

## **The problem of the "little man" in the works of A.P. Chekhov**

**Abstract:** the article is devoted to the problem of the "little man" in the works of A.P. Chekhov. The article, based on the analysis of several works, shows the life of people who occupy a low social position, their fears and experiences, character traits and external circumstances that do not allow such people to change their lives. Also, special attention is paid to the issue of a person's unwillingness to change his life - he chose this path and fenced himself off from the big world with minor prohibitions and restrictions without the pressure of society.

**Key words:** little man, position in society, representative, officials, approach, victims.

The problem of the "little man" holds one of the central places in Russian literature. Many great writers portrayed minor officials, unremarkable citizens, defenseless against the soulless state machine. A.P. Chekhov also raises the problem started by A.S. Pushkin, but the image of his "little man" is radically different from the view of his predecessors.

For the first time, the image of the "little man" appeared in the literature of the XIX century [Polotskaya 1985: 21]. These weak people depend on circumstances and superiors. Before A.P. Chekhov, A.S. Pushkin, N.V. Gogol and F.M. Dostoevsky raised the problem of the "little man" in their works. However, in Chekhov's works, the image of the little man is noticeably modified. Pathetic, stupid and ridiculous characters who only a negative attitude arises suddenly appear instead of heroes who arouse the reader's sympathy and love. The author literally ridicules them. The emphasis in the works of A.P. Chekhov is not on the sorrows of the lives of little people, but on their vices: cowardice, sycophancy, and narrow-mindedness. The image familiar to the reader in Chekhov's works changes, the previously sympathetic hero becomes a satirical character, an unattractive "small" person, spiritually devastated.

A small person is a person who occupies a low position in society, not distinguished by strength of character, who is afraid of change. The "little man" often appeared in the images of poor officials, reflecting a low social status, poverty and insecurity.

Many scientists have been researching the topic of the "little man". There are several points of view on the origin of the concept of "little man", but everyone agrees that these heroes are, as a rule, "invisible creatures", a kind of "cogs" of a soulless state mechanism, victims of the bureaucratic system and social injustice [Kuznetsova 1978: 75]. They are characterized by shyness and fear of life.

Thus, P. T. Sahakyan wrote: "The tragic image of the "little man" is the image of a person broken by living conditions, socially crushed. Little people are victims of living conditions, having bright sparks of human feelings in their souls, hidden dreams of a better life, but reduced to the position of a slave.

V. M. Markovich said that "little people" are typical representatives of the general mass, people "who can be considered average in any respect, heroic officials, mired in routine", but worthy of a better fate.

A. G. Zeitlin believed that the image of the “little man” arose from the theme of the “poor official”. However, A.P. Kuzicheva refuted this idea in her works on the study of “little people”, stating that a “small person” is not always a “small official”.

For the first time, the image of the “little man” appeared in the work of A.S. Pushkin "The Stationmaster". In The Stationmaster, A. S. Pushkin reveals the image of Vyrin through a family tragedy: an violation of his father's feelings, a struggle to assert the right to a loved one. The sequence of events is associated with drastic changes in the private lives of the characters.

Professor N. Ya. Berkovsky points out that "Pushkin portrays Samson Vyrin with sympathetic implantation into his social personality, with accuracy in everything that notes how he is placed in the official, social world."

Thus, A.S. Pushkin tried to show how external pressures that the characters due to their inherent social “pettiness” are unable to cope with affect the quality of life of the “little man”. He shows that being a "little man" is a natural and inevitable destiny.

In Chekhov's early stories, the theme of the little man gets a new meaning, although the heroes of many of his humorous works, as before in literature, were often small officials. For the writer, a person is small both externally, in terms of his social status, position in society, and internally, due to the scarcity or absence of the spiritual world, emotional experiences. It is much more dangerous and terrible when material and spiritual poverty are combined in the “little man”.

So, in the story “The Death of an Official”, a “little man” appears before readers in the form of an executor Ivan Dmitritch Chervyakov. The little official in the theater sneezed and splashed the civilian general Brizzhalov. Feeling guilty, Chervyakov comes to the general several times to apologize and does not understand why he went unpunished. There are “rules” in his mind that the higher ranks must always follow in relation to the lower ones. He expects oppression, humiliation from a high-ranking person. Nevertheless, the “little man”, who is used to being afraid of everything, does it voluntarily, considering it the norm.

We can also highlight the story "Thick and thin." The author describes the meeting of two friends who studied at the same gymnasium. The characters are sincerely happy to see each other until their social status is known. "Thin" learns that his childhood friend has already reached the rank of privy councilor, despite the fact that he has been serving as a collegiate assessor for the second year: "He served, you know, in the department, and now he has been transferred here by the head of the same department..." The true face of the "little man" appears: his appearance has changed the tone of speech; he begins to fawn in every possible way, suck up, humiliate himself, forgetting that mates have known each other since childhood. But "Thick" did not need the humiliation of a mate. The "little man" in this story, as in the story "The Death of an Official", feels himself only an official of a certain class, ready for self-abasement, and not a man.

Thus, Chekhov's innovative approach is appears in the fact that the author describes the situation of the characters differently, changes their social position or enhances the drama of situations. On the contrary, the heroes in the same circumstances, but behave differently, are guided by low and unworthy motives.

The "little man" in the works of A.P. Chekhov creates such a way of life for himself because of laziness, fear, lack of pride, self-respect. [Zagidullina 2003: 128] He is pathetic, because he does not strive to grow spiritually. The man, without the pressure of society, chose this path and fenced himself off from the big world with petty fears, prohibitions and restrictions.

For example, in the story "The Witch", the sexton Savely Gykin could get a "good job" if he made a little effort and "went to the general's wife." However, "he does not go to the general's wife because he is lazy and afraid of people." This is the tragedy of the "little man": a person is afraid, and above all he is afraid of himself, afraid to get out of his comfort zone [Semanova 1976: 91].

Does not allow sympathy for A.P. Chekhov and the character of the story "The Man Who Lives in a Shell" Belikov. The author showed with contempt the image of the "little man" cut off from the world. The secretive Greek teacher welcomed all restrictions, and he was wary of any manifestation of freedom. The psychological "shell" brought discomfort to his environment, he disgusted most of his colleagues.

Thus, stupidity and routine have become the main components of the life of the "little man". Society was not his enemy. He himself made himself a nonentity, he himself trampled on his best qualities.

A.P. Chekhov understood the definition of "little" as pathetic, lost spirituality, superficial, in contrast to the author of The Stationmaster A.S. Pushkin, whose "little people" were characterized as poor and defenseless [Kataev 1979: 132]. Now the "little man" did not evoke sympathy, but rather blame. Chekhov saw in such people the slaves of the philistine, ridiculed all their actions that prevented them from living honestly and justly. He condemned cowardice, rudeness and indifference. Chekhov noted these properties in the "little people", openly declared them. For the first time in literature, the flaws, ideals and vices of such people were ridiculed. They do not even try to change their lives or learn a lesson from the situation, on the contrary, they suffer all the consequences and then regret what they have done, or do not notice anything and continue not to live, but to exist.

So, the problem of a small person in the work of A.P. Chekhov is solved differently than in the works of his predecessors. If a small person of A.S. Pushkin is helpless, a hostage of his position, then the character of A.P. Chekhov has completely opposite characteristics: he is unpleasant, ridiculous, ashamed of him. "Little Man" in the works of A.P. Chekhov does not seek to grow spiritually, he chooses his own path, on which only fears and limitations await him. Such a person is pathetic and lazy to change anything in his life, he lacks such an

important quality as self-respect. The society is not his enemy, he himself has made himself a nonentity, and he himself has trampled on his best qualities.

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