

**IRONY AS A TOOL FOR CRITICIZING SOCIAL VICES IN A. P. CHEKHOV'S
SHORT STORIES (comparative analysis of the works "GOOSEBERRIES" and "THE
LADY WITH THE DOG")**

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Abstract: The article examines the use of irony as an artistic device for criticizing social and moral vices in A. P. Chekhov's short stories "Gooseberries" and "The Lady with the Dog." The analysis aims to identify the methods by which the author combines the outward simplicity of narration with a profound satirical intent, exposing the moral degradation, hypocrisy, and self-deception of his characters. The transformation of ironic tone from overt social and moral criticism in "Gooseberries" to subtle, psychologically motivated irony in "The Lady with the Dog" is examined. It is demonstrated how in both works irony transitions into moral and philosophical commentary, revealing the limitations of human aspirations, the illusion of happiness, social indifference, and spiritual passivity. The study utilizes contemporary philological works, ensuring the relevance and scientific validity of the analysis conducted.

Keywords: Chekhov, irony, social criticism, psychologism, interpretation, moral issues, artistic thinking.

Irony in A.P.Chekhov's artistic world always transcends the boundaries of comedy and becomes a means of philosophical reflection on human behavior. In the stories "Gooseberries" and "The Lady with the Dog," irony serves as a tool for socio-moral analysis, revealing the hidden motives behind actions, false ideals, and inner contradictions of the characters. In these works, irony functions as an instrument for exposing the vices that define the spiritual atmosphere of the late 19th century: complacency, moral indolence, hypocrisy, selfishness, and unwillingness to grow internally.

Modern scholars emphasize that Chekhov's irony is characterized by a special gentleness, subtlety, and even outward benevolence, within which a sharp moral judgment is concealed. According to T. Yu. Bychkova, Chekhov's irony "exposes the character's spiritual deformities through seemingly neutral narration" [Bychkova, 2021]. This characteristic directly applies to both stories, although in each of them, irony functions in its own unique way and targets different levels of artistic meaning.

In "Gooseberries," irony takes on a predominantly social character and is aimed at criticizing the narrow worldview of a small landowner. The image of Nikolai Ivanovich is built on the paradoxical absence of inner reflection: the protagonist considers his modest and limited existence a manifestation of happiness, placing the taste of gooseberries above moral principles and human relationships. Chekhov's narrative tone emphasizes not the comic nature of the situation, but the tragic narrowness of the character's consciousness, who perceives his own

limitations as an ideal. Researcher O. V. Chugunova notes that "the irony in 'Gooseberries' expresses the moral protest of the narrator, who sees complacency as a dangerous social phenomenon" [Chugunova, 2019]. The discrepancy between the protagonist's perceptions and the narrator's evaluation forms the structure of hidden satire.

The character of Ivan Ivanich holds particular significance, as through his monologue, he transforms irony into a moral warning. His words about "contentment" and "quiet happiness" sound not as a sermon, but as the disillusioned view of a person who has realized that the world is filled with moral indifference and passivity. The ironic tone lies in the contrast between the moral ideal he attempts to formulate and the inevitable doom of this ideal to be misunderstood by others. Researcher A. A. Kameneva clarifies that "Ivan Ivanich becomes the bearer of bitter irony, directed not at an individual, but at a society incapable of awakening" [Kameneva, 2022].

In "The Lady with the Dog," irony takes on a different semantic character: it becomes a subtle psychological category through which the duality of the characters' inner lives is revealed. Chekhov deliberately avoids overt satire, instead allowing irony to manifest in the discrepancy between the formal conventionality of the characters' relationships and the depth of their inner transformation. Gurov appears as a man accustomed to superficial connections, but unexpectedly realizes the limitations of his own conceptions of happiness. His previous confidence that all women can be divided into "lower" and "higher" categories turns into an ironic exposure of his own spiritual imperfection. As M. L. Klyuchevskaya observes, "in 'The Lady with the Dog,' irony is aimed at the self-destruction of the hero's former worldview, which creates a unique inner dramaturgy" [Klyuchevskaya, 2020].

Anna Sergeyevna also becomes the object of subtle irony: her aspiration for a "pure life" comes into tension with real circumstances that prove stronger than her personal desires. Chekhov does not ridicule the characters, but exhibits a hidden irony towards the entire structure of social morality, within which personal feelings are forced to exist in a semi-concealed form. Researcher I. S. Baranova emphasizes that Chekhov's irony here "works against social norms, exposing their hypocritical and destructive nature" [Baranova, 2023].

Comparing the two stories allows us to see how Chekhov uses irony to reveal various aspects of social vices. In "Gooseberries," irony is aimed at demonstrating how self-satisfaction and narrow-mindedness of interests transform into a social danger. In "The Lady with the Dog," it becomes a form of moral analysis that exposes the gap between a person's genuine feelings and the rules accepted in society. The story "Gooseberries" depicts social degradation through ironic exaggeration of life's pleasures, while "The Lady with the Dog" reveals the limitations of moral norms that suppress individuality and create an illusion of external well-being.

As N. A. Bogdanova notes, the modern reading of Chekhov's irony "is impossible without recognizing its moral character, oriented towards revealing internal social contradictions" [Bogdanova, 2021]. Analysis of the two works allows us to confirm the validity of this assertion: Chekhov's irony serves not only as an element of artistic style but also as an important means of moral influence, prompting the reader to contemplate social and moral inconsistencies in reality.

The irony present in the stories "Gooseberry" and "The Lady with the Dog" becomes a means of moral and social understanding of reality, allowing Chekhov to reveal the deep vices of the society of his time. In "Gooseberry," it serves as a tool to expose self-satisfaction and limited life aspirations, while in "The Lady with the Dog," it aims to reveal the gap between the characters' sincere experiences and the demands of established social norms. In both cases, irony becomes an instrument of artistic exposure, allowing us to see the inner inadequacy of human aspirations. It doesn't directly destroy the characters but uncovers the spiritual vacuum that forms under the influence of social vices and moral passivity. Chekhov's irony emerges as a powerful artistic device that combines social analysis, psychological depth, and philosophical reflection on human nature.

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