

TRADITIONS OF THE FOLKLORE THEATRE IN CHEKHOV'S PLAY 'THE CHERRY ORCHARD'

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Abstract: It is a well-known fact that Chekhov's theatre is between the classical theatre and the modernist one. However, traditions of the folklore theatre are not taken into account in the structure of Chekhov's plays. In the current paper, they are considered studying the image of Simeonov-Pishchik in *The Cherry Orchard*, who has the same features and functions as a character of the Russian folklore puppet theatre, Petrushka.

Keywords: Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, Simeonov-Pishchik, folklore theatre, Petrushka.

ТРАДИЦИИ ФОЛЬКЛОРНОГО ТЕАТРА В ПЬЕСЕ А.П. ЧЕХОВА «ВИШНЕВЫЙ САД»

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Аннотация: Известно, что театр Чехова располагается между классическим и модернистским театром. Однако не учитываются традиции фольклорного театра в структуре чеховских пьес. В статье они рассмотрены на примере образа Симеонова-Пищика в пьесе «Вишневый сад», который имеет общие признаки и функции с персонажем русского фольклорного кукольного театра Петрушкой.

Ключевые слова: Чехов, «Вишневый сад», Симеонов-Пищик, фольклорный театр, Петрушка.

Chekhov's theatre as a specific artistic phenomenon was formed at the turn of the 19th – 20th centuries, during a difficult, one may even say crisis, period for the Russian theatre. The classical dramatic art of Ostrovsky and Turgenev, with its strive for similarity and likeness to life and psychological individualization of a character, came into conflict with the 'new drama' of the Symbolists, who gravitated towards the eternity and the transpersonal principles of life. At the same time, supporters of the old style theatrical system accused Chekhov of symbolism, while the symbolists rather often did not understand the symbolic subtext of Chekhov's plays.

Many Chekhov scholars rightly point out that Chekhov's drama has incorporated the classical tradition of the Russian prose, previous experience of playwriting and dramatic art, and the elements of the modern theatre of that time, providing '*a broader and more harmonious meaning*' [Zingerman, 1988: 3] to the play. However, the correlation of Chekhov's dramatic art with the traditions of folk theatrical culture remained unresearched. This part of the aesthetic life at the turn of the century is entirely unconsidered by researchers of Chekhov's dramatic art. Perhaps because Chekhov is still considered a 'non-folklore' writer, or because his plays, with their inherent subtle lyricism, psychologism, striving for ultimate realism and, at the same time, extreme conventionality and complex overtones, are in no way associated in the minds of modern researchers with rustic, rather rude interludes of the folklore theatre. Both of these views seem to be profoundly misleading.

Chekhov is deeply rooted in the traditions of national culture, although there are very few obvious traces of 'folklorism' in his works, namely quotations, folklore plots and images, stylization. Folklore, which served as the basis of the entire literary text or its constituent elements, is often seen indirectly, it rather transforms to perform structure and meaning-forming functions. The principles of folk theatricality are manifested in Chekhov's plays in different ways and at different structural and semantic levels.

The playwright sometimes directly refers the reader and viewer to the images of folklore scenes and interludes, as in the case of Simeonov-Pishchik (or Simeonov-Pishtchik), the character in *The Cherry Orchard*. This character, due to its peripheral position in comedy, rarely attracted attention of researchers. His surname is boldly folklore. Its first part is associated with the fairy tale *Seven Simeons*, especially considering the duplicated name, *Boris Borisovich* (thus, we already have two Simeonovs). The second part of the surname – Pishchik – is traced back to the Petrushka Theatre, where a special device for creating a squeaky, high-pitched voice for a puppeteer speaking for Petrushka was called '*pishchik*'. This character has a double surname only in the dramatis personae, while in the text he is simply called and addressed as '*Pishchik*'.

Folklore theatre and the space of its existence – fairs and folk festivals and festivities – played a significant role in the life of the Russian cities and their residents at

the turn of the 20th century. 'Would like to remind the reader that,' a researcher of the folk theatre culture, A.F. Nekrylova notes, 'that *'balagany'* (as folk festivities around 'balagans' (booths) were called in the colloquial language of the late 19th century) left an indelible mark on the memory of many people of art, reflecting in their creative work and life path' [Nekrylova, 2004, p. 14]. Indeed, *Balaganchik* (The Puppet Show) by Alexander Blok, Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka*, Kustodiev's paintings, '*Petrushka's mask from behind the screens*' in Akhmatova's poem, Meyerhold's theatre, etc., immediately come to mind. These impressions affected Chekhov as well.

Pishchik is not the main character of the play, he does not affect the development of the plot, the general drama bypasses him, and he appears as a random character, almost a walk-on. However, it forms its own specific internal plot, a plot within a plot, connected with the plot and poetics of the *Petrushka* theatre. Perhaps, when considering these characters apart from these, it may seem like stretching a point or a strained interpretation, but together they do form a rather coherent system.

It is notable that the author's remarks say nothing about what Lyubov Andreyevna, Anya, Lopakhin are wearing, but the appearance of Epikhodov, Firs, Charlotta, Pishchik is described in detail. As if the main characters of the play are self-sufficient, but some iconic details are required to characterize the others. Simeonov-Pishchik is dressed in a *poddyovka* (a coat) made of fine cloth and *sharovary* (baggy trousers) (XIII, 203). *Sharovary*, the wide baggy trousers tucked into the tops of smart boots are part of the traditional look of *Petrushka* [Nekrylova, 2004, p. 95].

Pishchik is associated with several episodes that seem to be interludes that are not directly related to the events on stage. In the first act, he advises Ranevskaya: '*There is no need to take medicine, my dear ... this neither harm nor benefit ... Give it to me ... my dear.* (He takes pills, pours them into his palm, blows on them, puts them into his mouth, and waters down with *kvass*.) *Here!* LYUBOV ANDREYEVNA (frightened). *You must be crazy!* PISHCHIK. *I took all the pills.* LOPAKHIN. *What an abyss.* Everyone laughs. FIRS. *They were at our place at the Holy Week; they ate half a bucket of cucumbers ... (Mumbles.)*' (XIII, 208).

This deliberately farcical episode is intended to make the people present laugh, to defuse the tense atmosphere of the upcoming sale of the estate, though at the same time, within the '*Petrushka-like*' context, it refers to the scene *Petrushka and The Doctor* and characterizes Pishchik as a prankster, a trickster. The trickster, as we know, acts at the turn of the era. This is '*not only and not just a mocker. He is often ridiculous himself, he is a kind of 'mythological fool'*' [Kostyukhin, 1987, p. 31].

However, Pishchik's lines and remarks contain not only the *Petrushka* theatre motif. Act III begins with his story about a horse, from which '*as if the Simeonov-Pishchiks ancient lineage descend.*' After Trofimov's words that there is something horse like in his figure, Pishchik says: '*Well ... a horse is a good animal ... You can always sell it...*' (XIII, 229). Among the main scenes of the traditional comedy about *Petrushka*,

A. Nekrylova indicates the ones of the purchase of a horse and testing it, the treatment of Petrushka, and the scene with the bride [Nekrylova, 2004, p. 95]. There is also a marriage motif in Pishchik's remarks: '*The most charming Charlotta Ivanovna ... I'm simply in love ...*' (XIII, 231). There is also one more motif – 'Petrushka and the Musician': '*A good man, but a bad musician,*' Charlotta says about him (XIII, 231).

Of course, one should not expect a consistent reproduction of Petrushka interludes in Chekhov's play. The allusion to them is only a signal that defines the associative field of Pishchik's image. G.I. Tamarly notes the buffoonery character of the play *The Cherry Orchard*, created by the carnival tradition, Pishchik, Charlotta, jumps and antics, blows with a stick for no reason. Thus, according to the researcher, the play's world of drama and the originality of Chekhov's conventionality are formed [Tamarly, 1993].

Notably, the semantic space of the Petrushka theatre, included in the associative field of the play, in many respects determines its genre nature. In the folk drama, everyone beats each other, deceives, kills – and it is funny! In *The Cherry Orchard*, the estate is sold for debts, the lives and destinies collapse, the characters split up, the garden is cut down, Firs dies – and this is a comedy! Dramatic conflict in the folk theatrical culture always has a comic resolution. This determines the static and comic character of Pishchik's image, and his function is to reduce the dramatic intensity. Therefore, to the words of Gayev about the death or departure of old servants, he reacts with a replica: '*My daughter, Dashen'ka ... bows to you/gives you her regards...*' (XIII, 205); and right after Firs' reminiscences about the garden's past, about its abundance and fertility, Pishchik, turning to Ranevskaya, suddenly 'changes the register': '*And how was it in Paris? Have you tasted the frogs?*' (XIII, 206).

Pishchik is a big fan of telling all sorts of fables. His speech (as well as the surname of Simeonov-Pishchik) is stylistically multifaceted, where the high coexists with the low and the serious with the comic one within the same phrase or replica, which is a characteristic feature of the folk drama, of its tragic-farcical character. This property of Chekhov's plays gave the researcher a reason to call their individual episodes '*a farcical transcription of tragic situations*' [Ishchuk-Fadeyeva, 1996, p. 184].

Pishchik's speech is abound in folk expressions and jokes typical of the fair folklore, such as '*let my cart perish, with its all four wheels ...*' (XIII, 204), '*once in a pack, if not bark, but wag your tail*', '*a hungry dog believes only in meat*' (XIII, 229) and many others. The use of folk comic sayings is a distinguishable feature of Petrushka's speech. His monologues '*contain the elements of comic self-praise*' [Savushkina, 1976, p. 127]. Let us recall the story of Pishchik, which opens Act III, about the age-old existence and origin of his family and the kin, allegedly descending from a horse that Caligula placed in the Senate.

Pishchik introduces into the play the element of a folk holiday, which, according to Propp, V.Ya., has a commemorative and productive meaning [Propp, 1995]. According to A. Nekrylova, in a folk holiday, '*two trends are connected: return and immobility*

and renewal and dynamics, thus, it simultaneously focuses on the past and directed towards the future [Nekrylova, 2004, p. 3]. Pishchik is the only hero of the play who does not lose, but gains when everybody loses. Even Lopakhin becomes the owner of the garden only after breaking off the relations with Ranevskaya, Gayev, and Varya. Pishchik, on the other hand, never loses the hope: *'Now, I was about to think that everything has already gone and dead, but no, look, the railway crosses my land now and ... I have been paid for that. And after that, I'm sure, something else will happen if not today but tomorrow...'* (XIII, 209). He is the same resilient optimist as Petrushka who at the end of each performance is either eaten by a dog or dragged off by a ram or a devil. However, this does not frighten anyone as one puppet play runs: *'It's over. The dog ate Petrushka. When one thing ends – another one begins'* [Folklore Theatre, 1991, p. 263]. In the following performance, Petrushka will appear in front of the audience alive and unharmed. Therefore, what happened to Pishchik is no less amazing and fantastic than 'the resurrection' of Petrushka: *'The British came to my place and found some kind of white clay in the soil ... (! - M.L.)'* (XIII, 249). This is quite in line with the philosophy that both Pishchik and his folklore prototype adhere to: jump from the roof and that is the task!

Pishchik falls out of the linear time of life and is placed into the cyclic time of the play, which gives hope for the rebirth and renewal. Life does not end even if someone's personal circumstances are in conflict with the natural cycle. In *The Cherry Orchard*, as Zingerman, B.I., noticed, *'the theme of the loss and parting merges ... with the theme of finding and meeting ... the eternal miracle of the renewal of life, which reminds us of the myth of the dying and resurrecting Dionysus'* [Zingerman, 1988, p. 383].

The image of Simeonov-Pishchik in *The Cherry Orchard*, which is closely associated with the Petrushka theatre, with its extreme structural and semantic richness and associativity, creates a kind of 'a play within a play' (like a 'story within a story' in an epic), which *'works for'*, contributes to the general idea, uniting the plot centre and the periphery.

Thus, our observations allow us to draw some conclusions. The Chekhov plays' aesthetics seamlessly integrate the traditions of the folk theatrical culture, contributing to the creation of a new stage convention, largely determining the specific plot and genre features.

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