистов к себе на обед. Все, кроме бабья! - сказал он.- Бабья не надо... отрицает... у меня дочка..."

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In his early works he used extravagant devices to cover up the lack of poise and experience. He used very often the incorrect Russian of the uneducated, several puns, grotesque names, exclamation marks and pseudo-classical paraphrases.

Secondly, his inner dissatisfaction was deepening, while he started to grow out of the kind of journalism Leikin was demanding. He started to chafe under Leikin's supervision and editorship. He felt a sense of duty before his readers and insisted to Leikin that in life not everything is funny, but there are a lot of nauseating things as well. But the Oskolki was not suitable for serious stories. Only later by meeting Sosorin, (December 1883), the editor of Novoe Vremia, did Chekhov's direction as a writer change completely. Basically Chekhov had a mature, thoughtful nature. Some signs of it are there even before 1883, but not so often. Thomas Mann said that the sign of inner dissatisfaction is the "sight of genius in a writer" and by 1886 Chekhov was well on the road to becoming one.

Myshkovskaiia came to the conclusion that Chekhov, being a serious-natured young man who matured early and rid himself of his illusions, was covering up a lot of his dissatisfaction with the frivolous jesting and buffoonery of humorous magazines and that is why even in the earliest period of his writing one can meet such a thought-provoking pieces as Ustritsy (1884), Torzhesto pobeditel'ia (1884).

Thirdly, his work as a reporter was exposing him to different aspects of life, giving him new themes and revealing to him human weaknesses, funny and tragic. Despite his own protestations that he was not satisfied with such work and despite the opinions of some critics about publicity's being alien to his nature, one gets a different view from reading his own words. His love of newspapers he expressed thus:

> When God asks me in the other world, why I did not write much, I will answer: I read newspapers.

Before him the general opinion was that the sphere of everyday banal facts was not worth the attention of a famous writer's pen. But it became apparent that literature can feed itself with new themes from every dirty backyard, every doorway and window. All you had to do was to absorb the details for future use. Material was available in abundance and Chekhov

gladly made use of it. At that time it was not great literature, only a polemic within a great literature. Long, verbose novels were disappearing from the pages of the thick magazines and the new genre of the short story started to claim its rightful place. After 1883 Chekhov paid more attention to this type, emulating Leikin's mastery in the field of the comic short story. By the modifications that Chekhov initiated in that genre, he inaugurated the same revolution in literature as Cézanne effected in painting, using impressionistic techniques in the choice of a particular thought, idea, brief moments, like single dabs of paint. Bunin said that Chekhov was aware that he was creating in effect a new trend in literature, saying that he was beating a path through the wall with his head in order to make the path easier for the acceptance of the short story. In the short story he owed something to the tradition of Turgenev's prose, but he was developing a style of his own, with short introductions, vivid characterizations in the manner of the impressionists and more attention to internal than external action.

Also his stories characteristically had one of two different unexpected conclusions, either of which was intended for comic effect. One conclusion, "the surprise ending" was well known through the works of Maupassant, but the other consisting of "zero ending" was typically "Chekhovian". In it, the tension mounts and when the reader expects something to happen relaxation of tension occurs and there is no climax. He jokingly used to say to his brother that he led his reader on and then unexpectedly punched him in the nose. Chekhov was
fascinated at the beginning with the technique of presentation and his excellent perception of the different techniques shows in his very successful parodies.

But his contemporaries could not understand how a writer could dedicate his talent to such trivial themes of life, not understanding that he dealt with those themes not because of lack of ideas but because in them he saw the means of showing the disparities of the interests of the individual and society at large, between national and local issues. Here he could combine the elements of laughter and sadness, mixing comic and tragic.

Finally they admitted their mistake: A. Bely wrote:

"...если творчество Чехова порой и могло нам казаться товарным поездом, и мы спешили за экспрессом, в настоящую минуту следует признаться в том, что многие из нас остались далеко позади, со своими "экспрессами", а товарный поезд,"перегнав, врезався жизнью в неисчислимые дали душевых пространств."

Вестник знания 1904 №11,86

After 1883 he was wavering between gay frivolity and more conscientious production that reflected the unconscious development of a feeling of

11 Bely, A. Vestnik Znanija, "Letopis tekushchei literature i zhizni" 1904, p. 89.
moral duty before his reader. Under Leikin's "leadership" in Oskolki, Chekhov's style improved, and his short stories started to lose the tendency to verbosity, becoming pithy and neatly turned. His work as a publicist taught him economy of expression, making it an outstanding quality of his work. Now with few strokes he could create a funny situation or a comic hero. After being exposed as a reporter to real life, he leaned towards satire, but his satire always made allowances for human weaknesses and therefore it never became bitter through derision and mockery, it never hit hard, like a whip, as Gogol's nature humour did.

One more factor influencing the change of his comic tone, often overlooked by the critics, is the fact that fate dealt him a severe blow while he was still a young man. The irony of life dictated that when he finally graduated in 1884 becoming a fully-fledged doctor, after spending several extremely strenuous years studying and writing in order to earn money for study, his health broke down and the first signs of TB, haemorrhage, appeared the same year. Although he denied the seriousness of his incipient illness, being a trained doctor of medicine he knew what was in store for him. Starting with a letter of December 1884 to a friend, Sergeenko, in which he mentions the haemorrhage but in the same breath denies its origin, the complaints about ill health crop up more and more often in his letters as the years go by. Sadness creeps into his humorous stories.
He underwent tremendous inner turmoil as he struggled to reconcile himself to a drastically bridged life span and to reconcile himself to this terrible reality. A quality described as humility, restraint or modesty which endeared him to the people dealing with him came to him as a result of great efforts and self-discipline of many years duration. "Sic transit gloria mundi" (so passes worldly fame") or "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" appears now and more often in his stories as a caption or expression used by his heroes or even as the whole content of a story, the frequency increasing with years.

Until 1886 he still was wavering between the professions of M.D. and of writer. His own opinion about himself as a comic writer was as follows:

"Я писал, как птица пест... Сяду и пишу, не думая, как и о чем. Само писалось. Я мог писать когда угодно, написать очерк, рассказ, сценку мне не стоило никакого труда... Смейлся сам и смеял окружающих. Я брал жизнь и, не задумываясь, над ней, тормозя ее туда и сюда... Взял самому весело и со стороны, я должен быть, выходило очень смешно..."

A. P. Chekhov's earnings as a writer exceeded that of the doctor, because being soft-hearted he treated many without remuneration.

When he was noticed by Suvorin, then the editor of Novoe Vremia

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in St. Petersburg, and invited to St. Petersburg in December 1885 he met many distinguished authors and critics and was surprised, pleased and perturbed by their interest in his work. A culmination of this mood came with the arrival of Grigorovich's letter of March 1886, who acknowledged Chekhov's talent as a writer, pointing to areas where his talents might most properly be applied. A combination of three factors led to a change in his writing. Firstly Savvorin opened the door to him to a magazine where he was no longer restricted by style or enforced gaiety. This, together with his increased income and general recognition, awakened in him a sense of duty before his readers and the knowledge that he was being read with interest forced him to be more critical of himself. To this should be added the state of his health and the changes in places of living because of it.

All the researchers of his literary activity have come to the conclusion that by 1886 there is a definite change in his literary work and a new period of his activity started. The appearance of _Pestrye rasshazy_ in May 1886 begins his career as a serious artist. This publication marks the borderline where Antosha Chekhonte ceased to be and Anton Chekhov was born.
CHAPTER I B

When Chekhov made his debut as a writer in 1880, the genres used by the humorous magazines were mostly parodies, anecdotes, jokes, aphorisms, short stories -- narrative and dramatic -- and comical letters.

Chekhov was an inveterate parodist and had written accomplished parodies whilst still in his early youth.

"A parody, like mock epic, is also a form of high burlesque, but it derives not its subject, but a particular literary style, by imitating its features and applying them to trivial as grossly discordant materials." [1]

His first published work, Bismo k uchenomu sosedu (1880), was probably a parody on the writings of his Uncle Nitrofan. The attempt to adorn daily tedium with solemn description creates a comical effect. The letter is from a semi-literate "Samodur" type of man defending science. He uses words that he does not understand and that ridicule his whole way of thinking. His explanation that days are short in the winter because they shrink from cold is ludicrous; as he rambles on his continual misspellings and his baroque style make more comical the pompous manner that he effects in expressing himself. His contradictory

discourse in trying to impress his learned, intelligent neighbour is
destroyed in a single stroke towards the end when he advises the
recipient of the letter to beat up the messenger if he should be late.
Chekhov liked the technique of imaginative letter-writing enough to
use it extensively in his later works such as Два писма, Письмо, Ванка
(1884), На святках (1890), У предводителя (1885).

Chekhov produced many other parodies using the convention of the
detective novel, such as Драна на Охоте (1884). The detective
story Шведская спичка (1883) is one of the most dextrously written
stories with a plot in Russian literature. Chekhov is the acknowledged
master of the story without a plot, yet he could invent excellent plots
if he chose. The plot in Шведская спичка immediately labels it as
comic, and its style is a pastiche of what were serious genres in the
time of Renaissance and in the time of Romanticism. In the time of
Chekhov, plot and seriousness were almost contradictory to each other.
In order for plot to be effective life itself has to be full of
events and upheavals, but when life is stagnant then literature with
a plot is reduced to the level of mere entertainment.

Not only literary genres could be parodied, but also people's
behaviour. Transpose the solemn into the familiar and the result is parody.
What was formerly dignified becomes laughable. To this category belongs
Слова, слова, слова (1883). Here he draws a contrast to the dramatic
theme of a fallen girl by referring in Слова, слова, слова to the same
words used by Hamlet (Act II, scene ii) where his treatment of Ophelia is being discussed. The solemn idealism of the Danish prince is contrasted with the idle curiosity of the telegraph worker Gruzdev, a hypocritical, curious little man who does not practice what he preaches. He tries to reform the call-girl Katya, forcing her to confessions, and thereby reducing her to hysterics. He finally reminds her of the real reason for his visit.

In this story, Chekhov uses vivid description of the reaction of the weather to unfair, ugly human relationships. At the beginning the wind sings shyly as if afraid that it will be forbidden to sing at all; the snow is dirty and the weather nauseating. After the real motives of Gruzdev become clear, the wind suddenly utters a piercing scream and someone starts to play banal music. The classic opening degenerates into mere banality. In Primadok Chekhov also mentions the snow, but as a contrast in its pristine whiteness to ugly, dirty relationships.

Skvernaia istoriia is written in a similar mood to Slova, slova, slova. It is a story of an insulted spinster who believes in the sincerity of the prolonged courtship of an artist. He, however, only wanted her to be his model. Predlozhenie (1886) is also written in this mood.
Chekhov inherited the tradition in humour and satire established by Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin, but his works lack hyperbole because of the indirect nature of his ridicule. Chekhov uses devices that Bergson says are characteristic of indirect satire; their effect in Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin is satirical but not Chekhov because, unlike those writers, he does not use hyperbole. He does not distort or disfigure to the point of a caricature, he was too kind for it. Resemblance was temporary but with the times the attitudes grew apart. Henry Bergson describes this indirect type of satire as a plot where characters are shown to be ridiculous by means of action and dialogue. The stylistic devices of indirect satire -- mock epic form, the grotesque, parody, irony, alogism, -- distort or disfigure the object of ridicule, thereby illuminating those aspects of the person which are distasteful to the author. Distortion and disfigurement assume the form of exaggeration or degradation.

The closest story to the Gogolian type of grotesque is Strashnaia noch (1884) where even the title is parodic. It is written in a burlesque style, with grotesque names for the protagonists. The style of Gogol made use of straight fantasy. In Chekhov's work, however, the apparently irrational happening is susceptible of rational explanation. His stories are kept within the realms of probability. Here the hero coming home

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after a seance finds a coffin. He flees frightened and bewildered to his friend, only to find a coffin at his place too. At the third friend he finds the same. Finally, the terrified hero gets an explanation. Their friend, a coffin merchant, has been hiding his wares from his creditors. The story stays within the bounds of rational explanation and the point is made at the end of the story. The only sinister touch in the story comes from names of the heroes, which are all connected with death and graveyards. Panakhidin, living on Uspensko-na-nocilkakh has a Trupov as landlord; his friends' names are Chorepov and Kladbishchenko.

Chekhov likewise explains the supernatural events that befall the hapless hero in Strakh (1886). A black dog running after the hero like Faust's poodle, signifying a bad omen, is explained by his friends' ownership of the dog. In Nervy the frightened hero finds himself in a farcical situation, because his imagination plays tricks on him. After the seance he is afraid to be alone. The only person in the house at the time is a German governess, but she misunderstands his motives and refuses to keep him company. Later however he creeps into the governess's room, where he is found in the morning by his returning wife on the trunk, soundly asleep.

As Chekhov develops a style of his own he uses Gogolian themes every once in a while. An example is Snert chinovnika which is similar
to Gogol's *Shinel*; or *Shilov nische*, similar to *Revisor*. However, one Gogolian device which he does use very frequently in the first part of his literary activity is anthropomorphism -- attributing to things and animals the qualities and behaviour of human beings. But in his hands it acquires added liveliness:

"...и его лысую зачесали перья, кончики которых робко выглядывали из подушки."

"На его шоколадной фабрике наняли такую нечисть, перед которой затукали себе нос даже извозчики лошади."

"...стенные часы, точно конфузясь перед посторонним мужчиком."

"Ей казалось, что не только люди, но даже лошади и собаки глядят на нее и смеются над простотой ее платья."

By comparing his heroes to animals, Chekhov is able to create an incongruous effect in many of his stories. The hero of *Panasha* (1880) is fat and round like a beetle, while his wife is thin like a Dutch

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herring. In *Dura* the heroine "looks like a snail in profile, en-face like a black cockroach."

"Я был щенком когда родился, гусем лапчатым, когда вступил в жизнь."

The word "gander" was a favourite of Chekhov when he wanted to describe the stupidity and self-satisfaction of the hero.

Name-play, creating a comic effect, was a popular device in 18-19th century in Russia. It was used by N. Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin in their works. Comparison of Chekhov's work show his closeness in the choice of names for his heroes to the techniques of both the above-mentioned writers, who in turn received their inspiration from the vernacular. Chekhov widened the circle of names he used to create different slants in his stories. In such unusual names as professor Knopka, captain Vakhter, telegraph worker Jat, one sees Chekhov the artist. By using negative vulgar connotations, such as the name Zhratva for the mayor of the city, he creates a portrait of a social type. Another example is Shelma in *Starosta*. At the beginning of his literary career Chekhov was complying with the wishes of his editors

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and striving for superficial effects. According to Le\'kin:

"ПУТ НУЖНА ПАРОДИЯ, КАРИКАТУРА, ВЫБОР И ФАМИЛИЯ. ЗАМЕЧАТЕЛЬНО, ЧТО ВСЕ ЭТИ ВАЛОСТИ, ЧЕМ ГЛУПЕЕ ТЕМ ЛУЧШЕ ВЫХОДЯТ."

Thus at the beginning, the names of heroes are mostly colloquial and vulgar, eg. Odekolon Pantalonovich, Podbriushkin, Parshivtsev, Smerdiaev, Khriapnov. Later Chekhov adapts the names to the personality of the hero, either to complement it or as an ironical contrast: Captain Urchaev in the *Kvitanski rund\'e* (1888), small official Nevyrazinov in *Meluz\'a* and his colleagues Kozulin and Kuritsyn in *Torzhestvo nobilitelj*, Zapoikin in *Orator*, Shchupaltsev in *Ot niechego delat*, Pieshkin in *V Mane*, the teacher Pustiatkov in *Orden*, Gradusov in *iz ognia da v polnym* Khaliavkin in *Zhilets*--all these heroes' personalities are used as backgrounds for their names. While such names as Prachkin in *Ne v duleh* or Kozyaevkin in *Zahludshie*, are used ironically to contrast their high position in society with their behaviour. For small officials he used names that

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were degrading. Examples: Perkhotkin, Okurkov, Peshkin, Cherviakov, indicating bootlicking tendencies and a lack of personal dignity. The choice of names derived from events which would sound insulting if applied to human beings aptly describes the position of the official who had to adjust himself to humiliating situations; Ponomov, Plevakov, Nevyrazinov, Nedokhov. The lower the rank in society the more degrading the name of the hero. While the higher officials called Tsitseronov-Gravianski, Pavlov, Kanifolyev, the factory owner is Piatigorov, and the General Zhigalov, most of the merchants depicted in Chekhov stories have negative names, eg. Sinerylov, Zhivotov, Piatirylova, Tsutsykov.

Double names in Russia indicate that the person belonged to the privileged classes. Chekhov mocked them by combining common-sounding names eg. Rezumov-Karalov, Liagavy-Gryzlov, Derzai-Chertovshchinov. By using foreign names in Russian, Chekhov was able to aptly describe the position of the person in society eg. Louise Vanzenbach (German wanze-a louse), Miss Twice, Sharmoo.

Sometimes he used the same word with different meanings, for instance "nzda" used to mean a reward and he uses it so in Dva gazetchika "ego zhdala nzda, slova i chitateli". However, the name of the inspector in Kleveta Nzda but now with the meaning 'bribery'. Similarly Ochumelov originally meant 'possessed by the plague', but now it means 'a man losing his senses'.
Chekhov in his first six years of writing used about 1000 names in his works, which indicates an unusual talent for creating names. One story alone, Loshadinaiia familia (1885), has 44 names connected with "horse". He created new names for people from the names of animals, birds, insects, from the behaviour of humans, from professions, clothes, actions, and ethnic backgrounds.

In his use of ethnic background Chekhov also displayed unusual perception of the characteristics of nations. In Oskolki (1884) he gives a characteristic description of the Germans:

Он хочет... покупить ... Русский театр. Он купит и из "Русского" с Бисмаркским беседочным, сделает "Немецкий", будет давать свои либерготские пьесы... ⁶

About the French he says:

Они шли улицу перед московской публикой и дали ей все то, что может дать за деньги подвиженный французский человек. ⁷

He stereotypes individuals of a certain nationality by putting them into stressful comic situations and watching their reaction. In Na chuzhine the Frenchman Shampoo becomes very emotional after the teasing scene, while in Doch Albiona the governess masters the situation with English

coolheadedness and contempt. The German Governess in Nervy just falls serenely asleep. The famous Russian gluttony is described in Sirena and inclination to philosophizing in Ariadna (1893).

In the same way as he creates the stock ethnic type, he portrays stock types by their profession or by certain psychological traits, by their expressions or through naive discourses. In Itoga (1884) the artist Khriapunov's letter to the merchant who beat him up describes a highly sensitive but helpless man, who must negotiate.

"Ваш адвокат Браев говорил, что вы не согласны заплатить сто рублей. В таком случае я могу скинуть и возьму за вашу подлость 55 рублей... с образованных же людей я беру за оскорбление дороже."

In the following lines it is not hard to recognize a merchant:

"... на счет векселя - накоса выкуси. По гривеннику с нашим удовольствием, а в отношении злостного банкротства бабушка на двое сказала."8

In the correspondence between the provincial librarian and the St. Petersburg librarian he uses play on words for comic effect.

8 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 256.
The reply is:

На Миллионное наследство—пляньте.
"Крестьянское царство"—дайте хорошему мастеру в руки и не жалейте расходов.

Humor, besides demanding simplicity of phrases and forms, thrives on the use of similes, metaphors and implications. Comparison is the soul of humour, metaphors the very life of it. Following Gogol's tradition, the early Chekhov uses a lot of metaphors, especially derisive ones, in the dialogues of his heroes, such as "dlinnopolaisa kutia in Kanitanski mundir. In Doch Albion, Briabov calls the governess "kikinora, triton, a long nail". Application of such words as "triton, kutia" to human beings is startling. Besides derisive metaphors, Chekhov made extensive use of different combinations of words and sentences to create comic effect.

"Городовой, стоявший на посту, почувствовал в своих внутренностях "образ мыслей".

Myshkowskaia, L. Chekhov i imoristicheskie zhurnaly 80-kh. godov Moskovski rabochi, Moskva 1929, p. 37.

10 Ibid., p. 38.
A comic effect is obtained whenever we pretend to take literally an expression which was used figuratively. Under this comes reciprocal interference and repetition of words. Reciprocal interference means that in the same expression two independent meanings tally, the pun and the play on words betrays a momentary lapse of attention in the characters' minds.

In *Indeiskii metuch* (1885) Lokhnatov and the druggist carry a dialogue about the prescribed medication:

"Говорю, что индийскому петуху, так значит и индийскому петуху. Не ору же!
-Я это могу на свой счет принять.
-Находился аптекарь.
-Зачем на свой счет принять?
Я сам заплачу."

or

"Около оконца сидит существо, которое, так сказать, всем существом предано вам."


In Lishuye Lin's (1886) when his son asks why do mosquitoes suck blood, angry Zaikin suddenly feels something heavy rolling to his liver and starting to suck it.

Another favourite was alogism — using a normally constructed sentence, which has a contradictory ludicrous meaning. Asked by the passenger how far is the village from the station, Cnilushki, the hackney comes out with an explanation:

"Если возница не пьёт и лошади не клячи, то и тридцать верст не будет, а коли возница с ужой да кони наморены, то целых пятьдесят наберется."

Then, trying to soothe his irritated passenger, complaining of his inability to recognize where the front of the carriage was, he says:

"Где лошадинный хвост, то там перед, а где сидит ваша милость, там зад." 13

By repeating words, the author is able to create a comic effect, because life goes on without repetition. Repeated use of the same word gives us an impression of something mechanical encrusted on life eg. in Serzny shag (1886), the hero keeps repeating the word "vsestoronne" which does not even fit into the context of the event and becomes ludicrous.

13 Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 80.
The pun was used very often by Chekhov in his works. As a journalist he wrote about a certain magazine in Oskolki (1883):

"Свет и тени светили, светили, наводили тень, наводили и вдруг-чирк всеми спичками сразу." 1

In the story Bakhniki the appearance and disappearance of the moon creates comic effect. Happy newlyweds are taking a walk along the railway stopover. But the moon frowns as if envious at seeing such a bliss while she is so lonesome. The moon still sulks and hides behind the clouds for the second time. But when the newlyweds suddenly are beleaguered by a crowd of newly-arrived and unannounced relatives the noon reappears, the look of the noon almost betrays joy that she has no relatives. The hero of V. bane repeats piously three times that he is fasting and ends up accusing the deacon of being a free-thinker because of his long hair.

The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable if they remind us of a mere machine. Repeated gestures which distract us from the speaker are comical. Chekhov's heroes have a tendency to blow their noses in the most sentimental or pathetic situations. In Isoved (1882) Makar Baldastov, a hopeless bachelor suffers a crushing disaster everytime he tries to get married. He is so tense

1 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 346.
that when he is finally alone with Zoia in the theatre during a
performance of Faust trying to talk about love, he gets an attack of
hiccups; the result -- general confusion. In a summary of the comic
effects created by words and gestures, onomatopoeia should be included:
Chekhov used it in his early as well as late works. Onomatopoeia is
the use of words that resemble the sounds they describe. In Izvlechenie
iz putevogo zhurnala the carriages in the train sound out: "chtotobudet,
chtotobudet..." instilling fear and uneasiness into the passengers.
In Agafia the bird: seems to be saying: "Ty Nikitu videl? Videl, videl, videl!"

Action and situation comedy is the kind we encounter readily
enough in every life. Step aside, look on as a disinterested observer
and many tragedies will look like a comedy. Any obvious delusion or
distinct impression of mechanical arrangement creates laughter.

Bergson gives as an example the speech of Chicagoneau in the
Plaideurs:

"here we find lawsuits within lawsuits, and the
mechanism works faster and faster -- Racine
produces in us this feeling of increasing
acceleration by crowding his law terms ever closer
together -- until the lawsuit over a truss of
hay costs the plaintiff the best part of his fortune."

15Bergson, H. Laughter, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., St. Martin's St.
London, p. 82.
What Bergson calls the "snowball technique" is used in the story Iz ognia da v polynia where the protagonist from sheer habit of behaviour creates comic effect, which gathers in volume and momentum. First of all, the names of the protagonists give their characteristics.

A lawyer, Kalyakin (to converse) represents Derevyashkin (piece of wood) who tries to sue the choirmaster of the Cathedral, Gradusov for a public insult. Gradusov (pod gradusom in colloquial Russian means "intoxicated") is genuinely surprised. By sheer habit, he talked to Derevyashkin that way since he had been calling him names for many years. But Derevyashkin is not employed by Gradusov anymore and takes the stand. Gradusov consents to a public apology but by force of habit he continues the same kind of name-calling. As a result of a meeting in Samopluyev (self-spitting) tavern, Gradusov is charged with insulting not only Derevyashkin, but also his lawyer and the policeman. He is convinced that he is the plaintiff, but the judgement makes him indignant and he insults the judge, insinuating bribery. He uses German words with a Russian connotation: "Kappen Sie gewesen" (Khanat Russian to grab, German haben, to have). On trial for contempt of court, he insults the higher courts and so on. He thanks the judge for this prompt and just verdict, commenting sarcastically that, of course, one cannot get along on just his salary nowadays, he understands that perfectly. But he will look for a court that cannot be bribed. He refuses to understand that he is himself to blame for the situation he finds himself in. His
inclasticity of mind is ludicrous and his behaviour in the court is similar to Prishibeov's in Untor Prishibeov, the merchant Pomoev's in Clevercyn Bayers, the peasant Denis in Zlomyshlemnik.

When we have the plot of the villain who is the victim of his own villainy, or the cheat cheated, we call it inversion. The "inversion technique" of humour is used in the story 75,000 where a circular effect is achieved when there is a return to the beginning, the theme of the cheat being cheated himself. An adulterous husband steals a lottery ticket from his wife and gives it to his mistress, who cheats him anyway. The ironical twist of it is that the ticket wins 75,000 rubles.

By creating a surprise ending in the story, Chekhov could present a comic situation very vividly. In Orator there is a surprise ending of mistaken identity. Orator Zanoikin (prolonged drinking) has to give a farewell speech at the funeral. The scene is very melodramatic, the widow screams, wanting to follow her deceased husband, but remembering her pension does not jump into the grave. But at the height of Zanoikin's florid, high-flown speech, he discovers the mistaken identity of the body. The man he was talking about is present at the funeral, very much alive with indignation. This ludicrous situation is heightened by the fact that the speaker constantly refers to the homely looks of the deceased, thus transferring the attention of the listeners from solemn spiritual matters to bodily shortcomings.
Chekhov, with acquired experience in writing, uses tricks in
the structure of the story to create humor, especially after contribut-
ing to Nozvo Vronia and later works. By underlining a similar trait
of character Chekhov was able to create a social anachronism such as
Sergeant Prishibeev, the voluntary, unsolicited policeman. Most of
the short stories of the first period are skillfully presented anecdotes.
Their comicality is created not only with the help of word combinations
but by the structure as well. Their unexpected ending is a complete
contrast to the previous content. In Loshadinaia famil'ia the wanted
name escapes the memory in the same manner as the melody escapes
Hauptvakhtov in Zaby1 or again as the elusive fish escapes the anglers
in Nalin. A similar kind of unpredictable ending is used to complete
those three stories. By using hints and paying more attention to what
is left unsaid, he was able to create a humorous story. In Ot nechego
delat, a lawyer, Kavitonov, surprises his wife in the embrace of their
son's tutor Shchupaltsev. The name of the youth exposes him, since it
means "tentacles". The husband plays with him as a cat does with a mouse,
by confronting the frightened youth with demands to marry and support
his wife. By hints and double play he reduces the youth to despair, and
gives him an enormous feeling of guilt. Suddenly the lawyer tells the
stunned youth that his wife is not worth all the trouble and advises him
to pursue the chambermaid instead. In Zhenshchina bez predrassudkov (1883)
the enormous sense of guilt of the hero is resolved in a similarly
surprisingly easy manner.
"Inversion technique" in Pered Sudon shows how the hero is finally paid back in the morning adversely for his frivolous behaviour the previous night during his stay at an inn. Discovering that behind the curtain in his room a good-looking young lady traveller is sleeping, he lets loose his imagination and his tongue. The starting point of this conversation is powder for bedbugs. Here the contrast between his romantic ideas and the prosaic bedbugs gives a touch of ludicrousness to the situation, which is increased by the appearance of the lady's husband, who dashes all the hopes of the ardent speaker. By that time he is ensnared in the web of his own making by declaring himself to be a doctor. On the insistence of the husband, he examines the young woman and gives a fictitious prescription.

Sic transit gloria

In the morning, he faces the husband who happens to be the judge in the court where he is a defendant and the feeling that the whole North Sea is pounding on his back assails the hero. Kleveta is written in the same mood. Akhineev himself spreads the gossip which returns to punish him. In Peresolil, the hero's self-protective tale to scare off the driver backfires when he himself is taken for a robber.

When we say "All the worlds a stage", we think about characters, because there are scenes in real life so closely bordering on high class
comedy, that the stage might adopt them without changing a single word. A character in order to be comic has to have this comic spirit, deep-rooted yet superficial, invisible to its actual owner but visible to everybody else. He has to be considerate to himself, but troublesome to others, so that he does not evoke pity. In other words, he should display signs of vanity. Three conditions are needed to produce a perfectly comic character which Bergson outlines as:

1. Unsociability in the performer
2. Lack of emotion in the spectator
3. Automatism. 16

It relates to Chekhov's heroes making them less human. A growing callousness to social life must be in the character. Comic characters may be quite in accord with stern morality, but an honest anti-social man is ludicrous. In Neobyknovennoe, the hero behaves and talks as a thrifty man, but in his household everyone cringes in his presence and the midwife attending to his wife leaves the house hurriedly, forgetting her fee. A similar atmosphere created in the household by the "honest provider" as in Tinzhelve Indi (1889) Ne v dukhe, Tsso, Obla-seneistva.

A comic character may follow a line of conduct that he has just condemned. In Nadlezhaschchie nery, the health officers eat up the apples they have confiscated as unfit for human consumption. A Polish tenant condemns his landlord for idleness but does not show any productivity

either. A similar situation is found in Slova, slova, slova. Rigidity, automatism, absentmindedness and unsociability all serve as ingredients in the creation of comic characters. By the grouping of similarities a type is created, a ready-made frame. Every comic character is a type. A person is ridiculous through some mental attribute resembling absentmindedness, through something that lives upon him without forming a part of his organism. It happens when we see a profession instead of a person. In svadba's generalom the guest talks only in the jargon of his moral profession, in Khirurgia deacon Vonmiglasov is a deacon first, a patient second. Dva rokana, Roman advokata show professional callousness.

In Zlomysilenik the naive peasant Denis is an expert fisherman, who shows his knowledge of the subject while the prosecutor carries his line of reasoning about law. Both heroes are thinking side by side, but their thoughts never cross, both of them are convinced of being right. The prosecutor tries to prove that a man removing bolts from joints on the railway track has committed a criminal offence. Denis, on the other hand, holds that the nuts he has taken are an indispensable item in fishing tackle. He feels that his conduct is justified by the existence of fishing.

"Look here, ny man, don't you go pretending you are an idiot. Speak up and don't tell no stories about a plummet."
"I have never told a lie in all my born days ... But surely Your Honour understands that you just cannot do without a plummet." 17

Denis cannot be shaken in his topic. When the crown attorney gets entangled in Denis's line of reasoning by pointing to the fact that he could have used a piece of lead or a bullet, Denis tries to teach the crown-attorney about fishing. He sees himself as an honest angler and no criminal, but the attorney wants to present him as a would-be criminal, almost a budding murderer. The rift between their reasoning is enormous.

The attorney:

"You must have known that it would lead to an accident -- is punishable by penal servitude... well, sir, you are the one to know best ... I am only an ignorant man ... -- What d'you mean by that? You understand such thing perfectly well. You are lying, pretending not to understand!"

"-- Why should I lie? You just ask any fellow villagers, if you don't believe me. Only bleakes can be caught without a plummet..."18

Denis in his ignorance fails to comprehend the reason for his sentence and thinks that it might be for non-payment of taxes and starts to argue about


18 Ibid., p. 148.
this point while being led away by the guard. Here comic, dramatic
and tragic elements are mixed together underlining the ridiculous
disorganization of a life in which a common and unifying logic is
absent. And at the same time Chekhov shows the bleak, hopeless
situation of the ignorant peasant, a representative of his class. In
Tylyly (1886) similar situation of parallel thinking by the protagonists
occurs. The same theme is carried into the second period of his
literary work.

Gorky recalls an interesting anecdote connected with Zlonyischiennik.
Once a pompous and petty crown prosecutor visited Chekhov and, trying
to appear better and smarter in the eyes of the writer then he was, gave
a legalistic speech about the criminality of Denis. Chekhov listened
with attention, than said that had he been a judge he would have acquitted
Denis saying "You Denis have not yet ripened into the type of the
deliberate criminal; go -- and ripen." After the lawyer left he summarized
his visit: "they are like nimbles on the seat of justice -- disposing
the fate of people." This remark shows that Chekhov hated pomposity in a
speech, which represented to him presumptuous authority, which according
to Derman he detested.

The theme of man's spiritual slavishness occupies a very prominent
place in Chekhov's writings. It is explored in a variety of different
ways. It is presented through stories that deal with the loss of human

19 Tchekhov's Note-Books and Maxim Gorky's Reminiscences of
Tchekhov, Published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press,
Paradise Rd, Richmond 1921, p. 100.
dignity, with humiliations and the feeling of self-loathing resulting from betrayal of one's better nature: _Dvoc v odnom_, 1883, _Deputat_ (1883) etc. Almost equally insistent is the motif of pervasive stagnation and banality which prevent the hero from realizing his potential and making his life more exciting and rewarding. It is used even more extensively in his later works.

In one of the earliest of his works Chekhov already is concerned with the loss of human dignity. In _Za iablochki_ (1830) he uses a stock situation, the landowner mistreating his serfs, and gives it a unique treatment by using a low comedy device -- slapstick. Slapstick is basically an exaggerated dramatic and pictorial form of action, where the ludicrous antics of the individual are stressed, rather than the moral aspect. A sadistic landowner, Trifon Semionovich, surprises a young engaged peasant couple as the girl is talking the youth into picking an apple from a tree. There is an element of biblical parody in the obvious allusion to the Garden of Eden. As punishment he orders them to hit each other repeatedly, pulling each other's hair. At the end, the couple part as enemies, their dignity torn to shreds.

After 1883 he devotes even more attention to the theme of lost dignity, assailing it with the vindictiveness of a personal crusade. It is his period of "squeezing the slave out of the system drop by drop." Until 1886, therefore, the majority of his works of this period are concerned one way or another with this idea.
Chekhov's overall vision of this situation could be likened to a giant ladder filled with people, each one kissing the heel of the man on the rung above him and kicking in the face the man standing immediately below. The ladder is the ladder of success.

In *Chameleon* (1884) Chekhov is a man who constantly changes his opinion and manners along with the changing opinions coming from the crowd about the ownership of a dog, who has bitten one of the citizens. He is not only a chameleon but two-faced like a Janus. He decides the fate of the man below him on the ladder, while licking the boots of the ones above him. Throughout the scene he suffers an agony of indecision symbolized by his orders to his assistant successively to take off his coat or put it back after each decision he has to make. He feels hot and cold at the same time. The loss of human dignity is shown here in its most degrading form deserving only contemptuous laughter.

By becoming the servants of the ones in power in this world, by losing their independence this kind become slaves and oppressors at the same time, losing human qualities; in short, turning into chameleons. This is a comedy of manners aimed at those who forget the individual, seeing only status, money, position. A man's position in society determines his degree of subservience and of mastery over others. Chekhov saw chameleon in Bolshonomov in *Vверх на лестнице* (1883), Idilia — *Увь и ах* (1882), Maska (1884).
One of the most traditional subjects in Russian literature since the time of Gogol had been small officials. Chekhov saw in today's downtrodden humiliated creatures tomorrow's despots and tyrants. Many of them would come home and let loose pent up feelings of resentment against members of their family. Such situations are shown in Tiazhelye Budd, Tsess, Otets semeistva, No v dukhe, Moi domostroi. Other officials, becoming powerful, humiliate their subordinates according to the manner in which they themselves were treated. In Torzhestvo pobeditelja (1883) the official who finally gets his power is a good example.

To Chekhov uncouth individuals who abused their power and their victims, who deferred to maltreatment recklessly, without fighting for their dignity, were equally distasteful. In Maska (1881), the wealthy drunkard is not much worse than the citizens he insults; on the contrary to him they embody the characteristics of the chameleon, which he detested wholeheartedly. Written in the same mood are Triansa (1885), Poznavnia (1883), Dvoc v odtorn, Na chuchbne.

Rank-consciousness is well represented in Tonkii i Tolstyj (The Thin and the Fat). Two school friends meeting at the station after many years are happy about the occasion until the fat one mentions his rank. The thin one's tone of voice changes to such a thick syrup that the Fat one feels ill at ease. The Thin one gets so agitated that he repeatedly reintroduces his student son and his German-born wife Luise. Although these two meet in the first place as fellow human beings, Chekhov has prepared his readers already by describing what both passengers were
eating and the state of their luggage, indicating their difference in income. In the second part, then, as soon as their different stations in life are disclosed, all humanity disappears and we are left with a mere confrontation between a superior and an inferior rank. The contrast with the genuine gladness of meeting of old friends is underlined by the bootlicking excitement of the Thin one and his family upon learning about the high rank of the Fat one. Towards the end Chekhov underlines the degraded position of the Thin one and his lost dignity by repeating several times the maiden name of his wife Luise Manzenbach (German: 'lousy stream'). In the first part of the story the man is described as he should be, in the second part as he is in reality.

Whenever an individual or a class makes pretensions to be something it is not, the result is laughable. In Oba luchshe, Pered svadboi, zabye, svadba s generalom (1884) he gives a portrait of a man with pretensions to beauty and nobility, while everything in him is permeated with the spirit of banality.

The targets for Chekhov's humour were not only the hero's pretensions and foibles but any kind of faith in what Chekhov considered illusions, whether promulgated by his own characters or in the writings of his shallower contemporaries. He attacks then in Tsvety zapozdal've (1882), slova, slova, slova (1887), Dachnitsa (1884), i vosproinlani idealista (1885), U predvoditel'shi (1885).
In order to create a comic type Chekhov used all devices available, beginning with word -structure, gestures, movements, reaction to certain stressful situations, but chiefly by the singling out of a specific characteristic, either physical or psychological, that immediately defines the character. In Iz ognia da v polynia in a few lines he presents a portrait of Gradusov by describing his hair as so coarse that one felt like using it for a shoeshine brush. So this one physical feature points to the whole rigid coarse personality of the character.

In the story Kapitanski mundir the peculiarity is a psychological one: Chekhov depicts the behaviour of the tailor Merkulov, who has the mentality of a slave so deeply ingrained in him that he actually welcomes situations where he is treated as one. There are three main persons involved, but Merkulov is the one who gets all the writer's attention. At the beginning Merkulov after a few drinks in the tavern starts philosophizing. He lives in the past as the tailor for the elite in St. Petersburg, refusing to accept clients of other classes. This prepares us for the main event of the story which begins with an officer wanting a new uniform. Merkulov is now the epitome of subservience.

"-Вам- благор...Господи!-забормотала Меркулов, захлебываясь и сривая из сноё головы шапку вместе с ключком волос." 20

He chokes on his words, giving genuine validity to the type of the slave. When the officer wants to know the price he answers him that he (the officer) is not dealing with some kind of a merchant, but with a man who knows how to treat a nobleman. The tension mounts when the tailor demands money from his wife for the cow they have just sold, buys material and is finally ready to deliver. The grotesqueness increases when happy Merkulov spends hours every day in the hallway of the captain's, waiting for money, being chased away each time. He is relishing this situation, but his wife takes the bull by the horns, demanding return of the money. The culmination of the story happens on the street when on her insistence Merkulov approaches the officer for the money, blaming his wife for such ignorance—but after all this is 'cow's money.' As a reply the officer hits Merkulov very hard in the face. Merkulov blissfully smiles and states to his wife that one can see the nobleman at once, because they are educated and sensitive behaving in the same manner as those in St. Petersburg in his good old days. The pathetic trait of the slave is very vivid in this stressful situation.

Towards the end of the 80's Chekhov leans more towards the psychological story. While in previous stories the action is concentrated about one event with a minimal number of participants, in the psychological story the participants are few but attention is now focused on a single experience. It creates a scene out of the inner life of the hero,
especially when he is under the influence of some external blow such as unexpected loss. Often misfortune wakes up out of his lethargy. Deep unhappiness takes a man out of his rut and revives suddenly the humanity that has lain dormant within him.

In *Toska* (1886) Iona, a former peasant, now a hackney in St. Petersburg, suddenly loses his son. He wants to share his grief with someone but in the whole city there is no one interested in him or his sufferings. After many unsuccessful attempts to tell someone...

"Stol'kon, s rasstanovkoi" as he feels, he turns to his horse and tells all. He is the only normal man in the indifferent set of people he meets. In order to underline the depth of Iona's grief Chekhov uses lyrical insertions. He describes the snow as falling so heavily it almost engulfs Iona who, immersed in his grief, sits under it not noticing it. The trend of the bereaved father's thoughts is like an inner dialogue.

In the contrast to the landscapes of the anecdotes where it has the function of creating humour, in a psychological story landscape serves as an object correlative for the inner world of the hero. Chekhov compares the magnitude of Iona's grief to a dammed flood that, once released, could have drowned the whole world.

The heroes in *Gore* (1885) and *Tanner* wake up in the same manner after the disaster. Chekhov uses also psychological humour in order to describe children, and their world. The children have a natural undistorted reaction to life. Everything ugly, nasty, insulting to human dignity
to which adults get hardened is viewed by them as strange, unnatural, frightening and funny as well.

By injecting pathos into his laughter he created a lyrical humour. The introduction of this lyrical note into his humour marks the beginning of a new stage in Chekhov's artistic career. After 1886 the hitherto dispassionate tone of his writings gradually gives way to a growing measure of involvement with the characters he has created.
CHAPTER II A

With the appearance of the Pestrye rasskazy, consisting of a collection of new stories and selections of old ones, in May 1886, Chekhov entered the field of the serious artist. He became, according to Andreevsky,

"Наследный принц литературных королей" ¹

While the months between the end of 1885 and May 1886 were for Chekhov a period for relishing his newly acquired recognition, meeting important people in literary and publishing fields such as Suvorin and Grigorovich, he was somewhat perturbed by the fact that his hastily concocted stories were read with attention. Nevertheless the feeling of elation did not leave him. V. Korolenko in his memoirs recorded his impressions of Chekhov as a man from whose eyes beamed the same inexhaustible wit and joy with which he flooded his stories. He felt that his Pestrye rasskazy were permeated with a youthful, carefree attitude to life and literature, glittering with genuine humor and ready wit. But each glory brings its thorns as well, for with the appearance of the Pestrye rasskazy, he was taken to task severely by the literary critics. Because of or maybe in spite of these unfavourable comments he became even more widely read and took

¹*Vestnik Znania, 1904 No. 11 p. 84.*

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himself even more seriously.

In the newspaper Russkie Vedomosti it was said that the stories were intelligently written, full of dynamism and easy to read; they were not only interesting but humane as well. Mingled with the tone of joking laughter there was however a trace of a more serious, contemplative note. Anyway, claimed the reviewer, it was the best collection so far of stories for entertainment. The article, although unsigned, is attributed to Golzov.

Comments coming from Konstantin Akseniev in Vestnik Evropy were less favourable. While pointing to the anecdotal structure of the stories, their banality and lack of credibility, he still gives the talent of Chekhov its due in the treatment of the psychological state of his heroes. F. Zuev in Now was even more unfair by maintaining that many of the stories reminded him of delirious thinking but not of plots that made sense. Such writing, according to him, does not demand great effort and is sentenced to live only twenty-four hours on the pages of the newspaper. While Chekhov displayed stoical serenity in the face of those comments, one criticism seems to have cut him very deeply, because he continued to refer to it throughout his life: it was from A. Skabichevsky, the populist literary critic who wrote in July 1886 Severny Vestnik:

comparing the author to the newspaper's clown and regretting his book written in gay mood
as a sad and tragic event in which a young
talent has committed artistic suicide in
the newspaper kingdom.

Chekhov never attempted to enter into polemics with the unfair critics, displaying once more his nobility of soul that made him reluctant to descend to their level. He was seeking ideal qualities of beauty and truth in human beings. Anything inferior he tried by his humour to point out in the hope of improvement. In his relationship with his friends and acquaintances he was demanding -- sometimes even uncompromising in his opinions.

After the avalanche of hostile and sympathetic opinions Chekhov took stock of his position as a writer and while in the latter part of 1886 and 1887 he perfected humorous short stories, subsequently he tried to fulfill the expectations of his critics by producing something serious and of lasting worth. When Korsh, owner of the Moscow theatre, approached him to write something for his theatre, expecting something humorous since the repertoire there was light comedy and vaudeville, he got "Ivanov" instead. "Ivanov" was met with a mixed reaction by the public. But the reception that the intelligentsia accorded it was hostile: they saw in it a personal affront. P. Kicheev in Moskovski Listok wrote about "Ivanov":

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2 Paraphrased from Polish. Sliwowski, Rene. Antoni Czecho
wondering how Chekhov having a university education could present to the public a cynical mixture, calling such surburshchina a comedy.

V. Korolenko writes that this drama created for Chekhov a lot of serious literary frustrations and he felt that one could detect a change in the attitude of Chekhov afterwards. He was tempted by Korsh's favourable proposal to write this play but he regretted the haste with which he wrote it, and had to make many changes after its appearance on the stage. His shaky finances and his secret concern about his deteriorating health had prompted the premature appearance of the play. His correspondence of this time confirms it.

"Денег кот наплакал" "Понемножку болею
и мало помалу обращаясь в' стрекозильные
моции''..."...увы, я беднее чем Ваш осел".

"Работа моя нервная, волнующая, требующая,
напряженная... Она публична и отвественна,
что делает ее вдое тяжкой.Каждый газетный
отзыв обо мне волнует и меня и мою семью".

M.В Киселевой. 1887.
19.1.1887-М.Г.Чехову.

3Feyder, Val. A. P. Chekhov literaturny: byt i tvorchestvo po

4Ibid., pp. 64, 66, 74.
Chekhov was already becoming a well-known figure. He felt even
greater pressures on him and expectations that his work would be of a
responsible nature. His first attempt at larger, more serious work was
Step, into which he put a lot of effort. He started to write this
story with a new feeling of responsibility. He expressed anxiety in
his letters to his friends about his inability to write on a large scale,
having previously been used to small-scale writings, and having a feeling
that he was presenting the reader with a Steppe Encyclopedia. His first
pancake, he thought, was turning out to be a dumpling. But it was a
literary achievement of greater magnitude than anything he had so far
produced. There is no abrupt change of writing technique; he is guided
by the artistic principle of his small stories, warmed up by lyrical
humour. The story is seen through the eyes of the hero, the child who
sees Russian life clearly and simply. Chekhov combines childish naivety
with high wisdom, creating specific humorous effect. Through Egorushka's
perception Chekhov presents landscape in unusual descriptions and with
the boy's single thoughts he cements important ideas and impressions.
He had seen the steppe himself while revisiting Taganrog in the spring
of 1887.

His literary activities of the years 1886–1887 present a
complicated picture. Some stories which continued to appear in Oskolki
and other magazines were written in the style of Antosha Chekhonte, but
they petered out during those two years. As a contrast to those stories
Novoe Vremia magazine was printing more serious stories at the rate of about one a month. The stories published in the Peterburgzskaja gazeta wavered between gay, frivolous pieces and creations of conscientious artistry. Chekhov realized that to do justice to his talent he must somehow manage to write less and the statistics show that the year 1886 was crucial in this respect. Compared with the 220 stories he published in 1886, his output dropped to a half of that in the following year and in 1888 barely 12 stories appeared. He was demanding more from his genius now, because of new demands on him by his readers, which were as much against his nature as the demands for strictly humour by Leykin.

By this period in his stories he showed already a high degree of skill when he described human feelings. While working for Leykin he had not had much opportunity to practice in this field, but he showed now his mastery in his treatment of human emotions. He applied the style of the Little story and capitalized on absurd situations in order to squeeze the last drop of humour out of it but still leave the reader with the feeling of sadness towards the end. The originality of those stories was that there was greater stress on atmosphere than on incident. They contained Chekhovian nastroenie (mood) which is very elusive of accurate definition.

His friends and critics were united in their praise of his talent, of his mastery in portraying landscape according to the mood of protagonists and above all of his excellence as a psychologist.
The accusations of lack of message in his works especially those of Mikhailovsky, then the idol of the youthful members of the Populist movement, annoyed Chekhov immensely and he finally stated his credo in a letter to A. N. Pleshcheev of October 1889:

"I am afraid of those who look for a tendency between the lines... I am not a liberal, not a conservative, not a monk, not an indifferentist. I should like to be a free artist and nothing more, and I regret that God has not given me the power to be one. ... I hate lying and violence in all their forms... Pharisaisia, stupidity, and despotism reign not in merchants' houses and prisons alone. I see them in science, in literature in the younger generation... My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom -- freedom from violence and lying, whatever forms they may take. This is the program I would follow if I were a great artist."

At about the same period Chekhov answers Suvorin's rebuke about his objectivity, lack of ideals and ideas, stating that when he writes he reckons entirely upon the reader to add for himself the subjective elements that are lacking in the story. Then he adds in another letter to Suvorin that nature reconciles man and makes him indifferent. He does not however advocate the indifference of egoists and empty people, but that of the one who in order to see things more clearly and portray them justly, frees himself from useless, irrelevant, cluttering details and casts prejudices, binding rigid programs, beliefs, traditions, and affiliations with particular parties. Chekhov is here describing

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6Ibid., p. 62, 64.
the kind of spiritual emancipation which Bergson regards as essential to
the humorist; for genuine humour can only be produced by a soul thoroughly
calm and unruffled.

Chekhov felt that when he showed life as it is he was giving a
message because with a little effort and initiative his heroes could
have made it better. The unity and consistency of his works from the
beginning lay in his concern with the triviality of life and the
exposure of human pettiness, deliberately avoiding all moralizing.
His heroes suffer right from the start because lack of understanding
between them is the central fact of life. They fool themselves by
refusing to face reality. His heroes behave badly not because they are
bad, but mostly because life drags them along the stream and, because
of their weak will, they become the victims of circumstances.

In his first phase he acts like a bystander, chuckling in amuse-
ment at his heroes’ attempts to squirm out of some embarrassing situation,
like puppets on strings. At the beginning the heroes are mostly
representatives of the small provincial town. This was a milieu he knew
and grew up with.

After his graduation as MD in 1884 he was exposed to a different
environment and a different kind of people. Voskresensk with its
hospital, Zvenigorod and Babkino were the highly cultured Kiselev formally
introduced him to a circle of talented, interesting people, had begun
to be a fruitful influence already in the stories of the second period.
His circle of acquaintances and friends from the professional world --
artists, writers and editors -- widens and he is able to understand the
mentality of different classes.
In his letter to his brother Nicholas, Chekhov tried to define his opinion of cultured people. Such people, he noted, respect the human personality, and therefore are always forbearing, gentle, courteous, and compliant. They will overlook noise, and cold, and overdone meat, and the presence of strangers in their homes... They are sincere and fear untruth like the very devil... They do not make fools of themselves in order to arouse sympathy... they are not vain... they develop an aesthetic sense, treasure their talent and make use of it. To Chekhov these were ideal qualities of a man.

In nature works the humour of Chekhov plays another role. Tragedy is softened by this humour or his humour is used to underline the sadness in sad stories, making the protagonists pathetic. It explains why his third collection of stories V Smershkh (1887) was published with a few rather melancholy pieces included. A highly controversial debate has arisen since as to whether Chekhov was still an optimist at that time or whether he became and remained thereafter a pessimist. Early criticism portrayed him as a gloomy writer: "singer of twilight moods", "a sick talent", "a poet of anguish" (Mikhailovsky) and expresser of "world sorrow" (Aleksandrovich), "an optino-pessimist" (S. Bulgakov), "a poet of the stagnant years" (P. D. Boborykin), "a poet of our ruin" (S. Andreevich), "a writer of disintegration" (Merezhkovsky).

"a writer who takes the ulcers of society from his own soul and depicts them extraordinarily beautifully" (A. V. Lunacharsky), a writer who in his nature work "steadily distills a sweet and comforting decoction

7Bunin, J. O Chekhove. n. 42.
of despair which will produce a happy and drowsy numbness" (D. S. Mirsky), "a singer of hopelessness" (L. Shestov). All those critics disregarded comments of Chekhov's personal friends or his own remarks in his letters and tried to read in his heroes autobiographical characters.

Chekhov recorded the facts of his epoch, wrote only about things he knew and studied, about the majority of the Russian intelligentsia, who assumed attitudes of pessimism, nihilism, who did not want or could not create their own ideal and a central organizing spiritual life-idea. Just as illness has the power to spread, while health does not, so on the psychological level, pessimism seems contagious, while optimism remains limited.

Chekhov said that he had believed in progress since childhood, which contradicts the idea of his pessimistic personality, because pessimism has other sources than disappointments in observing reality, experiencing frustrations and even tragic events in one's life. Pessimism does not allow the possibility of turning to the better from the nad reality. Chekhov himself was always annoyed when someone called him a pessimist -- (nutik) as he called it. The process of self-improvement that he underwent after his university years shows a double growth: of the writer and intellectual on the one hand, and of the apostle of moral liberation for the individual on the other. It cost him much

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sacrifice, effort and inner struggle. Only an energetic optimistic man could have achieved it. He writes about it to Suvorin (January 7, 1889):

"What the Genteel Writers used to take from nature gratis, the Raznochintsy had to buy at the cost of their youth. Write a story, do, about a serf's son, a young man who once worked as a grocery clerk, who sang in a church choir and went through high school and university, who was brought up to respect rank, to kiss a priest's hands, to submit to the ideas of others, to give thanks for every piece of bread; who was often flogged; who as a tutor made the rounds of his pupils without galoshes, who used to fight, to torture animals, who loved to dine at the homes of rich relatives, was hypocritical to God and man without any necessity -- simply from a feeling of his own insignificance -- write how this young man is squeezing the slave out of his system, drop by drop, and how, on awakening one fine morning, he feels that the blood in his veins is no longer a slave's, but real, human blood."

In the constant effort for self-improvement and in the struggle to shed his weaknesses whilst in the process of emerging from a biased, conservative milieu, Chekhov was able to acquire the high moral qualities of the cultured man: a wise restraint and simplicity, aesthetic appreciation, a sombre, profound mind and exceptional self-discipline for work.

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This letter negates a lengthy research of Derman who maintained that Chekhov suffered from shallowness of inner feelings and made a very good job of concealing it. He possessed self-control which he acquired at the cost of great effort and self-improvement, but he was also a sensitive man, with above average perception. No one can be a pessimist who, despite his own acutely bad health, strives constantly towards improvements for others, a fact confirmed by A. I. Kuprin (Pamiati Chekhova) who maintained that this "so-called pessimist" never lost hope for a better future for mankind. This opinion was supported by Ivan Bunin who stated that Chekhov never lost the signs of a humorist throughout his life, nor his restraint (sderzhannost), nor his courage, in the face of a long incurable illness -- denying Chekhov's pessimism with the words of Chekhov himself:

...а то вот есть писатель Чехов:нитик.
А какой я нитик? 21

This was the paradox of the author's personality: the dichotomy between his optimism and the degradation the heroes of some of his works. This

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paradox can be resolved on a psychological basis only. In his literary works Chekhov did not avoid problems created by life, he dealt with the themes of Russian reality. Being a man who strove towards beauty and harmony he felt painfully any abnormal situations, reacting almost pathologically to any false gesture, word or act contrary to good intentions. Thus he reacted to any disharmony in human relationships. Because he loved life and demanded a lot from it, he hated the factors that brought disharmony to it, reducing human life to mere existence.

One feels in his works a sense of life as it is. This may be the reason why he loved to write vaudevilles. Because it was expected from him to produce serious works with a message he joked about his one-curtain-raisers.

"Ах, если в Северном Вестнике узнают, что я писал водевили, то меня перекинут анафеме! Но что делать, если руки чешутся и хочется учинить какое-нибудь трю-ла-ла!"

In the period of 1887-90 he produced farcical sketches, written chiefly to amuse the public. These are The Bear, The Proposal, An Unwilling Martyr, The Wedding and later Kalkhas in 1891, The Anniversary with the new version of On the Harmfulness of Tobacco. Kalkhas, The Anniversary. An Unwilling Martyr and The Wedding were revised versions of

previous stories. These sketches were not bringing him fame as a dramatist but they were very profitable financially. The Bear was exceptionally successful and profitable too. Chekhov jested that a gypsy would not get so much out of a live bear as he got from a dead one. The proceeds gave him an opportunity to travel to the Crimea to spend two summers in Luka (Ukraine) to improve his health.

According to R. Hingley, those vaudevilles bear the same relationship to his long plays as the Little stories do to his serious stories. They were a blend of comedy with pathos -- caricatures. Chekhov boasted that vaudeville subjects gushed out of him like oil from the wells of Baku, because he felt that this is how life was, and his Little stories with their comically constructed dialogues could easily have been adapted to the stage.

His fame grew but ironically it was matched by a proportionate decline in health. In his letter to Leykin (December 10, 1883) he already mentions spitting blood but tries to reassure himself and others that it is not of tubercular origin. But in a letter to Suvorin of October 14, 1883, he reports some uneasiness about his haemorrhage, adding:

""В крови текущей из рта есть что-то зловещее, как зарево"" 13

13 Zaitsev, B. Chekhov, p. 73. Izdatelstvo imeni Chekhova, New York.
Although his brother Michael maintains that the years of 1888-89 in the life of Chekhov were unusually euphoric, with constant jokes, gaiety and a lot of work, it would be assumed that this activity was only an attempt to hide a growing concern about his incurable illness. The final crisis came with the death of his brother Nicholas from T.B. on the 17th of June 1889 in Luka.

His correspondence of this time is very revealing as he describes Nicholas' sufferings before death, adding that they absolved him a hundred-fold of any sins he ever committed. The most important is a letter to A. M. Pleshcheev (June 26, 1889) where he describes not only his loss but a feeling of guilt for leaving Nicholas in his last days to die, while he went with Slobodin visiting. His brother, in a letter to his father, mentions that during the funeral all were bathed in tears, but not Anton, which was bad. 14 After that, letters from Chekhov indicate stagnation, lack of interest in everything and suddenly the unexpected announcement of his intended journey to the penal colony island Sakhalin. With this trip he created a series of speculations about his reasons that has continued up to the present day. Opinions range from the strictly political, like Emilov's, who felt that Chekhov wanted to pay his debt not only to medicine but to his conscience as a Russian writer and his feeling of responsibility towards his nation, to more extensive explanations such as Ernest I. Simonov's, who gives various reasons, such as lack of focus in Chekhov's writing that led to a moral crisis, and critical attacks for non-participation in both his life and literary

work in current political, moral and social questions. Finally there was probably his awareness that he was hopelessly ill with TB and his failure to marry. The last allegation coincides with David Magarshak's theory in his Chekhov A Life, where he mentions Chekhov's love for a married woman, a writer, Lydia Avilova, which was an absolute secret until the recent publication of Chekhov in my Life by Lydia Avilova. These memoirs describe a relationship which once more underlines the nobility of Chekhov's soul, his discretion, tact and tenderness of feelings and especially his sense of fair play. He met Lydia Avilova in May 1889 and his sense of fairness obliged him to flee from this love on first sight.

The death of his brother Nicholas dealt him the same blow as was received by his hero Gregory Petrov in Gora, who yearns to start life anew but finds it is too late. The reason he did not travel to Western Europe, as was expected by many of his friends, but to the penal colony may be explained by the fact that Chekhov being a doctor knew that a sense of depression and despair cannot be cured by entering into a situation where people are much better off than the patient, but on the contrary the patient has to be exposed to the situations where the suffering and degradation of other human beings will show him that he is still much better off. Therefore, when Chekhov returned, in April 1891, from his trip to this dismal place in Siberia, via Ceylon and India, instead of exuding depression and sadness everyone was surprised to see how alert and
optimistic he looked. He had made peace with himself and accepted the law of life. This new attitude is shown in his subsequent works, starting his third period of literary activity. As a result of this trip there appeared the monumental journalistic work Ostrov Sakhalin, and he summed up his work for it to Suworin by saying "that once he became open in telling about Sakhalin the heanness lifted off his heart and even traces of humour reappeared."15

The story Gore (1935), although written earlier, sets a precedent for later stories that evoke a smile but a sad smile. The irony of turner Petrov's feeling of loss for his dead wife is underlined by his contemplations in which we see that she had ceased to exist for him for many, many years. All he recalls is the wedding when he got drunk and never became sober since.

From the beginning two motifs are interwoven, the motif of the sensitive artistic soul susceptible to awakening and that of the blow of fate that wakes up the turner out of inertia. He dreams about his future masterpieces and injects into them thoughts about his misspent life. Two lines run simultaneously through the story, a humorous one created by the senseless behaviour of the drunk and the main line -- a dramatic one. "Should start to live anew" -- he thinks, but he is not capable of reforming his life. It is too late.

Attention is concentrated upon the main character and his psychology. The story is written in a humorous tone, but humour changes here sharply. Moving away from external humour he veers instead toward lyrical humour, which has a pathos in itself.
The theme of the misspent life recurs more in Chekhov's works as the years go by. The problem of ignorance and stupidity is tackled from the other side. It is a sad event but man himself is at fault.

In the second phase Chekhov uses his humour many times as a counterpoint to the dramatic or the tragic. It is always very much in the foreground; it may be shown even as a means of adding a further dimension to works that seem far removed from the humorous. Through situation and circumstances Chekhov is able to create a different brand of humour, in which the conical level of the story derives from illiteracy and complete ignorance of the workings of the law and its offices.

The story is constructed so that the conicality is created by the dialogue.

On another level, though, those stories give a dramatic, terse account of all the hopelessness and poverty, material and mental, of the protagonists, which is Chekhov's primary concern. The result borders on the tragic.

In the story Tyiyy the conicality of the situation outweighs the tragic element. Popikov, a deputy examining magistrate, gets a jumble of stupid evidence from a witness, who is more interested in his allowance than in giving evidence about Drykhunov's beating his wife. To enhance the humor Chekhov still uses a funny name, which aptly describes
the defendant, a good-for-nothing lazy bones; for in colloquial Russian "drykhnut" is "to sleep a lot." The shepherd Filaretov is strongly reminiscent of Denis in Zloumyshleknik both in his external looks and in his behaviour. Filaretov is unable to understand that the deputy should be called \( v v \), he also gives funny answers during the giving of the evidence, which have nothing to do with the issue in the question, the alleged maltreatment of Drykhunov's wife by her husband. This story was not included by Chekhov into his collected works, maybe because it still lacks depth and is written more in Chekhone's style.

In contrast another story, **Termoda** (1887), has a predominantly serious theme with only an oblique use of humour. The subject is humorous but the content of the story is sad. Vaska, a local blacksmith, by an error of justice receives a harsh sentence for what is only a trifling offence. He falls sick and is transferred from the prison to the hospital. The drama starts with an appeal to the doctor by Vaska's brother Kiril to release the prisoner; the request shocks the doctor but Kiril does not give up, despite the doctor's assurances that he lacks the power to fulfil his request. Each tries to convince the other, but without success because they lack any common ground for understanding. We witness here the clash of two mutually exclusive logics. There is humour in Kiril's persistent appeals to a man who is in no position to help him. But underlying the comedy there is a more serious note. Kiril wants to prove that his brother is the victim of a miscarriage of justice,
that his family is suffering deprivations and that in his absence there is no one to run the smithy. The title Termota is allegorical; it underlines on the one hand the stark ignorance of the protagonist Kiril and on the other the tragic situation of a very unhappy man, who got himself trapped in a hopeless circle without any means of escape, a circle created by an unjust and inhuman bureaucracy for not only Kiril but the rest of the people. The tragic element in this story overshadows the conical subject: Chekhov shows us a society so structured as to prevent any meaningful communication between those who live in it.

In Bezzashchitnoe sushchestvo, which Chekhov later reshaped into a vaudeville jubilej (Anniversary), the construction of dialogues is similar. Chekhov again portrays an individual (this time a woman) who appeals to the wrong representative of the wrong institution; but the comic element is very strong here, because Chekhov, following the tradition he established in his first phase, livens it up by comparing the protagonist to a dung beetle, making her use derogatory metaphors against the clerks in her demands for money. Also Chekhov creates a social type out of the weak-willed banker, giving him the name of Shechina (to pluck). This character finally succumbs to the sheer force of the woman's persistence, even though he is not the appropriate object of it. That is why Bergson found inelasticity and rigidity so funny in human beings. Other stories where sheer force of persistence finally wins are
Lack of understanding is portrayed in Neostorozhomost (1887) which still reminds one strongly of Chekhonte in style. It consists of an anecdote in which the hero drinks coal oil instead of vodka in the darkness, seeks help vainly, prepares to die but recovers miraculously. His unperturbed relative Dashutka, sunk in the tedium of living is fretting only that the coal oil must have been of the diluted cheaper kinds and she had been cheated by the storekeeper.

In Zhiteiskie nevzgody, (1887) three protagonists are suffering separately: the head of the family through his inability to calculate the rate of interest on an investment bond, his wife who has severe toothache, and the student who is preparing for his medical exam, learning by rote. None shows any concern for the others. Their repeated reactions to their predicament enhanced by the loud music from the upstairs apartment "so loud that even the coils in the mattress were moving" create that Chekhov's external humour, built by gestures, words, situation of heroes. The change from this kind of humour to a lyrical one can be traced by a brief comparison of Vtsirulne (1883) and Polenka (1887).

Vtsirulne is a very skilfully presented anecdote. The tragedy of a young barber, who refuses to finish a haircut for the father of the girl he wooed unsuccessfully, is only an accidental detail: it gives extra flavour to the comedy of the father, who dances at his daughter's wedding with only half a haircut.
In Polenka we have the same tragedy of the jilted suitor. Here Polinka tells the clerk who is in love with her about her love for a student. Both stories, therefore, have dialogues where talk about love is mixed with professional talk, in the first about the haircuts, in the other about goods in the store. The core of tragedy in Polenka is, however, the suffering of the clerk who for the sake of his job and the protection of the crying girl has to repress his own pain and pretend to be a jovial polite salesman. Here lyrical humour is created by pointing to the inner feelings of the clerk, which in turn creates sadness in the reader. A similar theme is portrayed in Geroi barynya, where a betrayed wife has to play the role of a polite, gay hostess while her heart is bursting from suffering.

The penetration of the author into the inner world of his heroes is portraying in two stories which serve as a contrast in treatment of similar themes, Slova, slova, slova (1883) and Khoristka (1886).

While in Slova, slova, slova Chekhov uses external devices, introducing the weather and music in order to create sympathy for Katja, in Khoristka the simplicity is stark, but creates a profound drama of life.

The theme of Khoristka is the stock comic situation of the husband found by his wife with his mistress. The dramatic element is at first latent but gradually it becomes dominant. At the first the reader is supposed to feel sorry for the deceived wife, whose yastrel husband is hiding in the next room and who has subjected his family to
financial ruin and eventual bankruptcy. But in the background of this
drama we perceive the outline of another story, the story of the
misspent potential of a call-girl Pasha and her humiliation, which by a
shift in perspective suddenly becomes the centre of focus. The
original story meanwhile degenerates into a simple farce.

Another example will illustrate the transition. Chekhov wrote a
number of stories in which he exploits psychological drama for purely
comic effect. The story Метител (1887) is fairly typical: there is a
minimum of external action but all the drama is transferred to the
inner feelings of the hero. A deceived husband, Sigaev, comes to a
gunsmitli to buy a gun to avenge himself and to defend the honour of his
family. At first he decides to kill his wife, her lover and then him-
self, but the more the salesman tells him about the different makes of
weapons and waxes into an enthusiastic sales pitch the more defeated
the husband feels. His thirst for revenge dwindles in proportion to
the growing eagerness of the gunsmitli. He decides now against killing
himself, his wife and her lover, and opts instead for challenging the
lover to a duel. Then, as the salesman continues to hold forth about
weapons and the consequences of killing, Sigaev decides to kill both the
lover and himself. Finally, to escape the salesman, he buys a net to
catch birds with and then leaves. All the action in the story is
contained within the imagination of the insulted husband. The external
action is substituted by the psychological state of the hero.
These examples illustrate the way Chekhov's humour had evolved into a completely new artistic device. Besides being a brilliant source of comic effect, which is its basic function in \( \text{Natitel} \), the drama of interior action could be as in \( \text{Polenka} \) and \( \text{Khoristka} \), a means of exploiting the complexities and inconsistencies of life which, complemented by his serious side, allowed Chekhov to present a world where light and dark, comic and tragic, are inextricably interwoven.

With artistic maturity Chekhov also arrived at intellectual maturity. He was already addressing himself to a wide range of problems and ironies of life. Later he would become increasingly preoccupied with the fundamental issues of human destiny and the problem of human existence. In \( \text{Skuchnaia istoria} \) there is a clear anticipation of the lyrically tragic tone of his later works colored by mild and very often camouflaged irony.

A fatalistic note started to enter his work in the second phase already.

In \( \text{Schestlivichik} \) (1886) "...все зависит от случая" \(^{16}\) in \( \text{Sledovatel} \) (1887) "...нет действия без причин" \(^{17}\). He saw even the sickness of his generation, according to A. Bely, as sent with a purpose.

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\(^{16}\) \textit{Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem} A. P. Chekhoval \( \text{1-20, Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, Moskva 1944-51, Vol. V}, \text{p. 37.}

\(^{17}\) \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. VI, p. 142.
He develops also certain features of composition characteristic of the later dramatic works. His heroes meet each other accidentally as usually happens in ordinary life, where the fate of man is decided by circumstances.

Chekhov still uses methods in creating humour that we have seen as more characteristic of humour in the first phase. For example play on words:

"...сваха раскраснелась... и спросила: 
- А вы сколько получаете, Николай Николаич?
... Кроме того мы имеем доход от свечей и зайцев.
-- Охотой занимаетесь?
- Нет-нет, зайцы у нас называются безбилетные пассажиры."16

repetition of words:

"Я человек положительный"...

Chekhov was also fond of using foreign words and names to heighten comic effect. In Zhilets (1886) he combines both of them with another favourite device, the use of proverb. In this story there is only a hint of the proverb. The hero, Brykovich, is a typical Chekhovian creation, a henpecked husband who tries to vent his frustrations on his

16 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 229.
19 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 226.
wife's boarder, Khaliavkin. He breaks down, confesses his misery and goes off with Khaliavkin to drown his sorrows in drink. The names of both these characters are derived from Ukrainian, probably due to the Taganrog influence. Brykovich is from "brykati"—"to jump carefree"; and Khaliavkin from "Kholiava"—"the upper part of the boot." Chekhov also alludes playfully to the proverb "to have at one like Kholiava," which means to have a loose tongue (Khaliavkin shows a notable lack of discretion in his conversation with Brykovich). The story offers a good refutation of Derman's objections to Chekhov's use of Ukrainian expressions. Whereas Derman complains that they spoiled Chekhov's style, sprinkled as they were throughout practically all his stories, this example shows that Chekhov was fully aware of what he was doing. Chekhov showed the same bias towards things Ukrainian in his choice of names and proverbs. Brykovich, Khaliavkin, Nabrydlov, Puhets-Otkachalov are examples of Ukrainian names, and analogous examples may be found of his use of Ukrainian proverbs. 20 He included even sections of dialogue in Ukrainian, as in Sten. The use of those expressions was not an ignorance of style, as Derman thinks, but a deliberate device that Chekhov employed. He advised Suvorin to use Ukrainian names for his play for the sake of variety. 21

His heroes still blow their noses in the most pathetic, solemn situations, as is done during the proposal in Khoroshii konets by the hero, or by the musicians in Svadba at the most solemn moment.

21 Ibid., Vol. XVIII, p. 307.
Alogism is still used, for example in Novogodnie pythki (1887):

"Разбитый, покатый, без задних ног, возвращаешься вы к вечеру домой. Вас встречает ваша, извините за выражение, подруга жизни." 22

Solemnity when juxtaposed with the vulgar or prosaic becomes funny, as in The Letter (1887) where a father's stern solemn lecture to his unruly son is destroyed by his prosaic addition at the end of the letter, which is out of tone with the rest of the letter. The same happens to solemnity in Svadba, where the reappearance -- 3 times of the dog in the kitchen is enhanced by a comparison of the behaviour of the ushers with dogs who have just broken their chains, and we end with the father of the bride drunk and insisting that he is one of the insulted guests. He still uses professional rigidity as a comic aspect for example in Zlonyshlenniki (1887):

Затмение солнца.
 Городовой, что же ты злакания не обращаете на беспорядок.
 Солнце не в моем участке." 23

22 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 391.
23 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 462.
The heroes are still being likened to animals such as the "beetle" Marshukhina and the spiderlike hero in Ty i vy. The names of the heroes still create a comic impression, but vulgarity is gone. The following quote is the best example of anthrponomorphism.

"...выползает большая широколицая луна. Она красна (вообще луна вылезая из-за кустов, всегда почему-то бывает ужасно сконфужена)."

Anthropomorphism is still used in moderation; Chekhov even recommended its usefulness to Alexander, but when it became a common literary device he abandoned it and in 1890 positively discouraged M. Gorky from using it. 25 Metaphors are of more refined types, less derogatory, as in Shampanskoe 1887

"Встуя на скользкий путь, женщина всегда начинает с пампансого, потому-то она и шипит, как змея, соблазняющая Еву!" 26

The description of the hero in a few lines and concentration on certain features still continue. All we remember about the heroine in Iz zapisok vsylichivogo cheloveka is that her nose has a tendency to swell up in repeated

24 Ibid., Vol. V. p. 71.
26 Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem A. P. Chekhova, Vol. IV, p. 482.
crucial situations. The druggist in Aptekarsha (1887) has a jackass's jaw.

The laughable character who is severely moral and decent-living but has grown callous to social life, showing inelasticity of character, such as Ledovsky in Khoroshie Ludi, is well represented in the second phase too.

Nevertheless there is an increasing tendency to depict the irony of life, a tendency which, when fully realized, would be the keynote of Chekhov's third distinct phase of literary activity.
CHAPTER III A

The trip to Sakhalin played an important role in Chekhov's life. It served as a bridge between two phases of his life, his youth which was drawing to a close and the premature autumn of his life, which was beginning. Another, less disciplined man, in the face of a crisis such as he had experienced before going on the trip, would either have tried to escape from reality by drink or have become a useless, complaining invalid. Chekhov emerged as a man whose spirit had been strengthened, although his health suffered a gradual decline until 1897 after which it rapidly deteriorated. The adversities of his youth sustained him at the end of his life. If there is an occasional feeling of sadness it is the sadness that comes with accepting the law of life, because:

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die;"

"One generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever"

"For all is vanity of vanities..., all is vanity"  

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1 Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2, 1:4, 1:2, King James Version of the Bible.
This period in the life of Chekhov could be described as a progression consisting of a series of "farewells", sad but inevitable, and lacking the power to make him pessimistic because he had a sense of proportion, realizing the transitory quality of the world.

Upon his return he made a firm decision to use his remaining years effectively and began producing heroes whom he berated for their idleness, whose lives were a succession of missed opportunities and who later regretted their misspent lives. He pays attention to the relentless passage of time and in particular the phrase "sic transit gloria mundi" appears very often as an eniggraph, or expression used by the hero or as the theme of the whole story.

"Жизнь...страшна...—так не церемонься же с ней, домой ее и, пока она тебя не задавила, бери все, что можно урвать от нее."²

Similar quotations dealing with the passing of life are to be found in Gusey, in Tasskhaz neizvestnogo cheloveka (1892).³

Chekhov's restlessness after his return from Sakhalin was somewhat abated by his trip to Western Europe in 1891 with A. S. Suvorin. Chekhov, the Westerner, who refused to accept the romantic illusions of the Populists and Slavophiles, was enthusiastic in his praise of Western

² Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem A. P. Chekhova 1-20, Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoi literaturey, Moskva, 1944-51 Vol. VIII, p. 171.

Europe. Later he joked that there every dog smelled of civilization. Two things that amazed Savarin to the end were Chekhov's preference for visiting old cemeteries and his love of circus clowns. He connected it with Chekhov's uniqueness of talent, with its mixture of sad and humorous tears and laughter at himself and others.

Chekhov's deteriorating health and consequent changes of abode played an important role in his literary activity especially of the third period. Besides bringing him into contact with a totally different class of people, his malady made him more aware of the sufferings of others. The purchase of the estate of Melikhovo in February 1892, although it created some financial worries before it was paid up, nevertheless created a happy, busy period for Chekhov and his family. He plunged into community work, building schools, giving his money and effort. He took an active part in the Zemstvo, being a member of the health commission, fought cholera in his county, organized measures of famine relief, and gave free medical treatment to the local peasants. He had every right to criticize all those high-minded professors of liberalism and social reforms, who were forever philosophizing but without actually doing anything. Instead his secret philanthropies were the basis of his own self-discipline. He felt everything depended on the individual, because life is what it is and men are what they are: they would close their eyes to the world around them in order to avoid any unpleasant contact with the miseries of their fellow men. But love is kind and any man is capable of it if only he will work for it, because life itself is indifferent.
Chekhov as a humanist felt that if man could only develop more kindness and fairness things would be better. The need for fairness is something he stressed over and over again. To Suvorin in 1890 he writes that one has to be fair, the rest will be added; in 1891 he insists in a letter that fairness for an objective writer is dearer than fresh air; to his wife in 1902 that one has to fear unfairness. 4

Life in Melikhovo was conducive to literary activity and a lot of stories of importance were written there. Chekhov's cherished wish to produce a novel of magnitude did not come true, mostly because he realized how little time he had left, as he said himself; or it may have been, according to Suvorin, a combination of constant financial worries with recurrent attacks of ill health. 5 His dream of producing something new, lasting and worthwhile came out instead in the form of the plays.

According to H. T. E. Perry:

"In his four great plays he balanced implied tragedy against superficial incongruities, and from the union of these two unharmnious elements he created a novel genre which may best be described as ironic comedy." 6

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5 Feyder, Val. Chekhov, pp. 369, 155.

Because of declining health his repeated trips to Yalta (Crimea) culminated in his taking up permanent residence there in 1898, starting his "Crimean Banishment", away from the capital. Ironically he became relatively rich now by selling his works to A. F. Marx for 75,000 Rubles in 1899, but wealth came too late as it came too late to one of the debtors in Vishnevii Sad, Pishchik. Chekhov wrote L. Avilova asking what use to him was this pile of money now, when he was unable to get out of the house? He also wonders what he is doing in "this Yalta" place, anyway, where everything is so terribly boring. A multitude of his friends visited him in Yalta and according to them he nevertheless loved life, thirsting even for small joys and, health permitting, he still loved to joke, laugh and improvise. He had retained all the characteristics of the humorist: optimism, self-discipline, an active mind and nobility of soul.

His dream of personal happiness in marriage to Olga Knipper, the actress of the Moscow Art Theatre, was also short lived because he died in Badenweiler, Germany, on July 2, 1904.

In a letter of Feb. 1904 to L. Avilova it sounds as if he was finally at least part way towards understanding the unsolvable riddle of life:

"Above all, be cheerful; don't look at life so much as a problem -- it is, most likely, far simpler. And whether it -- life, of which we know nothing -- is worth all the agonizing reflections which wear out our Russian wits is still a question."7

In other words "vanity of vanities all is vanity."

After his death fate played a last trick on him, creating a situation worthy of his pen. When his coffin arrived at Moscow in a carriage marked "Fresh Oysters" there was only a handful of people to meet it. Minutes before its arrival the body of a general killed in the war had been met with an orchestra and the crowd followed the procession wondering why Chekhov was being buried with military honours. Discovery of the mistake created a general confusion. No wonder that he always claimed that in vaudeville one sees a true vision of life. 8

8Bruford, W. H. Chekhov, n. 23.
CHAPTER III B

In the third phase of his literary activity, except in his plays, Chekhov uses less of the most obvious devices that he has hitherto used to give his stories immediate humorous impact. Now the humour tends to be latent. The reader may even miss this element completely at a casual reading, because Chekhov depicts situations that lack obvious humorous brushwork: he attempts to let the absurdity of these situations hit the reader totally. The reader's response to the material is therefore determined by his willingness to examine it intellectually after his perusal.

The scope of these stories has expanded from a treatment of individuals to segments of society as a whole. A segment of society, like an individual, can seem mechanical and inelastic in its unwillingness to adapt and move with the times, as Bergson remarks:

"Let us go on to society, we cannot help treating it as a living being. Any image, then, suggestive of the notion of a society disguising itself...will be laughable. Now such a notion is formed when we perceive anything inert or stereotyped...on the surface of living society. There we have rigidity over again, clashing with inner suppleness of life." 9

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This inelasticity and rigidity is part of "poshlost". The theme of
"poshlost" was predominant in Chekhov's writings, but in the third
phase it becomes even more so, where he now tries portrayals of its
effect on intelligent human beings. In the first instance a man of
great potential and full of ideals slowly sinks into "poshlost" as
into a nire, losing his human dignity, becoming a rigid, inelastic man,
of the type that Bergson finds worthy of laughter. Much is one example
of a man becoming that type, unable to stand seeing others enjoying
themselves at the ball, including his wife. In Ionich a promising young
doctor Startsev under the insidious influence of "poshlost" becomes
another Oblonov.

Heroes sunk into "poshlost" do not notice it, but they may
suddenly become aware of it and try to behave differently, like
the heroine in Nevesta (1903), who escapes it by leaving home to study.
Thanks to her own courage and the advice of her relative, she returns
home a changed person. Nevesta is the most optimistic of the last
stories, despite being written by a very ill author.

Another hero, Nikitin, the teacher in Uchitel Slovesnosti (1894),
chronicles only his sudden awakening and distress in his note-book:

"Где я Воже мой?Меня окружают пошлость и
поблость. Скучные, ничтожные люди, горшочки
с смесанной, курицей с молоком, тараны,
глупые женщины."

10 Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pism A. P. Chekhova 1-20,
 Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo Khudozhestvennoi literatury, Moskva, 1944-51
The theme of lost opportunities and the passing of life are present in *Ponyvunja* (1892), *Skrinka Rotshilda* (1894), *Na podvode* (1897).

His humour is parallel to the lyrically dramatic line: in certain stories the humorous trend prevails, while in others the dramatic side becomes the main one and humour is only used to relieve or accentuate the sadness of the story. When humour and drama organically blend then they produce "laughter through tears."

A story depicting two sets of relationships and combining both moods is *Anna na shee* (1895). It has the relationship of husband and wife on the one hand and of Anja and her family on the other. It is also an excellent illustration of what Henri Bergson describes as the inversion technique, in a sophisticated form. Modest Alexeevich, a middle-aged, miserly civil servant marries a very young attractive teacher's daughter in the hope of dominating her and obtaining her total obedience through his purse strings. But the beautiful Anya, many years younger than her husband, finds herself like Emma in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* the centre of attention at the ball, where her beauty attracts her husband's suitor. Here her fear and feeling of financial insecurity leave her because, in the confrontation between the man and the rank, rank wins, just as it did in *Tolstvi i Tonkii*. Sure of her social position, she orders her husband out, paying him back for all her humiliations. The cheat is being cheated now, because it never occurred to her husband to be kind to his young wife or her family, whom he constantly humiliated because of their poverty and her father's drinking.
Ironically, though, her husband is not even mad at her. His ingrained bureaucratic nature rejoices because he is in favour now with his superiors. His lack of jealousy reminds one of the reaction of the officials in Na evozde (1883) and Zhivaia Chronologia (1885). Her husband receives the order of St. Anna (2nd class) which is laughable because at the beginning of their marriage he had told his wife that he hoped to avoid the situation of his colleague who had two Annas round his neck, the nodal and his wife Anna; the situation is therefore repeated, but when it happens he is pleased instead with every detail. He becomes one of Bergson's humorous characters, following the line of conduct he had just condemned.

Modest Alexeevich is described only in a few lines. He is a portly man with a chin like a heel and jellylike cheeks. His dogmatic, rigid character is shown by his constant repetition of the phrase: "Everyone must have his responsibilities". His miserliness he shows by denying any money to his young wife, taking repeated stock of her jewellery. The incident in the theatre where he squeezes a pear without buying it, because it is expensive, is similar to the episode in Aristokratka by M. Zoshchenko, where the hero refuses to pay for the French pastry that his escort has half eaten. Both heroes are insensitive to the feeling of humiliation suffered by their partners. The reader feels sorry for Anya and the passing of her beauty and youth, until another dramatic line becomes more apparent. The presentation becomes
more like that in Khoristka of the second phase. The lives of her
poverty-stricken drinking father and her two highschool brothers do
not improve with Anya's marriage to a wealthy man; she visits them
less and less, withholding even emotional support. Now it is the boys
who have to follow their father in order to prevent his excessive drinking
and stop him from losing his job. Their repeated pathetic cries:
"Don't, Daddy, don't" create the mood of "laughter through tears".
In Skrinka Rotshilda (1804) the coffin-maker Jacob, called 'Bronza,' is
laughable in his ignorance and coarseness. When he brings his ill wife to
the doctor he says:

"Бот, произольте видеть, захворал мой предмет.
Подруга жизни, как это говорится, извините
за выражение...."

Here humor is created by changing the linguistic level. At first he
calls his wife "предмет," then the high-sounding "подруга жизни," then he
proceeds from the solemn to the prosaic "извините за выражение." He
is so insensitive that he takes the measurement for the coffin while his
wife is still alive, and even marks down the cost of it. The alogism
that life brings only deficit, but death brings profit makes him
ridiculously cross. But as with Iona in Toska and the turner Petrov in

11Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 338.
the loss of his wife makes him up and he snaps out of his inertia.

Chekhov uses a lyrical insertion in the story to introduce the dramatic motif. Dying himself, Jacob contemplates the inconsistency of life, asking why life, given only once, does not bring any profit to man. Jacob atones for his previous indifference towards his wife by giving his priceless possession -- a violin -- to the violinist Rotshild.

The isolation of the hero continues to be the recurrent theme in Chekhov's writing of the third phase, especially in his plays, because he felt that people's misunderstanding of their fellow sensibility had something mechanical in it that made a person less human. The isolation may be even self-inflicted, as is the case of Asorin in Zhena (1892), where he relates a very favourable story about himself, but as the story unfolds the reader has the feeling that he is a most trying man to live with and the coldness and hostility in his relationship with his wife are of his own making.

The Professor in Skuchnaia istoria is able to discuss literature and theatre oblivious to the fact that members of his family are undergoing their own private crisis. The self-isolation of the hero acquires grotesque forms in the story Chelovek v putliare (1898), which is one of the stories of a trilogy written in the style of Leskov's skaz about people isolating themselves from life. The hero Belikov, a teacher of the Greek became like the Kameleon a type and his "kak by nichego no vyshlo" entered as a proverb into the Russian language. Fifteen years earlier
Chekhov had written a similar story, Snert chinovnika, which was a miniature of the single sad event, showing the death of an official as a result of his excessively slavish feelings. He sneezes in the theatre and sputters a General's bald head.

The treatment of Belikov is rooted in a deep psychological perception and creates a type symbolizing Russian life at the end of the 19th Century. He possesses traits which are common to many people but in a grotesque form. Chekhov stresses repeatedly Belikov's habit of keeping everything in a case, wearing boots and raincoat and carrying an umbrella even on hot, sunny days. Such behaviour is symptomatic of the inner life of Belikov, who fears existence, progress and anything new which is not printed in the orders. He lives in an emotional desert; he dwells in the past, and refuses even to expose himself to anything new. Instead he shuts off the external world by wearing dark glasses, lifting up his collar to shield his face and putting cotton-wool into his ears. He loves the classical languages because they are a sort of escape for him too. His first encounter with life comes in the form of Varenka Kovalenko, and he takes interest in her at first not as a woman but for her singing of Ukrainian songs which remind him by their melodious delicate tones of classical Greek. Following the advice of his colleagues that he should marry, he decides on this serious step and his awkward courtship and agonizing indecision on whether to finalize it provide an interlude of laughter. This is, however, the only thread of humour that
runs through the story, relieving the portraying of Belikov himself as a pathetically repressed and repressive man, feared by the other teachers for his tendency to inform on all activities that he thinks are against the law. He is quiet and even pleasant, yet he acts here as a self-appointed preserver of the status quo, just as Sergeant Prishibeyev did. Varenka is his only hope of participation in life and when she sees him fall down the stairs, pushed by her indignant brother, Belikov is unable to live down this humiliation. He just dies, as Cherviakov did before him in Sneg chinovinka. If there is any tinge of sympathy for Cherviakov there is none for Belikov; on the contrary it is stated that to bury people like Belikov is a pleasure.

Only one sad conclusion is left: that there are too many like Belikov left and still more will be born. Such people lack the ability to fit into dynamic, fluid life and they do not participate in it; either they lack an ideal or they sigh for an ideal so absurd that it is laughable.

The ideal of the hero in Kryzhovnik is to have his own bush of gooseberries. He denies himself essentials, saving money for an estate, letting life pass him by, marrying for money late in life, starving his wife by his miserliness and finally getting his dream -- his first crop of small, sour berries. It is a culminating point in the tragic-comedy of life. Through the words of the hero's brother in the conclusion, Chekhov the humanist again invokes the theme of human isolation:
"Надо, чтобы за дверью каждого довольного, счастливого человека стоял кто-нибудь с молоточком и постоянно напоминал бы стуком, что есть несчастные, что как бы он не был счастлив, жизнь рано или поздно покажет ему свои когти, стрясется беда-болезнь, бедность, потери, и его никто не увидит и не услышит, как теперь он не видит и не слышит других." 12

The type of man who lives in the past creates a tragi-comedy of life. He is laughable himself in his narrow rigidity and dogmatism but other people suffer in his presence and their sufferings create sadness in the reader. The comedy of manners has widened into a tragi-comedy of life.

In Vusadbe (1894) a landowner, Rashevich, called "The Frog", gives a pompous speech to his guest, Meyer, an attorney. Assuming that his guest is of noble birth he gets carried away in his contempt towards the professionals who have come up from the lower classes. The host himself is laughable in his insensitivity and stupidity, but we have here also a drama of the guest, who "does not belong", but being a cultured man is unable to pay the host in the same coin and departs insulted, having summarily stated his own plebian origin. The ironical twist to the story is that the host has two daughters who are eager to marry Meyer.

In another story, Pecheneg (1897), an occasional guest prevented from sleeping by his laughably insensitive, gross, talkative host reliving his past glories, finally takes leave at dawn without even

sleeping, but vents his frustration by calling the host "pecheneg" -- a barbarian.

The stories which contain latent humour, revealing the unreasonable-ness of the kind of life depicted, belong mostly to the nineties, such as Vorvrag (1901), Noia zhizn (1896), Tri poza (1895), Rabic barstvo (1894), and Sluchay iz praktiki (1898).

Most of the stories of the third period, even when considered as serious ones, have humorous parts in them. In such a serious story as Skuchnaia istoria Chekhov relieves the seriousness at the end by injecting a humorous twist of circumstance. When finally the Professor makes the trip to Kharkov after the repeated urgings of his wife to investigate the background of his daughter Liza's suitor, a telegram arrives informing him of the marriage of his daughter to that man. At one point the Professor compares their discussions to the breathing of three frogs poisoning the air.

In Palata No6 (1892) a supposedly emotionally ill doctor, Ragin, is examined for his sanity by local officials, who are ignorant of medicine. The farcical element is provided by the former friend of the doctor, who borrows money from him and loses it at a card game but repeats: "honour above all". Khobotov (elephant trunk), the man who took over Dr. Ragin's duties, is as insensitive as his name suggests.
In Novikov (1897) we have situations involving Grandpa, such as
the scene with the geese in the cabbage patch or her fight over the
samovar with the taxation officer, and her small granddaughters' ruminations
about Grandpa and hell.

Repeated expressions by the heroes such as "Khanstvo" by
Nikitin's father-in-law in Uchitel Slovesnosti or "nedurstenno",
"bolshinskiy roman" and "honzhurte", in Ionich by Turkina make the
protagonists look ludicrous. There is also the use of puns as when Turkina
(Ionich) says "Ja idu po kovru", or use of alogism such as "daj Bog vsen
tak umerez" in Uchitel Slovesnosti. Humour is also created by likening
some heroes to animals. In Kryzhovnik the hero almost groans like a
pig, his dog and even his fat cook look like pigs.

In Uovrage (1900) Axinia looks and behaves like a green snake.
In Suroga (1899) a sickly husband looks at the family portrait of his
in-laws, himself and his wife and sees them as a group of greedy predators.
Chekhov continues to use names for heroes to create humour, but they are
subdued.

According to Bergson any situation recurring several times in
its original form is laughable. Recurrent scenes of Pava performing in
Ionich finally become ludicrous. In addition, Dr. Startsev, now familiarly
known as "Ionich", is presented to us three times over riding in a
carriage. With the passing years he becomes engrossed in money-making
and, like Dr. Toporkov in Tavety zapozdalve, becomes fat and indifferent. On
the third occasion Chekhov, showing him sitting rigidly in the carriage,
fat and red, comments that Demch reminds him now not of a man but of a gluttonous pagan god.

By employing all those devices for creating humour as well as the use of latent humour and the injection of lyricism Chekhov manages to present serious matters in an optimistic, light tone in his works. There is use of onomatopoeia, as in Uchitel slovennosti, to show the reaction of the dog to different situations ("rrr... nga-nga... rrr") or description of the fire alarm in Muzhiki ("Ben-ben-ben..."). In Nevesta the watchman hitting the gong ("tik-tok, tik-tok") and use of three-word structures gives rhythm and originality to the work. In his last works he showed the changing of the social order in a spirit of calmness, sowing a seed of hope in the belief that truth, beauty and courage would free the human spirit and make life worthier, more beautiful for the individual.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis equal consideration is given to Chekhov's life and his works. In treating his life an attempt is made to show both those events that brought out in him the innate qualities which are a prerequisite for a humorist and also those which produced major changes in the trend of his literary activity and the form his humour took. These observations are substantiated with illustrations from his works.

For purposes of analysis three distinct periods in Chekhov's literary activity can be distinguished. The first begins with his youthful attempts at creative writing and extends up to the close of 1885; the second is from 1886 to 1891 and the third from 1892 to 1904.

The humour of the very early Chekhov was, in accord with the dictates of the humorous magazines, a humour that evoked "aesthetic laughter", light-hearted, free of rancour, a laughter of amusement. He was prompted to write professionally for very prosaic reasons: to earn money to fight off poverty and enable himself to complete his studies for an M.D. His early humour is an external humour, skilfully created by the use of words, names and situations with the utmost objectivity, using the
genres of the humorous magazines: parodies, anecdotes, jokes, aphorisms and short stories. He could be compared at this stage to Gogol, whose technique of humour he was to some extent following. The humorous tradition in Russian literature had been established before him and he took advantage of it, but without developing a sarcastically derisive attitude, since he was too tolerant to mock human beings for their weaknesses. Although, like the early Gogol, Chekhov was not against having a laugh at the trivialities of life and the vulgarity of mediocrity, his works nevertheless lack hyperbole and he does not distort or disfigure as Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin did, to the point of caricature. The resemblance to Gogol was only temporary and as time went on their styles and attitudes grew further apart.

From a writer of sidewalk literature for humorous magazines Chekhov became a classic and master of the written word. Most of the critics attribute this growth to his contributions to the humorous magazines and the training he got from his prolific early writings: undoubtedly the magazines played an important role in his development, but there were many other factors which were equally important, such as his medical training and opportunities of meeting many stimulating artistic people. But above all it was his unusual self-discipline and the will to work that brought his success.

After 1886, once freed from the restrictions of scope that working for the magazines imposed on him, he develops lyrical humour in which the external treatment, where sadness and humour are interwoven creating a
certain mood. The role of humour now is to either enhance or relieve sadness. He perfected the little story to the extent that he is considered as the innovator of that particular type of story and even a writer such as Katherine Mansfield is considered as only a follower in his style. Chekhov has a tendency now towards the genre of novella under pressure from the public and unfair critics who expected works with a moral content from his talent, he turns to serious novella.

In his third period Chekhov's declining health and abridged life span did not allow him to produce novels, his dream; but his genius found its expression in plays where his instant humour mixed with dramatic qualities created lyrical dramas. In his last works latent humour is prevalent which reveals the unreasonableess of the kind of life depicted. The isolation of the individual, his inertia and inability to climb out of the vice of "poshlost", which stifled his potential, became the prevalent themes of later works taking pre-eminence over the basic theme of the earlier years -- the protection of human dignity. The humour of Chekhov that began as only an "aesthetic laughter" became with maturity and artistic development, and without even Chekhov knowing it, a didactic humour. Occasionally it was mingled with sadness, but it was not the sadness of pessimism as many critics have suggested, rather it was, as maintained in Chapter II, the sadness of accepting the law of life, the realization of the transient quality of the world.
In order to be a humorist the writer needs an active mind, disciplined emotions, nobility of character and above all optimism. He bears some analogy to the scientist, dissecting the world around us, and he has to absorb all the details unseen by others.

Chekhov was of the opinion that if one wants to be an optimist and understand life, one has to stop believing what others say and write, but watch oneself and investigate. From year to year he checked, investigated and changed his opinion by re-evaluating circumstances. Dumin said of him:

До самой смерти росла его душа.

Chekhov the man acquired the serenity to accept the things he could not change, life as it is, people as they are. He had the courage to change traits of his own character which he felt were impeding the realization of his potential because he felt that every individual has to give his share of effort to the world to make it a better place. He had the courage to point out human weaknesses and foibles in the hope

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2Quoted by A. Derman. Tvorcheski portret Chekhova, p. 313.
that once people see themselves as they are they will change, because Chekhov was always concerned with the individual. There was in the foreground always an individual personality, each unique soul passing this transitory world only once, and it pained him to see how this individual did not utilize all his potential to live more beautifully, truthfully and make this world a better place for others to live in too.

Chernyshevsky held that those people are inclined to humour whose souls contain a high ideal of the beautiful and therefore will not tolerate ugly things in life about them. Chekhov's ideal was beauty, truth, and courage and love because they are eternal. He was convinced that the "thing of beauty is a joy for ever." Thus Chekhov's humour is still appreciated and understood because in our mechanized society indifference is growing and there is still the same danger that the individual will lose his soul and become reduced to a series of statistics. There is always a need for humour to maintain a sense of proportion in life.

Chekhov the writer expressed his serenity, courage and wisdom in his humour, making allowances for human frailties, weaknesses, so-called vanities which are common to the whole human race, thereby making his humour universal and humane.

3 Katzer, Julius. A. P. Chekhov: (1860-1900). Foreign languages publishing house, Moscow, p. 163.
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Chronological Table of Works Discussed:

1880

Pismo k uchenomu sovedu
Papasha
Izvlecheniia iz putevogo zhurnalda
Za izblochki
Pered svadboi

1882

Tsvety zapozdalye
Idilliia-uyy i akh
Nest

1883

Tolstyi i tsukii
Klevota
Shvedshkaia spichka
Dva romana
Dvoc v odnom
Ispoved
Na gvozde
Zhenshchina bez predradssudkov
Roznaia
Slova, slova, slova
Deputat
Geroi barynia
Dura
Smert chinovnika

121
1884

Orden
Khirurgia
Kameleon
Iz ognia da v polynia
Nadlezhashchie nery
Naska
Ustritsy
Strashnaia noch
Ne v dukhe
Liberal
75,000
Vanka
Dva pisaa
Neskolko ryslei o dushe
Dachnitsa
Ito\go
Svadba s generalom
Drama na okhote

1885

Kapitanskii mundir
U predvoditelshi
Zhivaia khronologiia
V bane
Meliuzga
Nery
Kalina
Loshadinaia familya
Zabludshiye
Zlomysheennik
Otets senoistva
Unter Prishibeev
Na chuzhbine
Peresolil
Gore
shilo v neshke
Toska
Nechi pered sudom
Agafia
oba luchshe
Diplomat
Vverkh po lestnitse
1885 (Cont'd)

Intelligento brevno
Starosta
Dva gazetchika
Indeiskii petuh
Triapka

1886

Pisma
Schastlivchik
Strakh
Aptekarsha
Lishnie ljudi
Khoristka
Muzh
Tiazhelye ljudi
Mesta
Neobyknovenno
Tsss!
Khoroshe ljudi
Orator
ot nechego delat
Serezny shag
Ty i vy
Rozovy chulok
Predlozhenie
Moi domostrui
Zhilets

1887

"Ivanov"
Shampanskoe
Temnota
Polenka
Neostrozhnost
Bezzashchitnoe sushchestvo
Zhiteiskie nevyzgody
Pismo
Sledovatel
Iz zapisok vsyplichivogo cheloveka
Sirena
Mstitel
1887 (Cont'd)
Lev i solntse
Novogodnaia pytka
Udav i krolik
Obyvateli
Zlomyshlenniki
Kalkhas

1888
Step
Pripadok
Skuchnaia istoriia
Gusev
Medved (the Bear)
Predlozhenie (The Proposal)

1889
Svadba (The Wedding)
Tragik po nevole

1891
Jubilei (Anniversary)

1892
Zhena
Poprygunia
Palata No. 6
Strakh

1893
Rasskaz neizvestnogo cheloveka

1894
Babie tsarstvo
Skripka Rotshilda
Uchitel slovesnosti
V usadbe
1895
---
Tri goda
Supruga
Anna na shee
Ariadna

1896
---
Moia zhizn

1897
---
Muzhiki
Pecheneg
Na podvode

1898
---
Chelovek v futliare
Kryzhovnik
Ionych
Sluchai iz praktiki,

1899
---
Na sviatkakh

1900
---
V ovrage

1903
---
Nevesta
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Articles


