

A Transition to Modern Story: Dramatization and Authorial Intrusion in Chekov's "Enemies"

Zhitong Chen

*College of Foreign Languages and Cultures Sichuan University, Chengdu 610065, China
Email: chenzhitong97@163.com*

ABSTRACT. *Although realism is the main feature of Anton Chekhov's works, his story also reveals his modern consciousness. The author analyzes Chekhov's short story "Enemies" from the perspective of "dramatization of fiction", finding out the dramatic characteristics of the scene and dialogue in this story. Nevertheless, authorial intrusion still appears in the story in the form of comments, reflecting the characteristics of traditional novels. The author considers that Chekhov's short stories can be regarded as a transition from traditional stories to modern stories, a brave try for him to transcend his times.*

KEYWORDS: *Chekov, "enemies", Dramatization, Authorial intrusion*

1. Introduction

Anton Chekov is a superb short-story writer who creates incredibly realistic characters and gives us a fascinating insight into humanity. The short story "Enemies" ranks as one of his early masterpieces. It depends on the traditional notion of plot and focuses on the tension between different classes. A story that revolves around grief, egoism, and up to a point, communication, it tells the encounter of two men's sufferings at the same time: doctor Kirilov endures the death of his only child, while Abogin experiences the apparent serious illness of his beloved wife, but then turns out to be a deception of her elopement. One notable thing is that this story is similar to a good drama, which evokes the intense emotion from the audience directly and authentically.

Chekov's short stories have long been regarded as realistic, but they are yet highly dramatized. Without casting away the 19th century style of short stories, it is clear that Chekov's short stories at the same time have shown the characteristics of modern short stories. "Liberated from its adherence to the parabolic exemplum" [1] (166), they began to be seen as the aesthetic and sympathetic narrative form to reflect the modern temperament. For Chekov, the revelation of character by means of story presentation of a crucial moment is the key to Chekhov's much discussed "objectivity" and yet "sympathetic" presentation. Some critics saw that "Chekhov's ability to dispense with a striking incident, his impressionism, and his freedom from the literary conventions of the highly plotted and formalized story marked the beginnings of a new or 'modern' kind of short fiction that combined the specific detail of realism with the poetic lyricism of romanticism." [1] (150)

2. Dramatization and Authorial Intrusion

Many critics have proposed the idea of dramatization of fiction as fiction has a dramatic potential that should not be content with "telling", but aim at "showing" its subject.

The English novelist Walter Besant specifies his dramatic ideal with an explicit image of theatricals and with a reference to the audience—the dramatic presentation is to be full in the interest aroused in the audience:

Closely connected with selection is dramatic presentation. Given a situation, it should be the first care of the writer to present it as dramatically, that is to say as forcibly, as possible. The grouping and setting of the picture, the due subordination of description to dialogue, the rapidity of the action, those things which naturally suggest themselves to the practised eye, deserve to be very carefully considered by the beginner. In fact, a novel is like a play: it may be divided into scenes and acts, tableaux and situations, separated by the end of the chapter instead of the drop-scene: the writer is the dramatist, stage-manager, scene-painter, actor, and carpenter, all in one; it is his single business to see that none of the scenes flag or fall flat: he must never for one moment forget to consider how the piece is looking from the front. [2]

"Dramatize, dramatize, dramatize" was also the advice offered by Henry James for novelists [3], for he

realized that the basic principle of drama definitely held the key to artistic beauty. James regarded the scenic method as his imperative, so he praised Turgéniéff for his skill in constructing scenes-"as always with our author, the drama is quite incomplete; the poet never plays chorus; situations speak for themselves." [4]

Similarly, the disciple of Henry James-Percy Lubbock then turned his suggestion into a rule that "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself." [5] (41) He insisted that "Everything in the novel, not only the scenic episodes but all the rest, is to be in some sense dramatized; that is where the argument tends". [5] (77)

There is, according to Besant, James and Lubbock, an ideal way for a story is "showing" in third person narration which is at once dramatic and psychologically immediate.

The antithesis of dramatization is authorial intrusion, and this occurs when the narrator addresses the reader directly. Presenting a story dramatically, without authorial intrusion has become much more important in modern fiction than it was in previous centuries. The key to understanding dramatization, is to see that the narrator's point of view is merged with that of the central character, and the events in which he or she plays a part are shown as a drama. The authorial intrusion occurs when this 'merger' is broken by the narrator talking directly to the reader to tell him about the character. There may be exceptions, particularly if a writer deliberately makes the authorial narration a prominent feature.

3. Dramatization

In Chekov's "Enemies", the dramatization is best shown in the presentation of scenes and dialogues.

3.1 Scene

The story divides clearly into two parts as the plot setting changes from Kirilov's dark house to carriage, then to Abogin's pretty drawing room. In the first scene we are in Kirilov's house and learn how he meets his misfortune. A transitional episode occurs in which both characters are on the road together traveling to Abogin's house. The second scene of the story takes place in Abogin's house where we discover how he meets his real misfortune-his wife's run away with her lover.

3.1.1 Closed Plot Setting

The three main plot settings of this short story-Kirilov's house, carriage, and Abogin's drawing room-all have a special characteristic: they are closed. The plot settings in this story are very similar to the stage sets in drama where actions are presented in quite limited space.

The initial situation of the story, announced in first paragraph, informs the child's death occurs in a dark night in September. The whole world seems to be sunk in apathy, waiting for winter.

BETWEEN nine and ten on a dark September evening the only son of the district doctor, Kirilov, a child of six, called Andrey, died of diphtheria. Just as the doctor's wife sank on her knees by the dead child's bedside and was overwhelmed by the first rush of despair there came a sharp ring at the bell in the entry. [6]

Comment is superfluous here, as words seek not to express the author's attitude towards the event, but simply to show the scene of death and convey a stark and terrible fact. Abogin arrives on Kirilov's doorstep at the worst possible moment, when the doctor is exhausted and overcome by his own personal grief. The readers are then drawn into the bleak and tragic world of the death scene. Every detail speaks mutely of the tragedy: Kirilov standing with his back to Abogin, the unlighted lamp in the drawing room, a thick book lying on the table, and heavy smell of carbolic.

"Here in the bedroom reigned a dead silence," wrote the narrator, "Everything to the smallest detail was eloquent of the storm that had been passed through, of exhaustion, and everything was at rest." These singular details are vivid enough to convey the oppressive atmosphere: the candle standing among a crowd of bottles, boxes, and pots, the big lamp illuminating the room, and the mother kneeling by the bed. Chekov does not describe much about the dead boy, but he gives much attention to the furnishings-"The bedclothes, the rags and bowls, the splashes of water on the floor, the little paint-brushes and spoons thrown down here and there, the white bottle of lime water"-together, the heavy and stifling air is felt through these disordered details of the death scene.

3.1.2 Light and Sound

Light and sound are essential elements in drama to shape the mood, so can they be used in story to portray the emotion. On the stage, a variety of gobos are projected onto the floor to represent the light, which is used to direct our attention to one part of the stage or one character on stage and is also used to suggest the time of day. It is effective and helps to create the mood and atmosphere of a scene. For example, darkness is often associated with scary and terrible things, while brightness is often related to something good and joyful. Sound also functions as a key aspect in any acclaimed performance. In a drama, it includes music and other kinds of sounds, which also creates atmosphere and can mirror what is happening on stage. Different sounds one hears on stage are commonly associated with different moods and emotions. The right combination of sounds can create for suspense and fear, while others can influence an audience to feel excited and celebratory. Storm sounds, for example, can be used when two characters having a stormy quarrel. Slower tempos can sadden us, while heavy beating drums can suggest that tragedy is in the air.

Chekhov also skillfully uses light and sound effect in his short story to create atmosphere and to indicate the psychological situation of his characters. Darkness is the prevailing color of this story that represents tragedy. The child's death occurs on a dark night, Abogin appears out of the darkness, and then, he and Kirilov go out into the dark, cloudy night, which is brightened only by a few stars and the red half-moon. When the carriage drove into the dense shadow,

Behind them in the dim light of the stars the road could be seen and the riverside willows vanishing into the darkness. On the right lay a plain as uniform and as boundless as the sky; here and there in the distance, probably on the peat marshes, dim lights were glimmering. On the left, parallel with the road, ran a hill tufted with small bushes, and above the hill stood motionless a big, red half-moon, slightly veiled with mist and encircled by tiny clouds, which seemed to be looking round at it from all sides and watching that it did not go away. [6]

“Dim light”, “darkness”, “dim lights were glimmering”-everything seems dim, misty and dark, betokening a doomed failure and predestinated tragedy. The veiled half-moon in clouds suggests that the light may well vanish-it does sink behind the hill and the clouds that have been guarding it “lay in dark near the stars” at the end of the story; its red color indicates a possibility of blood and death.

On their way to Abogin's house, the only sound that Abogin and Kirilov can hear is the terrifying cry of the crows, the night birds often associated with death, which seems to reflect their own sorrows and grief.

The crows, awakened by the noise of the wheels, stirred among the foliage and uttered prolonged plaintive cries as though they knew the doctor's son was dead and that Abogin's wife was ill. The clamour of the crows sounded dimly far away and soon ceased altogether. [6]

In contrast to Kirilov's dark home, Abogin's pleasant home seems like a comfortable one. Echoed with the former darkness, however, the silent and half-dark house promises the misery. “There was no sound in the hall of steps or voices and all the house seemed asleep in spite of the lighted windows.” [6] The windows are lighted, but the woman has already run away with her lover, leaving an empty and hushed house. At the time Abogin returns, it is evident that darkness has invaded this house as well.

3.2 Dialogues

Dialogue is the exchange of spoken words between two or more characters, which is an especially important tool for playwrights, as most plays rely primarily on a combination of visual storytelling and dialogue to introduce the world of the story and its characters. The short story “Enemies” is full of dialogues, and some of the most important information is conveyed and the development of characterization is supported through his use of dialogue.

Chekhov does not allow for thoughts of Abogin and Kirilov, or any other character of “Enemies” to be revealed by explicit narration. Instead, it is only through dialogue that their thoughts and personalities are shown, and the scenes are dramatized. As Abogin took a heavy stride into the drawing room, he bent forward, moaned, and shook his fists. “She has deceived me!” he cried, “Deceived me, gone away with that clown Papchinsky! My God!” Abogin's sadness and anger is clearly shown in his words. Tears then gushed from his eyes, Abogin's sufferings are sincere. In a tearful voice, it seems like Abogin's monologue: “If you have ceased to love me and love another-so be it; but why this deceit, why this vulgar, treacherous trick?” “What are you telling me all this for? I have no desire to hear it! I have no desire to!” the doctor shouted after listening to Abogin's “vulgar” family secrets. With little narrative explanation, the conflict between the two then broke out, characterized by a series of dialogues on two pages. Kirilov accused Abogin of playing with people and treating people as a stage property, while Abogin shouted that it was unfair. The quarrel then escalated, for Kirilov dehumanized Abogin as “fat capon” and cursed rich people like him as “worthless people”, while Abogin insulted the doctor with money.

They become enemies. The dialogue is forceful enough for the readers to understand the change in mood of the two men, with no narration needed. This technique of showing rather than describing was later given the term “objective correlative” by T.S. Eliot, that is “a detailed event, description, or characterization that served as a sort of objectification or formula for the emotion sought for.” [1] (2) The conversion of the dialogue from “narratives” to “show” provides the short story with a dramatic aesthetic presentation of demonstration.

4. Authorial Intrusion

In spite of dramatization, commentary sentences still appear several times in this short story, with the function for helping the readers grasp the theme.

For example, when Abogin entreats the doctor, the narrator remarks his way of expression,

Abogin was sincere, but it was remarkable that whatever he said his words sounded stilted, soulless, and inappropriately flowery, and even seemed an outrage on the atmosphere of the doctor's home and on the woman who was somewhere dying. He felt this himself, and so, afraid of not being understood, did his utmost to put softness and tenderness into his voice so that the sincerity of his tone might prevail if his words did not.

Abogin is by no means a man without genuine feelings, but the readers can barely sympathize with him sincerely, as the narrator describes his expression as “stilted, soulless, and inappropriately flowery”. What's more, Chekhov explicitly shows his views on silence:

That is why dumbness is most often the highest expression of happiness or unhappiness; lovers understand each other better when they are silent, and a fervent, passionate speech delivered by the grave only touches outsiders, while to the widow and children of the dead man it seems cold and trivial.

The naive and shallow Abogin abandoned the highest expression of happiness or unhappiness, while the doctor Kirilov attained the beauty of silence, showing his greatest sorrow in dumbness. It is Chekhov who makes it difficult for us to respond sympathetically to Abogin and makes it natural for us to choose to be on Kirilov's side.

As the dialogues between the two proceeds, however, it is Abogin who progressively gains the story's sympathy. Kirilov, who arrogantly rejects and humiliates Abogin's suffering, loses some of sympathy of the readers. Another important authorial voice intervenes at the end of the story, which makes clear the injustice and inhumanly cruelty of the doctor's thought. All the way home the doctor thought not of his wife, nor of his Andrey, but of Abogin and the people in the house he had just left. He condemned Abogin and all who lived in rosy, subdued light among sweet perfumes, and a firm conviction concerning those people took shape in his mind. “Time will pass and Kirilov's sorrow will pass, but that conviction, unjust and unworthy of the human heart, will not pass, but will remain in the doctor's mind to the grave.” As the conviction that the doctor forms about “these people” are “unworthy of the human heart”, the doctor is singled out for moral condemnation from the narrator. Chekhov suggests that egotistic grief and misery do not bring people together to share, but force them apart. Here, Chekhov shows his view on the dilemma of communication ironically, which definitely, influences the readers' understandings of the two characters as well as the theme of the story.

5. Conclusion

With a dramatized feature, Chekhov's short story “Enemies” is shown, instead of just being told. The closed plot settings provide the story with a characteristic of drama, and the exquisite arrangement of light and sound not only creates a dramatic atmosphere, but also expresses the external emotion of characters, metaphors the fate of the characters. The adoption of dramatic dialogues which are full of movement is closely related to the characterization and the development of the plot. The 19th century style of authorial intrusion, however, still appears in the form of commentary sentences in this story, which exactly shows that this story is a transitional one moving from traditional story to modern story.

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