

The Timeless Allure of Anton Chekhov and his Characters

Anton Chekhov once told a friend that he expected to be forgotten within seven years of his death. He could not have been more wrong. Whenever the art of the short story is discussed his is the name most often mentioned. In the context of drama, only Shakespeare has proved to be more influential. Either way, as storyteller or playwright, he is immortal. He is recognized as a master of the modern short story and a leading playwright of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Synopsis

Anton Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860, in Taganrog, Russia. Through stories such as "The Steppe" and "The Lady with the Dog," and plays such as *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya*, the prolific writer emphasized the depths of human nature, the hidden significance of everyday events and the fine line between comedy and tragedy. Chekhov died of tuberculosis on July 15, 1904, in Badenweiler, Germany.

Youth and Education

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860, in Taganrog, Russia. His father, Pavel, was a grocer with frequent money troubles; his mother, Yevgeniya, shared her love of storytelling with Chekhov and his five siblings.

When Pavel's business failed in 1875, he took the family to Moscow to look for other work while Chekhov remained in Taganrog until he finished his studies. Chekhov finally joined his family in Moscow in 1879 and enrolled in medical school. With his father still struggling financially, Chekhov supported the family with his freelance writing, producing hundreds of short comic pieces under a pen name for local magazines.

Early Writing Career

During the mid-1880s, Chekhov practiced as a physician and began to publish serious works of fiction under his own name. His pieces appeared in the newspaper, *New Times*, and then as part of collections such as *Motley Stories* (1886). His story "The Steppe" was an important success, earning its author the Pushkin Prize in 1888. Like most of Chekhov's early work, it showed the influence of the major Russian realists of the 19th century, such as Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

Chekhov also wrote works for the theater during this period. His earliest plays were short farces; however, he soon developed his signature style, which was a unique mix of comedy and tragedy. Plays such as *Ivanov* (1887) and *The Wood Demon* (1889) told stories about educated men of the upper classes coping with debt, disease and inevitable disappointment in life.

Major Works

Chekhov wrote many of his greatest works from the 1890s through the last few years of his life. In his short stories of that period, including "Ward No. 6" and "The Lady with the Dog," he revealed a profound understanding of human nature and the ways in which ordinary events can carry a deeper meaning.

In his works, Chekhov concentrated primarily on mood and characters, showing that they could be more important than the plots. Not much seems to happen to his lonely, often desperate characters, but their inner conflicts take on great significance.

He never tells the reader what to think. There are no heroes. There is little action. Chekhov often focuses on the way people tend to speak without understanding a situation or listening to others. His characters are individuals, not types. They live lives of delusion and futility. For example, in one of his stories, a character complains about unhappiness and another replies: "Well, it can't be helped. Life must go on. And our life will go on... We shall live through a long succession of days and endless evenings."

Chekhov's stories stand out because he reveals the truth about human nature through his characters and the sometimes-exaggerated things they say and decisions they make. The reader often recognizes traits they have in common with the characters. If placed in the same situation, readers are sometimes reluctant to admit, they may have behaved in the same manner if faced with similar circumstances.

Chekhov's stories offer a unique selection each touching upon fundamentally important subjects such as the purpose and value of life, what it takes to be human, eternal life and higher objectives of human life, happiness, guilt and romance. Through the eyes of Chekhov's characters, readers are given a glimpse of Chekhov's own views on life.

In "The Bet," we meet a young man who trades fifteen years of his life for two million. He leaves his notes and shares with the reader his thoughts and conclusions of this bet. In "The Death of a Government Clerk," the reader discovers how words and misunderstanding can kill, literally. And in "The Black Monk," the reader is introduced to a bight man of learning who offers an insight into the world of ideas, intellectual advancement, and what this can mean for everyday life.

Chekhov always maintained that writers must be objective and not take sides. His art is intellectual, deliberate; always human, never judgmental.

Later Life and Death

In 1901, Chekhov married Olga Knipper, an actress from the Moscow Art Theatre. However, by this point his health was in decline due to the tuberculosis that had affected him since his youth. While staying at a health resort in Badenweiler, Germany, he died in the early hours of July 15, 1904, at the age of 44.

Citation Information

- Article Title: The Timeless Allure of Anton Chekhov and His Characters
- Author: Eileen Smith
- Website Name: Biography.com
- Original Published Date: April 2, 2014
- URL: <https://www.biography.com/people/anton-chekhov-9245947>
- Access Date: January 25, 2019

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