

## The World's Moments: Anton Chekhov's Poetics and the Theory of Evolution

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This study aims to illustrate literary objectivity, one of the major characteristics of Anton Chekhov's poetics, in a new and fresh way by focusing on modern science as a perspective, which has not been previously examined. Chekhov, in asserting the objectivity of literature against the modern Russian cultural milieu that sought ethics and ideologies in literature, used a rhetoric based on modern science apart from human sense perceptions or subjectivity. Chekhov paid particular attention to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution among various scientific theories that existed at that time. The theory of evolution, which views the origin of life as part of an unadulterated natural scientific process, has shaken the privileged position of humanity as God's preeminent creation. It brought about a major paradigm shift in the 19th century, with a consequence reaching far beyond the realm of science. This study treats the theory of evolution as a parallel discourse to fictional writing, examines how Chekhov's characters, narrative structure, and time-and-space representation are tied to the theory, and thereby attempts to describe his literary objectivity in a systematic manner.

Chapter 1 touches on the purposelessness and non-anthropocentric nature of the universe as depicted by Darwin's theory of evolution, and discusses how this view was perceived in Russia at the time. Darwinism was met with resistance in Russia, both in the scientific and literary communities. However, Chekhov's plan for a research thesis "History of Sexual Authority" has certain similarities with Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* in its idea and structure, and it accurately describes the working of natural selection. Thus, this chapter argues that Chekhov shared Darwin's view of the universe as being purposeless and non-anthropocentric.

Chapter 2 delves into the uniqueness of Chekhov's position with respect to changes in the world of media, as literary journals declined and gave way to general-interest newspapers and magazines, and how science played a part in the process. Here, the focus is on the "physiological sketch" genre, which was regarded as a means of fostering nationalism in a premature Russian society of the 1840s and 1850s, and which made a comeback in the 1880s as instant reading, as the media became more visually oriented. The French physiology literature, which led to the emergence of physiological sketches in the subsequent time periods in Russia, was different from the latter in its expressions and objectives. Also, Russian physiological sketch of the 80s was different from that of the 40s. Nevertheless, they all shared a view that literature would be able to explicate and depict the world with the power of science. This chapter, however, points out that Chekhov was different, in that he recognized a lack of knowledge and the limitations of science and literature.

Based on the above two chapters, the aim of Chapter 3 and onward is to illustrate in an integrated manner the actual structure of the text, which enables the general features of Chekhov's poetics that have been pointed out in the past, in parallel with the theory of evolution. Chekhov's poetics, for instance, is characterized by its parodies, characters who change in the middle of the story, fragmentation where causal relations are lacking among various elements, and the incompleteness of its ending.

Chapter 3 focuses on the characteristics of Chekhov's parodies and explains that there is a sense in which his characters voluntarily conform to the perceived characteristics of different social classes. The chapter analyzes the novella *The Duel* and shows that characters' individuality would emerge as they break out of their social molds, but the story ends without a closure. Chekhov's description resembles the constraints of individual organisms as seen in the theory of evolution, in that the development and growth of individual characters are not depicted.

Chapter 4 once again examines the changes in the characters based on the story structure and narrative characteristics. In particular, it analyzes *Ionych* and points out that the story lacks causal relationships even as it describes a process in which a young physician turns into an obese miser. In Chekhov, as in evolution, the story is about contingency, dealing with situations that could take place anywhere, rather than foreknown or predetermined events that inevitably occur.

Chapter 5 discusses Chekhov's handling of time and space in relation to his characters as they come to a dead end and as their changes fail to produce any tangible results. The chapter analyzes the motif of "escape" that characterizes his work, in which the characters dream of migrating to a different space-time continuum. However, the characters cannot escape "the here and now" as their escape occurs only through their language and sense of time. The chapter cites *The Bishop* and shows that the time pointing toward the future continues to exist even as a person's life comes to a standstill.

Finally, it is worth noting the significance of "lyrical escape," a phenomenon in which a person finds "true life" or "truth" in nature, in Chekhov's poetics. Previously, lyrical escape was regarded as an expression of the loftiness of nature that the characters could experience by temporarily leaving the vulgarity of their daily lives. This study takes a different approach and argues that Chekhov's lyrical escape is not a paean to the beauty of nature. The characters find subjective meanings in nature, such as beauty and truth, while the narrative, instead of complementing them, leaves the purposelessness and randomness of nature intact, as in the case of Darwin's theory of evolution.

Thus, this study concludes that the basic structure of Chekhov's literary objectivity lies in a dual perspective that looks into an unfillable chasm between the finite existence of human beings and the continual existence of nature unfathomable by humans, of which any laws or objectives cannot seem to be ascertained.