CHILDREN IN THE LIFE AND WORKS OF CHEKHOV

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and
Research in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

by

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Department of Russian and Slavic Studies
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An abstract

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the child-protagonist attained an important position in Russian literature. Chekhov contributed to this achievement by developing a uniquely sensitive appreciation and a fresh realistic view of the child and his world. Based on his personal childhood experiences and on his later artistic observation of children, the writer was able to present a natural picture of the child in various stages of his psychological development. Chekhov's depiction of the child, however, was never idealized, for he also included in his stories the sociological and pedagogical problems of growing up. Although Chekhov did not portray children favourably during his early Chekhonte stage, he later proved to be a successful author of stories about children. Works such as Vanka (Van'ka), Sleepy (Spat' xočetsja) and The Steppe (Step') are still universally enjoyed.

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Dans la deuxième partie du dix-neuvième siècle, les personnages enfantins furent souvent utilisés dans la littérature russe. Chekhov contribua à développer cet aspect en appréciant de façon unique l'enfant et son monde par un regard d'une fraicheur réaliste. D'après ses souvenirs d'enfance et par la suite en observant les enfants d'un point de vue artistique, l'auteur fut capable de décrire l'enfant dans les différentes étapes de son développement psychologique. Néanmoins la peinture chez Chekhov ne fut jamais idéalisée, car il a toujours tenu à inclure dans ses récits l'aspect sociologique et pédagogique de l'enfant qui grandit. Pourtant, Chekhov dans ses premiers débuts sous le nom de Chekhonte n'a pas décrit les enfants sous un jour favorable; par la suite il devint un écrivain qui réussit les histoires sur les enfants. Les oeuvres telles que Vanka (Van'ka), L'endormie (Spat' xočetsja) et La Steppe (Step') sont toujours universellement appréciées.

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PREFACE

Material for this thesis was obtained from McGill University, Michigan State University, University of Michigan, University of Toronto, University of Windsor and The Library of Congress.

The transliteration throughout this study was done according to the North American Slavists' System, which is used in the Slavic Review and Slavic and East European Journal. However, the name "Chekhov" retains its normal English spelling throughout the main text.

The titles of the standard English translations of Chekhov's works have been kept in the text. Where no English translation exists, Russian titles and quotations have been translated by the author.

The author would like to express her deep appreciation to Dr. J. G. Nicholson, whose judgement and insightful criticism made the completion of this study possible. Also worthy of mention are N. Miloradovitch and V. Nonnenman for their help in editing the manuscript and the author's mother for her patience and understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

The age of realism dominated Russian literature during a great part of the nineteenth century. Although there were considerable trends and changes inside the literary school, one important and general characteristic was maintained by all the realists--their subjects were drawn mainly from the contemporary Russian way of life. This explains the somewhat journalistic and historical nature of the realistic novels and brief narratives written in the mid and late nineteenth century Russia.

Another quality claimed by the Russian realist movement was human sympathy. The formula of all the Russian novelists, from Turgenev to Chekhov, was: "People are not good or bad, they are only more or less unhappy and deserving of sympathy."[1] This philanthropic attitude was especially apparent in the portrayal of the common man and the ways in which the mundane events of his life affected him.

Although the image of the child had been introduced in Russian literature at a much earlier time, the subject of the child in society gained ultimate popularity with Russian writers in the second half of the nineteenth century.[2] In view of the sympathetic attitude displayed toward their characters, the realists, from Dostoevskij on, had the

tendency to depict the child as a pitiful, tortured being.[3] Hence, the works such as Dostoevskij's Crime and Punishment (Prestuplenie i nakazanie), Netočka Nezvanova and Gorkij's Childhood (Detstvo) depict young victims of poor and morally deprived backgrounds. Only Tolstoj wrote about contented children of the higher social classes.[4]

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov is particularly fascinating in that he developed an unusually sensitive appreciation and an original realistic perception of the child and his world. The writer's experience with different children and his keenness of observation enabled him to accurately describe their characters, their speech, their sorrows, their joys. But above all, his own background and childhood led him to understand the problems which the common child faced in Russian society and the serious effects which these external influences could have on a young person's psychological development.

Chekhov did not view the child as being exclusively "good" in the Rousseau sense of the word. He did, however, believe that parents should nourish the innate talents of a young person rather than brutally punish his faults. The "non-political"[5] Chekhov attributed unusual importance to the human body and cared to spare it from any form of violence:

> My holy of holies is the human body, health, mind, talent, inspiration, love and complete freedom--freedom from violence and lies, no matter what form the latter two take.[6]

The purpose of this thesis is to attempt to understanding of Chekhov's position as a writer of literature about children. Although Chekhov's attitude to this subject has not been underestimated, nothing extensive has been written about it, particularly in the West. Western critics, such as W. H. Bruford and R. Hingley, briefly mention this aspect of Chekhov's literature.[7] Among the Russian critics, only a handful, such as V. V. Golubkov and V. V. Brusjanin, have discussed this subject in detail.[8]

It should be noted that for the purpose of this study, the term "child" applies to anyone under the age of seventeen, with one exception. The story, The Trial, concerns a mature youth, but is used in this study for it not only reveals the theme of child-flogging, but also serves as a reflection of Chekhov's own childhood.

This study will concentrate on Chekhov's writing career during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, for this is when he wrote most of his works about children. Throughout this thesis, the author has tried to observe the parallel between Chekhov's life and literature in order to throw light on his motivations in writing about children the way he did at a given time in his life.

Chekhov's early life was critically influenced by hereditary and environmental factors. Later on in life, many of his personal experiences during childhood were recounted in his literary works. Moreover, his personal encounters with

children in his later years also served as a foundation for his future artistic expression. The first chapter, which deals with the writer's background, childhood and later association with young people, should provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the motives which led Chekhov to write realistic stories about children.

The debut of Chekhov's writing career, which almost coincided with the beginning of his medical studies in 1899, is discussed in the second chapter. Already during this early Chekhonte stage some of his works included children as characters. This chapter reveals how Chekhov's indifferent attitude toward literature during his student years left its mark on his few casual portrayals of children.

It was in the last two decades of the nineteenth century that the writer composed the bulk of his works in which the child appeared as the central figure. It was with this, Chekhov's most prolific period, that the final chapter is concerned. The psychological, sociological and pedagogical studies of young people written in that period revealed not only Chekhov's talent as a writer of children's stories, but also the concern that he had for the child's position in the social system.

The originality of Chekhov's stories about children and his motivations for writing them will be demonstrated in this study. In revealing the literary and social significance of these stories, it is hoped that this feature of Chekhov's creativity will receive more attention than it has hitherto been given.

FOOTNOTES

[1]D. S. Mirsky, A History of Russian Literature from its Beginnings to 1900, ed. by Francis J. Whitfield, Vintage Books (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1958), p. 179.

[2]V. V. Golubkov, "Rasskazy A. P. Čexova - o detjax," in Tvorčestvo A. P. Čexova. Sbornik statej. Posobie dlja učitelej (Moskva: Učpedgiz, 1956), p. 438.

[3]Princess Nina A. Toumanova, Anton Chekhov - The Voice of Twilight Russia (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1937), p. 141.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Chekhov defines his views as "non-political" in his letter to A. N. Pleščeev in October, 1889. Refer to A. P. Čexov, Sobranie sočinenij, XI (Moskva: Gosizxudlit, 1954-6), p. 263.

[6]Ibid.

[7]W. H. Bruford devotes one page to this topic in Chekhov and his Russia - A Sociological Study (London: International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction, 1948), pp. 195-6.

Ronald Hingley has less than half a page written about this subject in Chekhov - A Biographical and Critical Study (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), p. 72.

[8]Golubkov, op. cit., pp. 185 - 214.

V. V. Brusjanin, "Deti v proizvedenijax A. P. Čexova," Deti i pisateli (Moskva: np, 1915), pp. 62 - 103.

CHAPTER I

REFLECTIONS ON CHEKHOV, CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN

The question of whether the child can be considered as a complete human being and whether he plays a role in society was raised in Russian literature as early as the eighteenth century by D. I. Fonvizin in his lighthearted but significant play, The Adolescent (Nedorosl'). The playwright pointed out the plight of his young protagonist, who was being raised in the stagnant atmosphere of the typical Russian household of that time. In spite of his apparent compassion for the child, Fonvizin made it obvious that the boy was well on the way to becoming like his parents--selfish and crude. The youth's continual exposure to vulgarity and corruption had predetermined his adult character.

Fonvizin's interest in the well-being of the child was supported by many other Russian writers from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, who discussed in their works contemporary family life and its effect on the future of the child. The critic, V. V. Brusjanin, points out V. G. Belinskij, A. I. Gercen, M. Bakunin and N. P. Ogarev as having significantly contributed to the sociological study of the child.[1] N. G. Dobroljubov and D. I. Pisarev, later followed by N. Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoj, Dostoevskij and

Pisemskij are also included by Brusjanin as important writers who paved the way for Chekhov's stories about children.

The child's position in society became a particularly controversial subject with writers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Not all the literary works, which concentrated on the child-protagonist, however, were primarily sociological and political studies. A. P. Babuškina, in her critical study of Chekhov states that Chekhov, like Tolstoj, laid emphasis on the psychological make-up of his young protagonists.[2] He was, therefore, very much responsible for re-emphasizing the child-character in Russian literature.[3] Babuškina mentions writers such as P. V. Zasodimskij, G. I. Uspenskij, V. G. Korolenko, D. N. Mamin-Sibirjak, K. M. Stanjukovič and L. N. Andrejev who later were to also view the child from a psychological point of view in their writings.[4]

It is of interest to note that not all the aforementioned writers, who attempted to draw the sociological or psychological portrait of the child were parents themselves. Chekhov, for one, was childless. Whatever he wrote about young people was drawn exclusively from his personal childhood experience and his earnest study of the children he encountered in his lifetime.

The childhood of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov has been described as the most dismal and sorrowful period of his life.[5] It has been emphasized by the Soviet Chekhov scholar, A. B. Derman, that even Gorkij's youth, which was filled with injustice and violence, was far less pathetic than Chekhov's childhood.[6]

Chekhov, son of a small shopkeeper and grandson of a serf, was born in Taganrog, an abandoned port on the sea of Azov, on January 17, 1860, one year before the abolition of serfdon. His self-educated grandfather had bought himself and his family freedom in 1841 after having had acquired considerable wealth through trade. Although progressively-minded in certain ways, Chekhov's grandfather, nevertheless, believed in upholding the tradition of patriarchal despotism. An atmosphere of violence and tyranny in the Chekhov home, a reflection of the prevailing social oppression, brought on the understandably rebellious character of the writer's father. The terrorized boy was determined to rise above the bondage to which he had been born and become his own master.

Pavel Chekhov developed into a literate and musically talented person and, as his parents had wished for him, he, too hoped to give his children as liberal an education as possible. It should be mentioned that Pavel Chekhov's positive outlook on the need for formal schooling was uncommon, considering that at this time the members of the merchant class believed that any formal type of instruction was senseless.[7]

Anton Chekhov received a rigourous religious upbringing. Appropriately described as a suffocating spiritual despotism,[8] it consisted not so much of the enforcement of the spiritual nature of religion, as of the strict observance of its many rites. One can understand why Chekhov, in his adult life, rejected formal religion totally. In a letter,

written by the writer on March 17, 1892, he states: "It is not for nothing that so many atheists have come out of the seminaries and the religious institutions."[9] He again expresses his views regarding a pious upbringing:

> I would never send my children to his school . . . .[10] I, myself in my younger years received a religious education . . . . And what of it? When I think back of my childhood, it appears to be quite dismal. I no longer have any religious belief.[11]

These letters show that the mature Chekhov was no longer attracted to the practice of Christianity in the form that his parent forced upon him. Nevertheless, the writer's negative outlook on religion did not prevent him from adhering to the traditional Christian ethic or having admiration for the solemn Orthodox rites to which he often referred in his writings. Perhaps H. W. William's following description of the spiritual state, which seemed to be common to most Russian intellectuals, may well be applied to Chekhov:

> The Church is an element in the national consciousness. It enters into the details of life, moulds customs, maintains a traditional atmosphere to the influence of which a Russian, from the very fact that he is a Russian, involuntarily submits. A Russian may and most Russian intelligents [sic] do, deny the Church in theory, but in taking his share in the collective life of the nation he, at many points, recognizes the Church as a fact.[12]

In addition to being raised in a stifling religious atmosphere, the young Chekhovs were often subjected to physical hardship. It was not unusual for them to spend long hours tending their father's grocery store.

The memory of these endless hours of servitude was to remain with the writer for many years to come, for it was then

that he and the other Chekhov children were first exposed to the widespread vices of cheating, lying and stealing. One of the Chekhov brothers describes the demoralizing atmosphere at work: "It is hard to find any establishment which pushes youth to the point of lying, stealing and corruption as much as the small grocery store."[13]

Although Chekhov's father believed in formal schooling and had a positive outlook in that respect, he considered corporal punishment as an efficient way of teaching his children morality and obedience. In equating them with fools, he justified the routine thrashings he gave his children:

> I myself was taught like that, and you see I have turned out a man. One beaten man is worth two unbeaten ones. As you are teaching a fool, nothing but good can come of it. He himself will be grateful to me for it afterwards . . . .[14]

A number of Chekhov's stories contain scenes referring to the beatings he experienced in the early years of his life. His partly autobiographical work, entitled Three Years (Tri goda), for example, contains a passage which describes the impact this form of physical degradation had on him as a child:

> I remember that my father began my education, or, more simply, my beatings, when I was not yet five. Every morning I awoke, my first thought was: "Am I going to be beaten today?"[15]

While reflecting on his past, Chekhov rightly stated that "In my childhood, I had no childhood."[16] He also realized that his situation was not unique for his ancestors had undergone similar experience to his:

> Our grandfather was beaten by the landowners, and the lowest functionary could smash his jaw. Our

> father was beaten by his father, and we by our father. What nerves, what blood we have inherited![17]

It should be mentioned at this point, that paternal violence was common in Russian households, regardless of social class.[18] Patriarchal brutality characterized many of the leading families throughout Russia's history and permeated Russian pre-revolutionary literature. A man's suffering explained and excused his imparting further suffering on those weaker than himself, such as his children. E. H. Erikson, an important figure in the field of psychoanalysis and human development, writes that in accepting the parent's sado-masochistic behaviour, the child "acquired that pattern of masochistic identification with authority which apparently has been a strong collective force in the history of Russia".[19]

Chekhov's abnormal personal history made his attainment of a unified ethical view of life difficult. However, the spiritual integrity that gradually surfaced with maturity and experience accounted for his eventual sensitivity to every kind of meanness and vice (pošlost'),[20] which predominated Russian society at that time. He resented any form of tyranny and, unlike his forefathers, did not believe that violence justified further violence. The "victim-executioner"[21] relationship which he had experienced as a child haunted him in later life. Even at the age of twenty-nine, Chekhov, reflecting the horror of his childhood days, exhorted his eldest brother not to follow in his father's footsteps:

> I ask you to remember that it was tyranny and lies [his father's] that destroyed your mother's youth. Tyranny and lies also darkened our childhood to such a degree that it is impossible to think about it without shock and revulsion. Remember the horror and disgust we felt in those days when our father made a scene at dinner because the soup was too salty, or when he treated our mother like an imbecile? Tyranny is a threefold criminal . . . . Remember that it is better to be the victim than the executioner . . . .[22]

The writer understood the position of the abused child whose very being was shattered by hypocritical adults. The innocence of a child merited parental respect:

> Children are holy and pure. Even the offspring of robbers and crocodiles belong to the order of angels. We, ourselves, are free to wallow in the mire of our own making, but we are obligated to create for them an environment, worthy of their status. We must not go unpunished for being indecent in their presence . . . . We have no right to make them instruments of our emotions: to smother them tenderly with kisses at one point, then angrily trample upon them at another time. It is better not to love them at all, than to love them with a despotic adoration.[23]

Chekhov's stories about children were not only based on autobiographical data, but also on his personal encounters with them. It seems that the first recorded significant acquaintance he had with young people dates back to 1884, when he spent the first of his three most socially enriching summers in Babkino.[24] It was during this time that he befriended the children of an educated landowner by the name of A. S. Kiselev.

Chekhov's encounter with the Kiselev children marked the beginning of a long and meaningful friendship, which is evidenced by both his formal and informal writings. To amuse

the girl, Saša, whom he playfully bestowed with the "grown-up" name of Vasilisa Panteleevna, and her brother, Sereža, fated to carry such nicknames as "idiotik" (the little dunce) or "Kokljuš" (whooping cough),[25] Chekhov would often write humourous short verses and sketch comical drawings in their scrapbooks. The following preface from the story, Soft-Boiled Boots (Sapogi v smjatku) serves as an example of the type of prose the writer would compose for their enjoyment:

> Hoping for the leniency of the critics, the author asks that he be promptly paid for his story, or else his wife and children will perish from hunger. The address of the author is: on the second floor, near the kitchen, to the right of the bathroom, between the cupboard and the red trunk, in that same place where the dog and cat broke a pot while fighting last year.[26]

Chekhov claimed that the only poem that he had ever written in his life was dedicated to the Kiselev children.[27] Interestingly enough, the work Hares and Chinamen, a Fable for Children (Zajcy i kitajcy, basnja dlja detej) was also meant by him to serve as a parody on the existing literature for the younger members of society:[28]

> Once walked over a bridge
> Fat Chinamen,
> In front of them, with their tails up,
> Hares ran quickly.
> Suddenly the Chinamen shouted:
> "Stop! Whoa! Ho! Ho!"
> The hares raised their tails still higher
> And hid in the bushes.
> The moral of this fable is clear:
> He who wants to eat hares
> Every day getting out of bed
> Must obey his father.[29]

Perhaps the most important reason for Chekhov's popularity with children was the facility with which he could enter

their world and communicate with them on their level. This is particularly evident in his correspondence with them:

"My dear Lady Vasilisa Panteleevna:
"I am sending You, from the depth of my heart, the following gifts:
1) Scissors for snipping off the tails of mice and sparrows.
2) Two pens to write poetry with: one for bad poems, the other for good ones.
3) A frame for the portrait of some mug.
. . . . . .
7) a copy of a Slavic newspaper to read on an empty stomach.
8) An illustrated ancient history book; from this history, one can realize that Idiots, Asses and Rascals lived in the ancient times.
9) There are no more presents.
"Having spent all I had for gifts and finding myself now without any means for survival, I beseech You to send me some money. And should You not have any, then steal some from daddy and mail it to me.
"With sincere respect and honour of being Your humble servant.

"Vasilij Makaryč

"Please excuse the negligent appearance of this letter. This was because of my worrying."[30]

Chekhov's ability to identify with children is also apparent in some of his business letters. His correspondence with M. V. Kiseleva, also a writer of children's stories, almost without exception contained such thoughtful comments about her son and daughter as:

> I bow to . . . Vasilisa with her five franc coin and Sergej with his dolls . . . .[31]

> Give my regards to . . . Vasilisa and Kokljus . . . .[32]

> . . . to the beautiful Vasilisa and amiable Kotafej Kotafeič [Sereža], I send my deepest regards and wish them a healthy appetite.[33]

In his letters to A. S. Suvorin, for whose paper he wrote after 1885, he seldom forgot to acknowledge his

employer's daughter. An example of this is Chekhov's letter to Suvorin on November 26, 1889, in which he attempts to convince the editor's child to exercise more: "It is not very healthy for one to be tall and have such narrow shoulders. You must engage in gymnastics or else I will not marry you."[34]

In spite of Chekhov's apparent light-heartedness, however, there existed much concern for the child's well-being. In a letter to M. V. Kiseleva concerning her son who was then staying with him, Chekhov comically describes how the boy "walks on his head . . . rolls down the stairs head over heels"[35] and then, with much concern adds: " . . . I honestly assure you that Sereza is in absolutely good health, in a happy disposition, does not cough, that he is as always a well-behaved little boy . . . ."[36]

Nor was the writer's devotion to children directed to only those of his friends, as the following incident indicates. Recalling the writer's boat trip from Odessa to Yalta, A. Fedorov recounts a conversation Chekhov had with a woman whose son was peering overboard:

> "Are you scared that he might fall into the sea?" asked Chekhov.
> "Yes."
> "And what if he did?"
> "I would jump after him."
> "And so would I." replied the writer, placing his hand on the boy's shoulder.[37]

The following part of a three-page letter written to the poet L. N. Trefolev, whom Chekhov himself hardly knew, reveals the writer's concern for an orphan who appears to be unappreciative of what is being done for him:

> Any day now you will be confronted by a suspicious personality . . . . This will be Dmitrij Ivanov, a peasant boy, twelve years of age, literate, orphaned, without a passport and so forth . . . . According to him, he came to Moscow from Yaroslavl' with his mother; she passed away, leaving him with problems for nothing . . . . My sister managed to scrape up some money and clothes for him, and tomorrow our cook will take him to the railroad station. The boy says that he has an aunt in Yaroslavl'. He does not know the address . . . . If he is not lying, would it perhaps be possible to find him some work? In typography, for example?
>
> An inspector of one of the boarding schools, a good friend of mine, donated . . . the following articles: boots, a grey suit, a housecoat, ... When the boy arrives, tell him that you are an important person, that you know of his possessions, that you have tremendous power and that if he sells or loses any piece of clothing, he will be dealt with in all strictness . . . .
>
> And should he not show up, then it will have to be regretfully concluded that he returned to Moscow, sold his clothes and ticket; inotherwords, he blew it . . . .[38]

The writer, A. Kuprin, recollects in his article entitled, To Chekhov's Memory, a peculiar, trusting friendship that developed between Chekhov and a sick girl, who, accompanied by the three-year-old orphan she was raising, regularly visited the famous author.[39]

Anton Chekhov's background and childhood not only molded him into the person he became, but also coloured much of what he ever wrote. He loathed the servile atmosphere of his early life and contrary to the frequently represented angelic image of him in various memoirs, he was made up of ordinary flesh and blood, with human weaknesses and passions.[40] As a child, Chekhov was regularly exposed to what he regarded as the two main human vices--the oppression of the weak and

the obsequiousness before the strong.[41] Raised in difficult conditions, the writer could not eradicate his negative characteristics and acquire his better spiritual qualities without an inner struggle. He reveals this fact in one of his letters to Suvorin:

> Write a story about a young man [meaning himself], the son of a serf, an ex-storekeeper, a choirboy, a schoolboy, a student, brought up on respect for rank, kissing priests' hands, and the worship of others' ideas, grateful for a crust of bread, flogged time and again, going to school in broken boots, fighting, torturing animals, . . . write how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself one drop at a time and how he wakes up one fine morning to feel that in his veins flows not the blood of a slave but true human blood.[42]

Unlike his forefathers, Chekhov tried to shake off the existing vulgar influences by setting before himself very early in life a high standard of moral rectitude and trying to subordinate his behaviour to it. The letter, which he wrote to his brother Nikolaj in 1866, reveals the pedagogical system he devised in order to train himself.[43]

In exposing the writer's turbulent childhood, his realization that childhood experiences strongly determine the character of adulthood and his humanistic attitude toward the weakest members of Russian society, these pages should lead to a better insight into Chekhov's motivations in writing as he did about children.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Brusjanin, op. cit., p. 63.

[2]A. P. Babuškina, "Anton Pavlovič Čexov (1860-1904)," in Istorija russkoj detskoj literatury (Moskva: Učpedgiz, 1948), p. 439.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]For truth's sake, it should be mentioned that a contrary and very unusual point of view regarding Chekhov's childhood is presented by the writer's sister, Marija. In her article "Detstvo", included in Anton Pavlovič Čexov - Sbornik: Stat'i, issledovanija, publikacii (Rostov-na Donu: Rostovskoe knižnoe izd-stvo, 1954), p. 4., she justifies her father's actions and asserts that, although they had to work hard, the Chekhov children lived in a cheerful environment.

[6]A. Derman, Tvorčeskij portret Čexova (Moskva: Mir, 1929), p. 25.

[7]V. A. Manujlova, red., A. P. Čexov v portretax, illjustracijax, dokumentax (Leningrad: Učpedgiz, 1957), p.2.

[8]Daniel Gillès, Chekhov - Observer without Illusion (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), p.4.

[9]Ibid.

[10]The school which Chekhov refers to is the church-affiliated one, directed by Professor S. A. Račinskij, who advocated religious education for children.

[11]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 553.

[12]Bruford, op. cit., p. 129.

[13]Al. P. Čexov, Iz detskix let A. P. Čexova (Moskva: np, 1960), p. 46.

[14]S. S. Koteliansky, ed., Anton Tchekhov, Literary and Theatrical Reminiscences (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1927), p. 24.

[15]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., VII, 445.

[16]Gillès, op. cit., p. 3.

[17]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., VII, 488.

[18]Ernest J. Simmons, Chekhov - A Biography (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 5.

[19]Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 371.

[20]Pošlost' is defined as all that is reprehensible morally, socially or aesthetically in Bruford, op. cit., p. 200.

[21]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 326.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid. p. 327.

[24]Manujlova, op. cit., p. 10.

[25]Aleksandr Roskin, Čexov - Biografičeskaja povest' (Moskva: Detgiz, 1959), p. 88.

[26]Ibid. p. 89.

[27]Maxim Gorky, Aleksander Kuprin and I. A. Bunin, Reminiscences of Anton Chekhov, trans. by S. S. Koteliansky and Leonard Woolf (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921), p. 96.

[28]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 434.

[29]Gorky, et al., op. cit., p. 96.

[30]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 431.

[31]Ibid. p. 154.

[32]Ibid. p. 212.

[33]Ibid. p. 335

[34]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 432.

[35]Ibid. p. 292.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 432.

[38]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 220.

[39]Gorky, et al., op. cit., p. 30.

[40]Julius Katzer, ed., A. P. Chekhov 1860-1960 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, nd), p. 98.

[41]Ibid. p. 99.

[42]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 330.

[43]Ibid. p. 81.

CHAPTER II

CHILDREN IN THE EARLY WORKS OF ANTOSHA CHEKHONTE

Having graduated from the Taganrog gymnasium (secondary school) in 1879, Chekhov rejoined his family in Moscow, where he enrolled at the University of Moscow's medical school. He wanted to become a physician not for the noble humanitarian purpose of alleviating human suffering, but to attain a respected social standing.[1] Thus, he concluded that a career in medicine was an honest way of obtaining the material security and social recognition which he desired. However, shortly after starting his medical studies, the student turned to writing, a successful feat which resulted in his first published story, entitled Letter to a Scholarly Neighbour (Pis'mo k učenomu sosedu) in March, 1880. It was this initial literary endeavour which accounted for Chekhov's future dual profession, an experience which he later vividly described in the following manner:

> You advise me not to hunt after two hares, and not to think of medical work. I do not know why one should not hunt two hares even in the literal sense . . . . I feel more confident and more satisfied with myself when I reflect that I have two professions and not one. Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one, I spend the night with the other. Although it is disorderly, it is not so dull, and besides neither of them loses anything from my infidelity. If I did not have my medical work, I doubt if I could have given my spare thoughts to literature.[2]

The desperate need for money to support himself and his rather large family proved to be the pressing fact during Chekhov's student years. This would frequently show up in his letters. "I am paying bills in all directions and I have nothing left. The family alone eats up fifty rubles."[3] Consequently, apart from pursuing his studies, he also began to concentrate more on writing.

During his early writing stage, the young literary dilettante was above all concerned with producing material that would satisfy the editors of the numerous magazines for whom he wrote. Grasshopper (Strekoza), Cricket (Sverčok), Alarm-Clock (Budil'nik) and Fragments (Oskolki),[4] all cheap but popular magazines at that time, were filled with Chekhov's banal jokes, tiny tales, comical sketches and parodies. These also happened to be what the public was demanding in the trend of humour.[5] The medical student discovered that dabbling with words turned out to be a most pleasureable hobby as well as a good source of income. Using such pseudonyms as: My Brother's Brother, the Man Without Spleen, Hot Iron, Ulysses and most frequently, Antosha Cehkhonte,[6] Chekhov eagerly provided the magazines with the desired trivial literature.

During his first years of writing, Chekhov occasionally depicted children. However, due to his indifferent attitude to literature at that time, he portrayed them strictly out of necessity--namely, as a source for subject material. His interest in writing about young people was minimal, and if he

by chance happened to include a child in his story, he did so with little serious intention.[7] Even in these instances, the writer seemed to be more involved with the conventional derogatory depiction of uncultured parents. Any reference which he would make to a child would be, for the most part, as a potential scoundrel. According to his early Chekhonte tales, childhood and youth appeared to be nothing more than a preparation of a young, naive person for the scandalous adult life.[8] In his occasional portrayal of children during this early period, Chekhov at most supported the popular literary trend of mocking the contemporary corrupt society.

Chekhov's first work, in which a young person holds a significant though passive role, is the partly autobiographical Daddy (Papaša), published in 1880. This long-winded, lighthearted tale is centered around the parents' fear that their son will fail in school and their consequent bribery of the powerless teacher. From the very beginning, the young author demonstrates his disrespectful attitude toward the parents in his description of them: the mother is "thin as a Dutch herring", while the father is likened to a beetle.[9] The father (papaša), though distinguished in his town, is shown to be impudent and ill-bred. When his wife comes in to discuss their son's education, the chambermaid jumps up from her master's lap. This causes no significant reaction from his wife, who "had already managed to accustom herself to his minor weaknesses".[10]

It is in such a domestic environment, one in which vices appear to be so natural that they pass unnoticed, that the boy is being raised. His adult character is already predetermined. On the verge of failing grade three, the narcissistic fifteen-year-old claims that he "knows arithmetic better than the teacher, himself, and that he is not to blame that in this world only high-school girls, children of wealthy families and smooth talkers receive excellent marks".[11]

Chekhov appears to condemn the young hero of the story Daddy too harshly. It is obvious that the child is an unprotected victim of a crude upbringing. The author, who seems convinced that the boy is well on the way to becoming an excellent prototype of his father, neglects to emphasize the boy's weak and predetermined position as an individual. In fact, of all the characters he portrays in his work, Chekhov seems to extend his sympathy exclusively to the schoolteacher, whose important role in society was still generally undervalued.

During the years of 1881 and 1882, Chekhov's choice of themes was fairly consistent.[12] Experimenting with various literary techniques, he would often write about such topics as: the lack of human dignity; the existing decadence in households, schools and social relationships; and the numerous forms of human degradation. The practice of child-flogging, which was widespread during Chekhov's younger years,[13] was studied by the writer in Because of Little Apples (Za jabločki) in 1880 and later in The Trial (Sud) in 1881.

In the short story The Trial, Chekhov reveals the senselessness of flogging. The plot centers around the young hero, who having returned home from the city on a legal holiday, is accused by his father of having stolen money from him. Innocent Serapion denies the theft only to be publicly strapped by the irrational parent, who insists on hearing his son's admission of guilt. The fact that Serapion is no longer a child in the full sense of the word, but a self-supporting youth, makes the beating by his father doubly grievous, especially as even the guests appear to derive great satisfaction in witnessing the event. Even the injured old woman, awaiting medical attention from the visiting doctor, momentarily forgets her pain as she lifts up her head to observe the session of punishment. The beating, however, is stopped when it is discovered that the money had actually been misplaced by the parent. Nevertheless, unaware of the suspended action, the frenzied gendarme "with a red face and protruding eyes" continues shouting: "Once again! Once again! That's the way to do it!"[14]

Although the work The Trial represented an unpleasant memory of his own childhood days, Chekhov seemed to put little feeling into the portrayal of the young hero.[15] It does seem strange that the author should write as indifferently as he did about a character, who was undergoing the same brutal experience that Chekhov once had known. The writer, in fact, was hardly objective in this story, for he deliberately

exaggerated the young hero's defenseless predicament, by portraying him as a colourless personality. Serapion, in comparison with the exuberant antagonists appeared as nothing more than a puppet.

It can be argued that Chekhov's main intention in this case was not so much to condemn the boy, as to emphasize the absurdity of the situation. The author no doubt wished to convey the crude domestic situation in which the omnipotent parent controlled his children's lives. One can, nevertheless, maintain that Chekhov intentionally and unjustifiably belittled Serapion in the eyes of the reader. The persecuted hero was made to look like a fool, void of any self-respect. Even toward the end of the story, when the youth is about to be beaten, Chekhov mockingly compares the scene to that of a martyr being executed: At his parent's command, Serapion "throws off his jacket, makes the sign of the cross, and in humiliation lies down on the bench" and says: "Torture me!"[16]

The lack of emotion which Chekhov would often display when he first began to write is again apparent in the sketch, entitled A Life of Questions and Exclamations (Žizn' v voprosax i vosklicanijax). Written in 1882, this verbal kaleidoscope describes the sequence of events which occur in each of the six stages of life: childhood, adolescence, youth, the twenty to thirty-age span, the thirty to fifty-age span, old age and death.

In describing childhood, Chekhov makes the existence of a child evident by means of the surrounding adults, who are shown to be perpetually fussing over him: "Take the cat away from him or it will scratch him . . . . The cabbies nearly ran him over . . . . Don't stand in the draught."[17] Yet the parents do not realize that their overprotection is spoiling the child. "The nanny must be fired . . . . You should be ashamed of yourself--hitting such a small child. Don't cry! Give him a honey-cake!"[18]

Chekhov's description of adolescence shows the growing child to be hopelessly pampered and mischievous. The writer seems convinced that the child is beyond any help, for even at this early stage, he displays in miniature the vices in which he will undoubtedly indulge when an adult. Although Chekhov holds the parents and educators responsible for the poor upbringing of the child, he nevertheless displays antagonism for the young person, who he believes will eventually repeat the same mistake.

One could conclude from the works discussed in this chapter, that Chekhov scornfully viewed the child. Perhaps the writer even agreed with Platonov, the hero of his innominate play of 1881, who disgustedly denounces youth:

> What vulgarity [pošlost']! To be so young and at the same time not to have a pure soul! What an extreme perversity! How repulsive those individuals, in whom we notice the slightest allusion to our past, seem to be . . . . Oh, youth, youth! On the one hand, you possess a healthy body, a living brain . . . and on the other . . . neglect of work . . . desperate use of foul language, debauchery, lies . . . . You pathetic orphans![19]

Certainly, the author who spoke in these early works was not the gentle, compassionate man, who was introduced at the beginning of this study.

The purpose of this chapter has been to show that Chekhov's early tales about children were not a deliberate attempt on his part to flay the vices of the generation, particularly that of young people.[20] Although many recent Soviet critics have read a satirical intention into the early Chekhonte stories, most of them were written with little or no feeling on the writer's part.[21] This is not to say that young Chekhov was the indifferent person he appears to be in the aforementioned works. As seen in the first chapter, he was far from being malevolent as an individual. He simply did not experience any compelling urge to manifest his personal thoughts, be they positive or negative, as a writer. During the early Chekhonte stage his motive for writing was solely mercenary. Recollecting his early period of writing, when his works were instinctive, meaningless creations, Chekhov explained:

> In former times I wrote as a bird sings. I would just sit down and write, without thinking how and of what. It wrote itself! I would write at any moment. To write down a sketch, a story, a scene was no labour at all to me . . . .[22]

Chekhov was concerned in producing material for purely comical effects. His literary goal was to induce laughter among his readers, even at the expense of mocking the tragic aspects of life. Looking back on his vain literary attitude, Chekhov

almost shamefully described his early experiences as a writer:

> Hitherto, my attitude to my literary work has been frivolous, heedless, casual. I don't remember a single story over which I have spent more than twenty-four hours . . . . I write my stories as reporters write their notes about fires, mechanically, half-unconsciously, taking no thought of the reader or myself . . . . I wrote and did all I could not to waste upon the story the scenes and images dear to my which--God knows why--I have treasured and kept carefully hidden.[23]

Perhaps the above quote also explains Chekhov's reluctance to write extensively about children in his early writing career.

In conclusion, it should be said that Chekhov's early literary endeavours were not the expression of a concerned, benevolent person, but rather an echo of Chekhonte's general nonchalance toward literature. It was not until later that Chekhov, as a writer, had a personal message to deliver to the expectant reading world.[24] The writer's main cycle of literary works about children will be discussed in the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Gillès, op. cit., p. 40.

[2]Anton Chekhov, Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and other Literary Topics, ed. by Louis S. Friedland (London: Minton, Balch & Company, 1924), p. 42.

[3]A. P. Chekhov, op. cit., XI, 24.

[4]The magazine Fragments is also referred to by some critics as Splinters.

[5]It is obvious that young Chekhov's earliest stories were largely the attempts of a student whose passion lay in literary genre and rarely in the conveyance of a particular idea (see Karl K. Kramer, The Chameleon and the Dream - The Image of Reality in Čexov's Stories [The Hague: Mouton & Co. N. V., 1970], p.30). As casual as he may have been to the writing profession at that time, his desire to attain a personal form of expression cannot be denied (Ibid.). In search for an original manner of writing and in an attempt to break away from the dull routine in which he so often found himself, Chekhov, still abiding by the standards laid down by the publishers, would try his hand at different literary styles. Though not always successful, the student would strive to convey his material by unusual means. Nevertheless, his experimentation and interest in mastering the techniques of the literary craft by no means suggest that he was as yet a dedicated writer.

[6]The story behind the pseudonym Chekhonte is interesting. Initially, one of Chekhov's favourite teachers, Fedor Platonovič Pokrovskij, gave him the nickname Chekhonte. Pokrovskij, who usually discussed Shakespeare, Goethe and Pushkin during the compulsory religious history course, gave young Chekhov an affectionate sounding name as opposed to the other students whose nicknames were usually of an insulting nature. Chekhov later used Chekhonte as a pen name when he started his writing career.

[7]Z. Papernyj, A. P. Čexov - Očerk tvorčestva (Moskva: Goslitizdat, 1960), p. 58.

[8]Ibid.

[9]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., I, 84.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid. p. 86.

[12]J. A. Krolenko - Obščestvo A. P. Čexova i ego èpoxi, red., Čexovskij sbornik - najdennye stat'i i pis'ma (Moskva: Glavlit, 1929), p. 156.

[13]At this point, it should be mentioned that to inflict physical pain on a child for any misdemeanour was considered righteous in Chekhov's Russia. In fact, "If a child was not taught right from wrong by beating, how else was he to learn?", was a common attitude in the patriarchal circles of Russian lower class families (see Simmons, Chekhov, p.5.).

[14]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 135.

[15]Krolenko, op. cit., p. 156.

[16]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 134.

[17]Ibid. p. 161.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Krolenko, op. cit., p. 141.

[20]Hingley, Chekhov - A Biographical and Critical Study, p. 50.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Koteliansky, op. cit., p. 6.

[23]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 79.

[24]Simmons, Chekhov, p. 65.

CHAPTER III

CHEKHOV'S MAIN CYCLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL STUDIES OF CHILDREN

Chekhov's numerous years of medical studies greatly influenced his attitude toward his creative work.[1] The scientific method, which he later followed as a doctor, taught him to view the world he portrayed in his writings in an accurate, objective light.[2] He no longer cared to yield to subjective conceptions and explained his preference for writing objectively in the following way:

> Subjectivity is a terrible thing. It is bad in the sense that it strips the poor author completely naked.[3]

Although his views vacillated between medicine--his "legal wife" and literature--his "mistress",[4] Chekhov was to later express the great impact which his medical career had had on him, as a writer:

> I have no doubt that the study of medicine has had an important influence on my literary work; it has considerably enlarged the sphere of my observation, has enriched me with knowledge the true value of which for me as a writer can only be understood by one who is himself a doctor. It has also had a guiding influence and it has probably due to my close association with medicine that I have succeeded in avoiding many mistakes.[5]

In 1882, Chekhov was introduced by a poet-friend,

L. I. Pal'min to the popular writer-humourist N. A. Lejkin, who was also the publisher of Fragments (Oskolki), a popular comical magazine in St. Petersburg.[6] Lejkin was considered as one of the most audacious publishers of that time, for in spite of the harsh censorship, he dared to print articles that criticized the bureaucratic and social system. Chekhov was soon assigned to head Fragments of Moscow Life (Oskolki moskovskoj žizni), a section of the journal which described the many-sided life in Moscow. The young author was to write amusing stories based on true and, for the most part, somber incidents--a task which he came to realize was a difficult and unpleasant one:

> Quite honestly, it is difficult to chase after humour. Sometimes you can turn out stuff that you, yourself, even find nauseating. You cannot help but cross into the sphere of the serious.[7]

Chekhov's views about literature were undoubtedly undergoing a change, for he was no longer satisfied just being a commissioned literary hack.

At the beginning of his writing career, Chekhov, as yet, did not have any firm philosophical views toward life. Although he was not indifferent to the social conditions in Russia,[8] he did not believe in abstract theorizing. However, as the young writer grew more conscientious, he realized that humourous magazines were hardly the appropriate place in which to register a protest. He considered them a by-product of the prevailing social depression and their facetious, flippant style merely an excuse to avoid genuine pressing issues.[9] His boredom

with the Russian comic press and the growing disgust he felt in continuously depicting the prosaic moments of life for purely humourous effects were becoming evident:

> The word "newspaper writer" means at the very least a scoundrel. I am one of them; I work with them: I shake hands with them; I am even told that I have begun to look like one from a distance . . . . But it is only temporary. I shall not die as one . . . . All I get out of my writing is a nervous twitch.[10]

Chekhov's work as a part-time journalist brought him into contact with a number of literary men, mostly elderly people who were not without a deep feeling of dedication to literature. It was their influence that helped the dilettante develop into a serious-minded writer.[11] Worthy of mention is V. V. Bilibin, a humourist-writer of vaudeville skits, who urged Chekhov to master the art of writing. It was in fact Bilibin who suggested numerous reflective topics, including a psychological study of a toddler,[12] for the frustrated author to work on.

Chekhov, in competition with other hack-writers, continued to produce the type of reading material which his editors expected. However, his assertion of personal good taste, together with his scientifically sharpened awareness of the surrounding truth and falsity, accounted for Chekhov's new trend in writing. Although his stories continued to be brief and coolly objective on the surface, they began to reveal the author's underlying concern for the issues depicted.

The appeal of Chekhov's short stories was not only

heightened by the technical superiority. More important than form was the novel realm of life which they dealt with, a feature previously unexplored in literature.[13] The basic principle of Chekhov's artistic work was to try to embrace every aspect of the typical Russian way of life and not to describe selected spheres, as was customary before him. In fact, by writing about a world of routine trifles and occurrences, which would at first glance appear insignificant, the author sought to remove "the differences and contradictions between the social and the personal, the historical and the intimate, the general and the particular, the large and the small - those contradictions with which Russian literature struggled so agonizingly and fruitlessly in search for a renewal of life."[14]

In striving to illuminate the tangled web of actual living and in giving meaning to the ordinary, Chekhov exposed the reality of life. He ceased to approach moral issues negatively and to focus his attention on the villain in his writings. Chekhov began to emphasize a hero, who was distinguished by his uncommon sensitivity to life and by his ability to discern within ordinary phenomena certain values and ideals which would seem meaningless to a prosaic person.[15]

Chekhov's depiction of children was also noticeably affected during this significant turning point in his literary career. Rather than portray the young person exclusively as an

object of bad upbringing and a potential scoundrel, the writer began to expose a fresh, yet untouched by him, aspect of the child's personality.[16] Relying on facts drawn from personal experience as well as the knowledge derived from his medical practice, Chekhov was able to present a most accurate picture of the child and his world.

One critic feels that Chekhov's children are not typical for most of the time they are melancholic, pensive and infrequently mischievous. Furthermore, the young heroes are often placed by Chekhov in tragic social and domestic circumstances.[17] Perhaps the root of the Chekhovian harrassed child can be traced to the writer's unwholesome childhood. However, his young characters can not be stereotyped, for as this chapter will show, their personalities vary according to their age, social class and the situation they appear in. The Chekhovian children have only one common feature--they are all very lifelike.

The Psychological Portrayal of the Child

Whether Chekhov dealt with grownups or children in his writings, his primary aim was to make his characters appear as natural as possible. The realistic portrayal of man could certainly not be achieved by describing his physical actions alone. It was the accurate disclosure of the human psyche that made the hero on paper become one of flesh and blood. Furthermore, the ability of the reader to identify

himself with the ordinary person, as opposed to some unique individual, made for an even more comprehensible character.

Chekhov's objectives in writing about children were varied. A successful feature of his works was the psychological analysis of a young hero and the familiarization of his readers with the thoughts and actions typical of a child in a particular age group. The writer was careful to include such vital information as the character's age, social standing and environment: all of which he felt influenced the child's mental development.

Chekhov's young characters can be divided into the following five age groups: those prior to the preschool group (ages one to three); the preschool group (ages three to seven); the elementary school group (ages seven to eleven); puberty (ages eleven to fourteen) and adolescence (ages fourteen to seventeen).[18]

The story Grisa is the only work about a child in the first age category. Following the suggestion of V. V. Bilibin to write a psychological study of a toddler,[19] Chekhov, within a few pages, gives an amusing, but factual characterization of a two-year-old boy. The writer heightens the realism of his protagonist by allowing the reader to perceive the world through the curious eyes of the impressionable child.

Grisa is introduced as a wholesome little boy, taking his first outdoor walk with his nanny. The only world that he has known till now has been a four-cornered one

consisting of a bed, his nanny's trunk, a chair and an icon lamp. Chekhov describes the toddler's first confrontation with this "big" world and conveys the child's impressions of this new environment by using a technique referred to by the Russian formalists as "ostranenie" (making it strange), a semantic shift transferring a depicted object to a different level of reality.[20] The boy associates all that he sees in the street with what he has known in the past. He notices a "nanny selling oranges" and "two large cats with long snouts, drooping tongues and curled-up tails" running across the boulevard. He has been removed from his familiar world of the nursery and considers the apartment of his nanny's friend with its "dark ceiling, an oven fork with two horns and a stove resembling a big dark bird"[21] strange. Although the child is confused and even frightened by this new experience, he enthusiastically attempts to identify, in his naive subjective terms, all that he perceives.

Chekhov portrays children of preschool age in the story, A Trivial Incident (Sobytie). The characters in this work are a four-year-old girl named Nina, and her six-year-old brother Vanja, both of whom have a broader view of the world than Griša. They can comprehend what the purpose of their father is and are able to distinguish between animals, although they innocently refer to the cat as "having born pups". However, their greater understanding of life and their ability to differentiate between the good and evil also brings them disillusionment.

The lives of the two children take on a new meaning after the kittens are born. Their whole world centers around these newly-arrived animals as they wonder why the kittens are "blind as beggars" and refuse to eat the food which they offer them. Carefully planning their pets' future, they decide that one will remain at home to console its mother, the other will be sent to the country and the third will live in the rat-infested cellar. When the dog, the kittens' appointed "father", devours them, the children's limited conception of life is shattered. They cannot understand the cruel indifference displayed by the dog and wonder how the adults can allow what they consider to be a "heartless and contemptuous "[22] animal to go unpunished.

Because of Chekhov's sympathy for the creative children, he was disgusted with adults who attempted to repress the natural manifestations of the young imagination. Chekhov felt that, though still naive in many ways, children in their closeness to the animal world, appear to have more appreciation for solidarity and life than most mature people.

Most of Chekhov's stories about children include protagonists who are between the ages of seven to eleven. Common to these characters is their desire to penetrate the lives of those they meet daily. By developing a curious-like interest in other people, these children are at the same time expanding their confined world. Their attempts to analyze fellow beings and situations often leads them to what adults consider as illogical conclusions. Nevertheless,

the children's lack of experience in life and limited knowledge of mankind do not stand in the way of their inherent sensitivity to all that is around them and their natural expression of thoughtfulness for others.

An excellent example of a child in this stage of development is found in Chekhov's short take, The Cook's Wedding (Kuxarka ženitsja). The title itself, consisting of the Russian verb ženit'sja (to get married to a female) instead of the appropriate expression vyxodit' zamuž (to get married to a male), reflects the seven-year-old's language well.

The story begins with the hero Griša observing a match-making session through the peephole of the kitchen door. Although no reference to a wedding is made during this time, the intuitive boy concludes that Pelageja the cook is going to marry the coachman. The bewildered child wonders why the cook should wed this "frightening, red-nosed coachman in felt boots", when both his mother and cousin married men "who wear gold chains, good suits and well-polished boots".[23] Having noticed the cook's shyness, fright and reluctance in this strange man's presence, the boy cannot understand why "the nursemaid wants poor Pelageja to marry".[24] Since the family teases the embarrassed cook about her suitor, Griša decides that marriage must be a shameful event. The boy's dream that night about Pelageja's abduction by a sorcerer and witch indicates the great impact

which the cook's situation had on the child. Griša's sorrow and compassion for Pelageja reaches its peak when her husband demands part of his wife's salary the morning after the wedding. Considering the cook as "a victim of human violence",[25] the child attempts to comfort her by giving her the largest apple he has picked.

Chekhov shows that it is characteristic for a child of Griša's age to become emotionally involved in the lives of those people who are close to him. The boy's attempt to analyze the cook's situation is an indication of his developing feeling of responsibility for other people. By diverting his attention to others, he is forced to leave the limited sphere of his personal interests and enter the unknown world of a fellow being. A child's voluntary involvement in the affairs of another person can be considered as an important stepping-stone in his psychological growth.

Children of the elementary school age, appearing in works such as Vanka (Van'ka), In the Home for the Old and the Sick (V prijute dlja prestarelyx i bol'nyx), The Runaway (Beglec), and The Steppe (Step'), have the common experience of confronting a new situation alone. As opposed to Griša, in The Cook's Wedding, who made his discoveries while on familiar grounds, the characters of the aforementioned stories are forced to physically and mentally adapt to new surroundings. Their adjustment to a solitary existence in a strange place is not without mental struggle. Chekhov, who many a time found

himself in a similar predicament, knowingly writes about the child who is removed from the familiar and placed into a frightfully different environment.

In The Runaway, Paška, an illiterate country boy, finds difficulty in adjusting to a strange place. The horror and desperation of his being in a hospital for the first time is intensified by the absence of his mother. The child's reactions however fluctuate. His fear is often counteracted by his astonishment for the unhabitual--from the hospital garb to the musical, whistling-like sound emitted by an old man when he coughs. Furthermore, Paška's recurring reflections on the doctor's promise to take him hunting also helps him endure his temporary home. Before the story ends, the boy has an additional frightful encounter with the unknown--death. It is the presence of the familiar doctor which finally calms the hysterical child.

Another example of a child's confrontation with the unknown is found in one of Chekhov's longest works, The Steppe. This autobiographical story is written as a traditional tale of adventures and observations of a wandering hero.[26] The reader is able to accompany the city boy on his impressive journey and to experience the child's feelings of fascination and confusion for the unusual which he encounters during his trip.

The story is comprised of eight chapters, united by an inner action and a common atmosphere to which the hero

continuously reacts.[27] The youth's sensitive nature is exposed in his encounters with unfamiliar sights, situations and people. His feelings, vacillating from desperation and loneliness, as he loses sight of his hometown, to bewilderment and perplexity, as he perceives the many aspects of the impressive steppe, are also affected by the interplay of the conflicting life and death themes which appear throughout the work.[28] Much of the fascination which the boy experiences is due to his own imaginative distortion of what he sees. For example, he visualizes a bush at night as being a robber crouching by the roadside, or three peasants with pitchforks as giants carrying pikes.

The important theme of the effect of vulgarity and emptiness on certain individuals is presented throughout this work in many poetic variations.[29] Egoruška suggests a sensitive protagonist who is isolated by vulgarity.[30] Those people who surround him are as indifferent to him as they are to the beautiful countryside through which they are travelling. The misunderstood child, who cannot cope with much of life's unpleasantness, often seeks consolation in nature and the steppe, which at times appeared to experience similar feelings of desperation:

> At that time, as Yegorushka looked at the sleeping faces, a quiet singing was unexpectedly heard. Somewhere far off, a woman was humming . . . . The soft, leisurely and plaintiff song, which resembled weeping . . . as if an invisible spirit was floating over the steppe and singing. Yegorushka looked and did not understand where this strange song came from; then, as he listened, it seemed to him that the grass sang it; in its song, half dead,

> already perishing, without words, it sadly and sincerely assured someone that it was in no way guilty, that the sun had burned it up in vain; it affirmed that it wanted terribly to live, that it was still young and would be beautiful, if there were no heat and drought; there was no guilt, but it nevertheless asked somebody's forgiveness and averred that it felt unendurably sick, unhappy and sorry for itself . . . .[31]

Because the story ends inconclusively with the confused hero wondering what life holds for him, it is felt by certain critics that, unlike many other Chekhovian characters who are transformed, or even destroyed by a hostile environment, Egoruška is not noticeably changed by his experience.[32] On the other hand, the critic G. A. Bjalyj explains why he feels that the young protagonist has been affected by his voyage:

> The consciousness of the child, his outlook on life attracts Chekhov as much as the consciousness of people with their direct, poetic and wise "natural" attitudes toward life. All that is minor, unnecessary, insulting to man, to which grownups have grown accustomed, in which they see a form of life and relations between people which they consider normal and inevitable, becomes strange and unnatural to the young person.[33]

Furthermore, it can be argued that the new environment had a definite impact on the boy's mentality, for Chekhov's original plan, as explained in his letter to D. V. Grigorovič, was to end his story with the hero committing suicide in St. Petersburg.[34] This no doubt indicates that the writer wished to reveal the child's negative reaction to his new experiences throughout the journey. Egoruška is not the same child at the end as he was in the beginning. Chekhov,

himself, gives reasons as to why the young person could be driven to self-destruction:

> On the one hand physical weakness, nervousness, early sexual maturity, passionate thirst for life and truth, dreams about activity as broad as the steppe, nervous self-analysis, lack of knowledge and a broad sweep of ideas; on the other hand, a limitless plain, a cruel climate, angry crude people with a heavy and cold history . . . .[35]

In both The Runaway and The Steppe, Chekhov exposes the child's sensitivity to the strange and unhabitual--a curious-life attraction to the novelty he experiences at one point, and an escapist reaction to the unfamiliar he perceives at another. Certainly, these emotional responses, whether they be positive or not, must leave a permanent mark on the mind of the impressionable child.

In the work, Children (Detvora), Chekhov emphasizes the fact that children generally from the ages of eight to ten years begin to show definite individual characteristics.[36] The writer reveals their developing individualization during their participation in a game of lotto.[37] Although the young characters in this short story are of practically the same age, they all reveal distinctive personalities in their reaction to the activity. The game interest Grisa, the oldest and therefore the most intelligent in light of the other children, because of the possible financial gains which it has to offer. Anja considers it important to win because of the

personal satisfaction she would receive. Her younger sister Sonja participates in lotto out of pure enjoyment, as opposed to Aleša who derives pleasure from witnessing the arguments which accompany the game. The cook's son is fascinated by the mathematical and philosophical aspects of the play.

It is evident that all of these children have a common interest. Nevertheless, as Chekhov points out, each of them have different reasons for enjoying the game. The writer shows how a minor activity, such as a game, can bring into the open the subtle distinction of character which begins to surface during this stage of life.

In depicting children in their pubescence, Chekhov exposes one of the most characteristic aspects of their behaviour. It is during these years that the child, in search of his identity, makes his initial attempt to assert himself. A young person's effort to achieve even the slightest amount of recognition usually involves displaying a noticeably abnormal type of behaviour. Chekhov views the child's aberrant inclination, whether it be positive or negative, as a normal phase in his psychological development.[38] The writer describes the various behavioural tendencies an adolescent has, in two of his works--Boys (Mal'čiki) and The Naughty Boy (Zloj mal'čik).

The characters in Boys are two "miniature individuals",[39] who plan a trip to California. Their minds saturated with accounts of world travellers, the boys decide to conquer the

unknown with "a gun, two knives, crackers, a magnifying glass with which to make fire, a compass and four rubles".[40] Chekhov shows that the romantically idealistic awakening in these children is a perfectly healthy and natural phase in their development and considers this "non-malignant disease" of wanting to achieve great feats of courage in faraway places as a positive reaction on their part.[41]

As were the protagonists of Boys, the young character in The Naughty Boy is also in his pubescent stage of life. However, as the title suggests his behavioural inclination is negative, for his method of attaining recognition is malicious.

The story The Naughty Boy revolves around the actions of the young hero, who having accidentally discovered his sister's love affair, decides to blackmail her. He realizes that the couple's relationship is just as dishonourable as is his own behaviour. Nevertheless, his obsession with authority and recognition accounts for his exploitation of the young couple's situation.

It is obvious that the gifts the boy procures in return for his silence are not as rewarding as the attention he gets from his elders, who would normally not bother with him. He derives personal satisfaction solely in being able to completely control a situation involving adults.

In writing about adolescents, Chekhov reveals a behavioural pattern which is usually first apparent during

the teen-age years. It is between the ages of fourteen to seventeen that boys and girls alike first experience a strong emotional feeling for members of the opposite sex. The writer discusses the theme of innocent young love in two of his short stories and shows how the characters cope with this new emotion.

Infatuation and its effects on a young person is presented by Chekhov in the work After the Theatre (Posle teatra). Inspired by Tat'jana's passionate letter to Onegin, Chekhov's sixteen-year-old heroine, Nadja Zelenina, also decides to write to her suitors when she arrives from the opera. Nadja is fascinated by Puskin's heroine and her tragic love affair. The girl's emotional inexperience leads her to believe that reciprocal love is dull and unstimulating. Concluding that a satisfying romantic involvment must be accompanied by suffering, she sets out to convince first an officer and then a student, that their feelings for her are not as strong as those she has for them.

Chekhov gives an entirely different picture of the adolescent and his awareness of the opposite sex in the story Volodja. The protagonist, whose name appears in the title of the work, develops an unreasoning passion for a thirty-year-old woman, who first provokes the innocent boy and then tampers with his feelings.

Volodja, who is said to be "unattractive, unhealthy and timid",[42] has an inferiority complex, which becomes apparent when he is in the woman's presence. Lured by her

sensuality, he becomes more and more attracted to her even though she continuously ridicules him. Although this happens to be the boy's first emotional experience of this kind, he soon begins to realize that his feeling for her seems to be strangely unclean and, therefore, cannot be true love. Nevertheless, this woman remains an important figure in his life as he makes plans to legitimately court her when he becomes a man.

Chekhov shows that Volodja's emotional experience is a normal occurrence in the development of a youth. In contrast with Nadja's strongly romantic inclination, the boy's feeling can best be described as one of lust.[43] Both of these imaginative characters attempt to create a world of idealistic love. However, while the girl continues to live in her world of fantasy, the boy soon decides that his hopes are futile, for his emotional involvement with an older woman is absurd. He even admits to himself at the beginning of the affair that "one does not fall in love with a thirty-year-old married woman".[44] Because he is psychologically unprepared to handle his emotional predicament, the hero commits suicide in the end.

The Child and his Social Position

Chekhov considered the young people of his time as one of the most valuable assets of his country.[45] In view of his idealistic philosophy about the future progress of

Russia, he felt that the child's position in society had to be improved. He was one of the many progressively-minded writers, who appealed to the social conscience for immediate justice for the oppressed child. Many of his stories, imbued with personal emotions and understanding for his characters, are dedicated to exposing the unpleasant truth about the many problems encountered by the child in society.

The theme of child labour exploitation is presented by Chekhov in two moving short stories. Apart from exposing the social practice of physical abuse in Vanka (Van'ka) and Sleepy (Spat' xočetsja), the writer attempts to show the reader the unethical element involved in forcing a young person to take on the responsibility of an adult. Although the child is physically capable of carrying out certain grown-up duties, he often lacks the emotional conditioning necessary to efficiently fulfill the job. The physical strain involved often reduces the child to desperation.

The young protagonists in both of these stories are cruelly exploited children, whose desperation is emphasized by their orphanhood. The absence of a nearby relative makes the harsh reality which they face all the more unbearable. Their search for compassion is futile, for their present world consists solely of cold-hearted, demanding superiors.

The title Vanka refers to the precocious nine-year-old boy, who is apprenticed to a city cobbler. The overworked orphan, driven to despair by hunger and beatings, appeals for

sympathy to the one person he loves in the world--his grandfather. In writing about his unbearable life, the young protagonist, with his childish subjectivity, describes the almost savage-like behaviour of his master. Vanja is beaten with a boot-stretcher when he falls asleep over the cradle, forced to steal pickles when he is sent to the tavern for vodka, and often deprived of food. The boy pleads with his relative to rescue him, for he can no longer endure his present existence, which he claims is worse than that of any dog. Naively addressing the letter to his grandfather in an unnamed village, the child, in hope of soon being saved from his present cruel world, drops it into the mailbox.

Although Vanja is only a child, he recognizes the almost impossible conditions under which he is forced to live. The physical work, combined with emotional strain, slowly destroys the child. He appeals to his grandfather--the only link to a world which he, as a child, idealizes and considers to be responsive. The fact that he sends his appeal without the correct address reveals not only the illusion of a better world, but also the infinite emptiness and cruel reality from which he will never escape.

The situation of the thirteen-year-old heroine of Sleepy is similar to Vanja's. She is also the victim of a heartless craftsman, who exploits child labour to its fullest. However, as opposed to Vanja who still lives in the hope of being rescued from his tragic environment, the girl, dis-

regarding the possibility of a better future, seeks immediate salvation. While rocking the cradle, the exhausted child tries to fight the weariness that is overcoming her. As the physical strain intensifies, the semi-delirious girl decides to destroy the present cause of her torment--the infant, who has "kept her hands and feet in chains"[46] until this point. In strangling her employer's baby, she is only trying to destroy an enemy who is preventing her from sleeping and living. She does not realize, however, that by trying to liberate herself from the forces of a hostile world, she is hopelessly sinking deeper into its savage grip.

The authors of earlier works about child-criminals in Russian literature seldom justified the actions of their young characters. At the most, they wrote with the intention of criticizing young people for their misdemeanor.[47] Sleepy, however, was not only Chekhov's first work of its kind, but also the first Russian children's story of its time to present a young murderer, whose actions were justified by the author.[48] In revealing the character's homicidal tendencies, Chekhov wanted to emphasize the serious situation of the exploited child.

Chekhov sought to improve the position of the impoverished child by exposing this social condition in his works. He especially stressed the apathetic attitude of society toward the hungry and poor in the hope that society would soon realize its blunder and try to rectify the situation.

The narrator of the story Oysters (Ustricy) is an eight-year-old boy. While begging with his father in the

streets, the starving child sees a sign in front of a restaurant and begins to shout "oysters". Amused by the boy's delirious state, some gentlemen offer to buy him a meal of oysters.

Chekhov's aim in this story is twofold. Firstly, he is interested in giving a medically accurate account of the psychological and physical implications of starvation on this afflicted child. The boy himself reveals his phrenetic condition:

> The sound of carriages rose to a thunder; in the smell of the street I could distinguish a thousand smells; and the restaurant lights and street lamps seemd to flash like lightening. And I began to make out things that I could not make out before.[49]

After reading the sign, the boy can think of nothing else but oysters. He imagines them to be something delicious and thinks of how he would eat them:

> And in a wink, I visualized this mysterious animal. I concluded that it must be something between a fish and a crab; and as it can come from the sea, of course it was made up into delightful dishes, hot bouillabaisse with fragrant peppercorns and bay leaves . . . .[50]

And yet, even though the child is overcome by a sudden feeling of repulsion when he is told that this "hideous stuff" or "these creatures, resembling frogs"[51] are eaten alive, the boy, driven by extreme hunger pangs, still attempts to consume what he considers so revolting.

In pointing out the crudeness of those members of society who react indifferently to the social condition of

poverty, Chekhov works in his other aim in writing this story. The gentlemen who offer to buy the boy a meal do not do so out of pity, but strictly out of selfishness--namely, to further amuse themselves by seeking the hungry child's reaction to the dish of oysters. They laugh when the child, who they know is unfamiliar with this seafood, bites into the shell. The writer does not hesitate to emphasize the mocking nature of the spectators and their apathy to the boy's misery. The onlookers' laughs represent the social attitude toward suffering people. Chekhov criticizes those who humiliate others:

> One must not humiliate people--that is the chief thing. It is better to say "My Angel" than to hurl "Fool" at his head, although men are more like fools than angels.[52]

Chekhov's consideration for the social well-being of children is all the more obvious in his longest non-fiction work, entitled The Island of Saxalin (Ostrov Saxalin). In this lengthy sociological study of a penal colony off the coast of Siberia, the author devotes a number of pages to the children of the condemned residing on the island. In view of his objective way of presenting material, the author accurately depicts the social and environmental conditions under which the children are raised and shows how these external factors affect their development.

Because of the existing poverty on the premises, the birth of a child is not a welcome occasion. Furthermore, the parents believe that the child's likelihood of becoming a respectable individual in an atmosphere of vulgarity and

dishonesty is slight. Chekhov questions the child's ability to mature into an ethical person, when he is surrounded by a society which has long forgotten the significance of the word "moral". The author wonders whether an undesired being can develop normally, when with every opportunity his parents curse the day he was born and ask that the good Lord take him away as soon as possible".[53]

The morally deprived children of Saxalin are also affected by the physical environment in which they live. Chekhov describes the children in the following manner:

> . . . pale, thin, listless; they are dressed in rags and are constantly hungry. As the reader will later see, they die almost exclusively from a disease of the digestive canal. Underfed, their nourishment at times for months consists solely of turnips, but even the well-fed . . . the low temperature and humidity kills the young organism . . . .[54]

The author's letter to the lawyer A. F. Koni further reveals the decadent atmosphere in which the Saxalin children find themselves:

> I will attempt to depict the situation of the Saxalin youngsters and adolescents in detail. It is a highly uncommon one. I came across starving children, saw thirteen-year-old "kept women", pregnant fifteen-year-olds. Girls become prostitutes at the age of twelve, and sometimes even before the commencement of menstruation. The church and school exist solely on paper as the children are raised by the environment and the penal conditions . . . .[55]

The Saxalin child, although young in age, is relatively mature from experience. He is aware of the decadence around him. An eleven-year-old boy, for example, realizes that he was born illegitimately and that his mother is now

living with a man other than his father.[56] The callousness which surrounds the child on Saxalin has made him impervious to such occurrences as death. Chekhov writes that: "What appears to be frightening in Russia, the cities and villages, is perfectly common here."[57] Life on Saxalin is the survival of the fittest. In order to survive, the child must be physically and mentally insensitive.

Although the precocious Saxalin child does not represent the normal, innocent young person, Chekhov points out that the children in the penal colony are a good element in an otherwise deprived environment, for they exert a "purifying and uplifting"[58] force on their immediate contacts and mainly on their parents:

> . . . the most helpful, needed and pleasant people on Saxalin--are the children, and even the convicts, themselves realize this and dearly cherish them. They bring into the hardened, morally deprived Saxalin family, elements of tenderness, cleanliness, gentleness and happiness. In spite of their purity, they love their unchaste mother and criminal father the most in the world, and if the kindness of a dog touches the convict who in jail has forgotten what tenderness is, then how invaluable he must consider the love from a child.[59]

In depicting the undernourished and socially abused child, Chekhov attempted to force society to see the surrounding reality of life and recognize the necessity for eventual reformatory measures. "I will, of course, not attempt to solve the problem of the child. I do not know what has to be done."[60] Chekhov wrote to A. F. Koni. The

writer did not offer any solution to the social problems the child faced, for he believed that:

> The artist's business is not to solve narrowly specific problems . . . . The artist observes, selects, guesses, composes--these actions in themselves presuppose a question at their outset; . . . you are confusing two concepts: that of solving a question and that of posing the question correctly. Only the second is the artist's duty.[61]

His main intention at this point was to bring to the attention of the people a social condition for which they were responsible and which only they could change.

The Child in School and at Home

Many of Chekhov's works are studies of the school life of children. The writer realized that the mechanical assimilation of certain rules and standards, habits and ways, could not solely determine the future nature of a young person. The thread of personal fate, tightly interwoven with the threads of environment, heredity[62] and the numerous other "trivial incidents"[63] of life also governed the development of a child. Nevertheless, he considered the instruction, which a young person received both in school and at home, an important factor in the formation of the child's character. His familiarity with the crude, out-dated mode of child-rearing accounted for the realistic portrayals of the contemporary school and family life in his stories.

The importance which was placed on the educational institution by Chekhov is revealed by Father S. Ščukin in

the following passage:

> Chekhov was interested in the school, attended it and always attracted children. He would regularly encounter them on the streets--little ones, laden with masses of books and would strike up conversations with them. And many a time, arriving at school, the children would eagerly boast that Chekhov had spoken to them.[64]

The progressively-minded writer, however, felt that the existing educational system had to be uprooted, in order to free its victims--the young people. His disclosure of the hypocrisy, favouritism and injustice, which undermined the already archaic Russian pedagogical institution, served to expose not only the vices governing the contemporary society, but also the detrimental impact that society had on the growing child.

Chekhov believed that the possibility of a child's growing into a respectable individual also greatly depended on what he was taught at home. The writer considered that it was important to expose the developing child to the moral code of ethics: to teach him to be considerate, condescending, gentle, polite and compliant; to instruct him to read, study and learn incessantly--for all this would eventually mold the child into what Chekhov himself referred to as a "well-bred man".[65] In the preface to his Collected Stories for Children (Sbornik dlja detej), Chekhov with paternal concern for the future happiness of all children as adults wrote the following:

> My dear and good children! Only he who is honest and just is fortunate in this world. Villains and scoundrels cannot be happy, and therefore, you must be honest and just.[66]

i) The Educational System of the Day

Many of Chekhov's works which dealt with the contemporary educational system were directed against the Tolstoj-Deljanov method of schooling,[67] introduced by D. Tolstoj, the Minister of Culture in Russia at that time. The reappearance of this antiquated classical form of teaching burdened the child with the senseless memorization of ancient languages, such as Latin and Greek, as well as of various other subjects which were far too advanced for the young pupil.[68] Chekhov's aim of wiping out the old system was supported by numerous other Russian authors including N. G. Garin-Mixajlovskij, whose principle work, a trilogy entitled Tema's Childhood (Detstvo Temy), Schooldays (Gimnazisty) and Students (Studenty) serves as an attack on the prevailing educational institution.

In addition to attacking Tolstoj's "educational reforms", Chekhov also sought to depreciate S. A. Račinskij's church-affiliated schools,[69] in which the child was smothered with religious teachings.

The practicing followers of these outdated institutions were not spared of Chekhov's critical remarks either. Although the teachers were unfortunate products of the Tolstoj or Račinskij systems, by enforcing the old method of teaching, they were just as responsible for the child's unbearable situation. Belikov, in Chekhov's The Man in a Case (Čelovek v futljare), typifies the narrow-minded teacher who stands in the way of rationality and mainly progress.[70]

Alongside the unfavourable pedagogue, Chekhov also introduces the progressive teacher, who actively participates in the struggle against all that is outmoded in the educational field. Representing The Chekhovian reformatory group is the hero of the work Three Years (Tri Goda), Jarcev,[71] whose interests lie mainly in the potential advancement of Russian social thought through the creation of a progressively-minded generation:

> Do you know that with each day, I become more convinced that we are on the eve of the greatest triumph, and I should like to take part in it. Whether you want to believe it or not, I believe that a remarkable generation is growing up. It gives me great enjoyment to teach the children, particularly the girls. They are wonderful children![72]

The writer devotes much attention to the country (narodnyj) teacher of the small village schools whom he considered as exploited as their pupils.[73] In reference to the village teacher, Chekhov, in a conversation with A. M. Gorkij, said:

> A teacher must be an artist, in love with his calling; but with us he is a journeyman, ill-educated, who goes to the village to teach children as though he were going to exile. He is starved, crushed, terrorized by the fear of losing his daily bread. But he ought to be the first man in the village; the peasants ought to recognize him as a power worthy of attention and respect . . . .[74]

Chekhov recognized the fact that the children were not the only victims of the backward educational system. The writer's query about some schoolteacher who battered his pupils was answered by the frightened pedagogue thus:

> It is true . . . there was such a case . . . . You know, it is not surprising. It is cruel, but explicable. He is married . . . has four children . . . his wife is ill . . . himself consumptive . . . his salary is 20 rubles, the school is like a cellar, and the teacher has but a single room--under such circumstances you will give a thrashing to an angel of God for no reason . . . and the children, they are far from being angels, believe me.[75]

In stories, such as A Classical Student (Slučaj s klassikom), The Tutor (Repetitor) and About the Drama (O drame), Chekhov unveils the morally destructive effect which the classical form of schooling has on children.

The young character in A Classical Student is a victim of the typical classical educational institution. The emaciated, panic-stricken thirteen-year-old boy is seen kissing all the icons and asking for his mother's blessing before going to his Ancient Greek exam. Although he has diligently studied the subject, he is unable to master the language and thus fails. His uncomprehending mother regrets not having beaten him more and beseeches her boarder to give her son a thrashing.

This story reveals the detrimental impact which the existing form of instruction has on children. The boy's aunt remarks that: "School has worn the boy out . . . . He is thin, coughs . . . look at him: he is thirteen-years-old; and yet he looks like a ten-year-old."[76] The writer further attacks the school system by showing that the instruction of certain compulsory subjects, such as the Greek language, is futile,[77] particularly in the lower grades.

An unjust situation, typical of the contemporary educational institution, is also presented by Chekhov in his story The Tutor. Two types of classical students are portrayed in this work--the tutor and his twelve-year-old pupil, who is having difficulty with what Chekhov considers another unnecessary subject, Latin.[78] Although the tutor is not much older nor wiser than his student, he already represents the callous educator which the Tolstoj-Deljanov system produces. However, familiar with the frustrating experience of being an instructor,[79] Chekhov justifies the tutor's indifference to his work: the young student, who teaches in order to put himself through school, receives but a meager salary for his hard work.

The short story On the Drama tells of a student who is punished for failing his Greek examination. The boy intrudes upon a judge and colonel, who are involved in a serious discussion about the arts. After the judge reads the note from the child's mother, he leads the boy into another room and fulfills the parent's request to give her son a beating. The judge, unruffled by what he has done, returns to his friend and continues his conversation with him saying:

> The stage has an educational effect on me . . . . To what else, but art can we be thankful for our great inherent feelings, with which savages are not familiar. Let art and humaneness flourish.[80]

This short story is not only a criticism of the backward educational system with its senseless emphasis on the ancient languages, but also a condemnation of the so-called

liberal-minded individuals. Chekhov ridicules those educated people who profess to admire culture and the liberal arts on the one hand, and turn around and perform an act of human degradation on the other.

Chekhov's hope in depicting the educational conditions predominant in Russia during his time so realistically was that favourable reforms would soon be initiated. He felt that the demanding scholastic regime was destroying the less clever members of the young generation. As seen in Chekhov's works, it was almost impossible for a Russian pupil to excel in his studies. Moreover, it was not uncommon to hear of a physically and mentally exhausted child committing suicide. Chekhov, in fact, predicted this suicidal epidemic in his study of "the man in the case".[81]

The writer not only expressed his interest in improving the educational system by means of his writings, but also actively participated in the struggle for educational reforms by donating money to schools and personally working with the pupils.[82]

ii) Family Upbringing

It is important to note that the interest of Chekhov's young characters is frequently deeply interwoven with that of their parents. The writer deliberately made the adults' influence on the children apparent in order to emphasize the important role which adults play in the lives of their children.[83]

Chekhov was justified in stressing the actions and thoughts of mothers, fathers and nannies since they greatly affected the development of a young person. The child by himself, independent of exterior influences, was a genuine "flower of humanity",[84] distinguished by his innocence and beauty of spirit and mind. It was the child's contact with the adult world which affected his inherent purity and spiritual radiance. Chekhov sorrowfully spoke about the fate of those children who were born into a decadent family in his play, entitled Three Sisters (Tri sestry):

> The just eat, drink, sleep and then die . . . more people are born and also eat, drink, sleep and so as not to grow mad from boredom, they try to make life versatile with their beastly backbiting, vodka, cards and litigation. The wives deceive their husbands, and the husbands lie, and pretend they see nothing, and the evil influence irresistibly oppresses the children and the divine spark in them is extinguished, and they turn into pitiful corpses and resemble one another just as their mother and father . . . .[85]

In discussing the situation of the Russian child at home, Chekhov showed that parents, regardless of their social status and educational background, can be void of those qualities which constitute a good parent.[86]

Belonging to the upper class are those parents portrayed in Grisha and A Trivial Incident. In the first story, the toddler is seen taking his first steps into a new unfamiliar world. The child however is not accompanied by his mother, but by his nanny--a corrupt and insensitive woman. The boy, no doubt, is well cared for at home, for he is

overdressed when he is taken out. His parents, nevertheless, fail to understand that, at this significant moment of his life, the child requires their affection as well as their personal guidance. Although he realizes the function of his mother, the little boy is perplexed by what a "father" is and wonders what this "mysterious personality"[87] represents. The lack of communication between the child and parent becomes even more apparent when the boy tries to convey to his mother his newly acquired impressions. The parent, totally perplexed by the child's attempt to explain his emotions, judges that the boy is ill and consequently sends him to bed after giving him a spoonful of castor oil.

In the story A Trivial Incident, the children attempt to express and share with their parents a new experience in their lives. Once again, the adults are too involved in other affairs to devote any attention to their growing children. And yet, when the children finally discover an amusing diversion--the newly arrived kittens, the parents fail to understand their anxiety and shatter their pleasure.

Chekhov deliberately introduces the birth of the kittens in A Trivial Incident, in order to show that what may appear to be meaningless to adults can be highly significant to children. The writer, furthermore, believes that animals play an important part in the life of a child. Chekhov, who seldom diverts from his position as an objective writer, finds it necessary to emphasize the role of animals in the upbringing of a child. He explains his view in the following way:

> In the upbringing and life of children, domestic animals play a hardly noticeable, but undoubtedly beneficial role . . . . It even seems to me that the patience, faithfulness, forgiveness and sincerity characteristic of our domestic creatures, affect the child's mind far more powerfully and positively than the long notations of a shriveled up and pale Karl Karlovič or even the vague talks of the governess, attempting to convince the youngsters that water consists of oxygen and hydrogen.[88]

Perhaps the best example of excellent communication between an adult, assuming the role of a parent, and children, is found in the story A Day in the Country (Den' za gorodom). The characters are a country shoemaker and two impoverished orphans. Although this adult is uneducated and poor, he is shown to be more responsible and understanding than the parents in Griša and A Trivial Incident. This simple shoemaker, who is also struggling to survive, accepts the parental duty of providing these homeless children with food and shelter. And yet, the meager material assistance given by the stranger is not as cherished by the young protagonists, as is the attention he gives to them. As the day ends, the children, though still cold and hungry, are content, for they have experienced the most essential of all human feelings--affection and understanding:

> The children fell asleep, thinking of the unsheltered shoemaker. But at night, Terentij comes to them, blesses them and places bread under their heads. And this type of love is seen by no one. Only the moon, which floats across the sky and gently peers through the perforated eaves into the abandoned, deserted shed is aware of it.[89]

FOOTNOTES

[1]Hingley, Chekhov - A Biographical and Critical Study, p. 41.

[2]Gillès, op. cit., p. 61.

[3]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 15.

[4]See supra, n.2., p. 30.

[5]Anton Chekov, Letters on the Short Story, the Drama and other Literary Topics, ed. by Louis S. Friedland (London: Minton, Balch & Co., 1924), p. 35.

[6]Manujlova, op. cit., p. 9.

[7]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 23.

[8]Hingley, Chekhov - A Biographical and Critical Study, p. 41.

[9]Ibid. p. 42.

[10]Ibid. p. 40.

[11]J. B. Priestley, International Profiles: Anton Chekhov (New Jersey: A. S. Barnes & Co. Inc., 1970), p. 10.

[12]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., IV, 622.

[13]Boris Eichenbaum, "Chekhov at Large", in Chekhov - A collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Robert Louis Jackson (New Jersey: Prentice - Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 22.

[14]Ibid. p. 24.

[15]Kramer, op. cit., p. 76.

[16]Papernyj, op. cit., p. 56.

[17]Derman, Tvorčeskij portret Čexova, p. 25.

[18]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 186.

[19]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 622.

[20]Hingley, Chekhov - A Biographical and Critical Study, p. 49.

[21]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., IV, 188-9.

[22]Ibid. p. 548.

[23]Ibid. III, 418.

[24]Thomas Winner, Chekhov and his Prose (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), p. 4.

[25]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 421.

[26]Winner, op. cit., p. 4.

[27]Ibid. p. 52.

[28]Ibid. p. 49.

[29]Ibid. p. 47.

[30]Ibid.

[31]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., VI, 28.

[32]Winner, op. cit., p. 53.

[33]G. A. Bjalyj, "A. P. Čexov," in Istorija russkoj literatury, IX (Moskva-Leningrad: Izd. ANSSSR, 1956), p. 366.

[34]Winner, op. cit., p. 53.

[35]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 194.

[36]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 192.

[37]Three of the children portrayed in this story are actually those of V. I. Maevskij, commander of the local battery at Voskresensk. Chekhov met Colonel Maevskij's family while working in a rural hospital at Čikino in the summer before graduating from Medical school. These children, who often accompanied Chekhov on walks and mushroom-picking expeditions, later inspired the writer to write this charming short story. Maevskij's children were also Chekhov's main characters in his play The Three Sisters (Tri sestry) (Simmons, Chekhov - A Biography, p. 58.).

[38]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 203.

[39]Ju. I. Ajxenval'd, "Deti u Čexova," in Siluèty russkix pisatelej, III (Berlin: Nauka, 1923), p. 39.

[40]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., V, 449.

[41]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 203.

[42]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 206.

[43]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 205.

[44]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 207.

[45]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 436.

[46]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., VI, 15.

[47]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 437.

[48]Ibid.

[49]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., II, 434.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid. p. 435.

[52]Simmons, Chekhov - A Biography, p. 193.

[53]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., X, 275.

[54]Ibid. p. 277.

[55]Ibid. XI, 493.

[56]Ibid. X, 277.

[57]Ibid. p. 276

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid. p. 275.

[60]Ibid. XI, 495.

[61]Ibid. p. 287.

[62]Robert Louis Jackson, ed., Chekhov - A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice - Hall, Inc, 1967), p. 10.

[63]This phrase is from Chekhov's story A Trivial Incident (Sobytie), which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

[64]Brusjanin, op. cit., p. 72.

[65]See Chekhov's letter, written in March, 1886 to his brother Nikolaj in A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 81. for a detailed description of what the writer meant by "good breeding".

[66]Brusjanin, op. cit., p. 103.

[67]T. D. Kornejčik, "A. P. Čexov o vospitanii," Sovetskaja pedagogika, V (1954), 86.

[68]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 201.

[69]See supra, n. 11, p. 18.

[70]Kornejčik, loc. cit., p. 86.

[71]Ibid.

[72]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., VII, 483.

[73]Kornejčik, loc. cit., p. 87.

[74]Gorky, et al., op. cit., p. 2.

[75]Ibid. p. 7.

[76]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., II, 111.

[77]Golubkov, op. cit., p. 201.

[78]Ibid.

[79]Ibid. p. 204.

[80]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 418.

[81]Brusjanin, op. cit., p. 73.

[82]Kornejčik, loc. cit., p. 88.

[83]V. Pokrovskij, red., Anton Pavlovič Čexov - Ego žizn' i sočinenija (Moskva: np, 1907), p. 440.

[84]Gorkij refers to children as "cvety zemli" according to Brusjanin, op. cit., p. 63.

[85]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., IX, 395.

[86]Pokrovskij, op. cit., p. 451.

[87]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., IV, 188.

[88]Ibid. p. 544.

[89]Ibid. p. 255.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we have seen the evolution of Chekhov from the time of his first published story, written in his "dilettante" stage, until his mature years when he became a serious professional writer. The late Chekhov, whose works were discussed in Chapter III, reflects more accurately Chekhov the man, who was introduced in Chapter I.

As seen in the many works discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, Chekhov's stories about children exposed the child's psychological development as well as his position in society. The writer, by attempting to objectively portray all that he perceived around him, hoped that he would invoke in the reader the realization that changes in the attitudes of society toward the young person and his social situation were necessary.

However, Chekhov saw literature not only as a vehicle for expressing one's personal views and impressions of the surrounding reality, but in as early as 1879, he also emphasized the educational role of literature. This was expressed in a letter to his younger brother:

> It is good that you are reading books. Get accustomed to reading. With time, you will cherish this habit. You say that Madame Beecher-Stowe has wrung tears from your eyes? I read her once, and six months ago read her

> again with the object of studying her . . . . Read Don Quixote. It is a fine thing. It is by Cervantes, who is said to be almost on a level with Shakespeare. I advise my brothers to read--if they haven't done so already--Turgenev's Hamlet and Don Quixote.[1]

Chekhov believed that reading the proper material would provide the child with a solid foundation, necessary for his healthy development. Yet the writer's own stories for children are free of the moralizing which was so often characteristic of children's literature of that time. Chekhov, whose works had no age barrier, felt that a young person should read what was also appropriate for adults. Although he never exactly explained what type of literature was suitable for both young and old, he felt that reading material, containing straightforward realistic portrayals of life and people, was far more beneficial than works, filled with excessive moralizing on certain issues of personal interest to the author. Children could learn about themselves and others by being exposed to books which presented the real world of both children and adults:

> Children ought to be given what is suitable also for adults. Anderson, The Frigate Pallada, Gogol', are easily read by children and also by grown-up people. Books should not be written for children but one ought to know how to choose from what has been written for adults--that is, from real works of art. To be able to select drugs and to administer them in suitable doses, is more direct and consistent than trying to invent a special remedy for the patient because he is a child. Forgive the medical comparison.[2]

The fact that literature had a great psychological impact on children was emphasized by Chekhov in his story, Boys (Mal'čiki), in which a twelve-year-old devotee of Captain Mayne Reid talks his friend into escaping to California, in order to avoid spending a dull Christmas at home. The writer showed that the characters' natural idealism, heightened by the books they read, was a positive phenomenon in the development of a normal child. However, the information which young readers gathered from literature did not always affect them favourably. Chekhov recalls an incident about children, who having read a popular story about robbers, commit a serious crime. The author conclusively states: ". . . the youngsters are now in prison, but the described incident can once again serve as evidence of the destructive effect books can have on a child's mind . . . ."[3] Because literature had such a great influence on the impressionable mind of a child and could, therefore, affect his behaviour, Chekhov stressed the importance of selecting the right books for a young person.

Chekhov was not satisfied with the quality of the past and contemporary literature for children. In a letter to Rossolimo, who dealt with the publication of children's books, the writer firmly stated: ". . . I do not like the so-called literature for children and do not believe in it."[4] He believed that young people should read works which contained a definite pedagogical element. Literature should introduce the youth to the many sides of reality, rather than bury it-

self in overly romantic, fictional situations. Chekhov criticized the existing literary material, which heavily relied on humourous and nonsensical devices, in his The Flying Islands (Letajuščie ostrova), a parody on the work of Jules Verne.[5] Similarly Chekhov's Soft-Boiled Boots (Sapogi v smjatku) and Hares and Chinamen, a Fable for Children (Zajcy i kitajcy, basnja dlja detej), both written for the Kiselev children, were also meant to ridicule the prevailing children's literature which was distinguished by its sentimentality, falsity and lack of proper grammar.[6]

Although Chekhov did not believe in writing specifically for children, he did attempt to compose two stories in the interest of young people. Nevertheless, both the works, Whitebrow (Belolobyj) and Kaštanka, realistic portrayals of the canine world, have proved to be not only favourites of children, but also popular with adults. This merely substantiates Chekhov's conviction that literature for children did not have to be "childish".

Apart from personally striving to improve the quality of literature for children, Chekhov also encouraged those writers whom he considered to be talented in this field of writing. He not only guided such people as his brother Ivan, who wrote under the pseudonym of Bogemskij, and M. V. Kiseleva in their writing of children's stories, but also regularly advised publishers, such as Rossolimo, on the publication of books for children.

Perhaps the enduring success of the Chekhovian stories about children was best explained by K. Čukovskij, a Soviet children's story writer, on a radio program in 1969:

> It is difficult nowadays even to imagine what Chekhov meant for our generation, for the adolescents of the nineties. Chekhov's books seemed to us to be the only ones to tell the truth about all that was happening in the world around us. You read a Chekhov story or novella and then you glanced out of the window and found youself watching the continuation of what you had just been reading . . . . Such a unity of literature and life I have never yet observed. Even the sky above me was Chekhovian.
> . . . . . .
> Chekhov was for me and my contemporaries the touch-stone for all problems and in his stories and novellas we clearly heard the voice of a guide and teacher.[7]

Čukovskij's words show how well Chekhov succeeded in all his aims in portraying children. He presented such an accurate picture of young people in Russian society at that time, that in reading Chekhov's stories about children, even the next generation was able to recognize his characters as their own reflections.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., XI, 9.

[2]Ibid. XII, 388.

[3]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 434.

[4]A. P. Čexov, op. cit., p. 388.

[5]Babuškina, op. cit., p. 434.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Kornei Chukovsky, "How I Became a Writer," Soviet Literature, VIII (1970), 155.

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