Plot in Anton Chekov’s five major plays

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Abstract
An overview of the growth of Russian drama is essential to comprehend Anton Chekov as a dramatist. Chekhov’s aim in his plays and short stories is to create a better world which is pure and free from vulgarity the major themes of Chekhov are: love, industry, illusion and reality, dependence of women on men for security, degeneration of aristocracy and the future happiness of mankind. To Chekhov plot is not so important as characterization. Chekhov’s players clearly, reveal his mastery in characterization.

Keywords
Anton Chekov, short stories.

1. Introduction
The principles governing the structure of Chekhov’s plays prove absorbing to discerning scholars. Chekhov’s plays clearly, reveal his mastery in characterization. To Chekhov, plot is not as important as characterization. Chekhov’s technique is subtle, varied, powerful and an innovative. It is made possible by the brilliant use of realism, keen observation, analytical mind, and suggestion of large effects through small details, irony, the chorus, the arrival and departure elements of the characters, music, pauses, stage directions, literary allusions and language.

The present chapter focuses attention on Plot in Chekhov’s major plays. Chekhov’s interest in everyday life is based on the general feeling life, that state of pervasive inner tonicity in which man lives from day to day. His choice of prosaic details was determined not by their ethical and thematic meaning, but by their significance in the general emotional context of life.

The private desires and ambitions of Chekhov’s characters have an extended meaning. They are the vehicles for the inner desire for another, bright existence in which vague, lofty and secret dreams can be realized. The double emotional chord at the end of Chekhov’s plays, sadness about the present and the bright promises of future is the synthesis of that judgment on reality which is realized in the movement of the plays.

Chekhov was immensely influenced by Ibsen in many ways. His plays are divided into four Acts. The structure of a play by Chekhov has no “beginning” and “end”, it is all “middle”. Among the three classical unities, the Unity of Action received the great care for Chekhov.

His plot admirably helps him to develop characterization rather than action. Chekhov did not agree with Aristotle and bestowed greater importance on characterization rather than action. Chekhov did not agree with Aristotle and bestowed great importance on characterization following the Russian tradition.

Chekhov is more concerned with the description of the inner lives of his characters, and hence, he is not interested in presenting an action. His plays appear to be lifeless and static, because most of his characters talk and plan a great deal but they do not seem to act according to their plans.

2. Plot in His Five Major Plays
The plot of Ivanov is basically a simple one. It concentrates on the mentally depressed estate-owner called Ivanov. Ivanov-centres round the hero and his relationship with Anna, his wife. Ivanov’s behavior towards Anna is atrocious and he knows that he is fully responsible for her miserable existence. Ivanov has totally forgotten the noble and loving sour of Anna. Anna is terrified to see the unwarranted vulgar exhibition of Ivanov’s character.
She is at a loss to understand the baseless desperation of her husband. She is ready to be with him always in order to make him cheerful, and she wants him to remain at home. When the cruel Ivanov tells Anna that she cannot live long, the broken-hearted woman is shocked to hear the news of her impending death.

Love appears in a different aspect in the relationship of Ivanov and Sasha. Sasha the other woman. Ivanov visits the Lebedevs’ quite often to enjoy the satisfying company of Sasha, the attractive and intelligent girl. Sasha is so deeply in love with Ivanov that when Ivanov’s character is questioned by others. She immediately defends him from baseless attacks. She worried about his well-being. She is so madly in love with him that she is ready to elope with him to America.

He is unable to relate himself with either of them. It is basically a static situation that gets enlarged as the play proceeds and Ivanov’s character is revealed in all its ramifications, ending in his suicide.

Chekhov’s second play, The Seagull, is the most complicated. It has intricately plotted series of amorous triangles. Treplevecentres round the hero and he receives interesting and affectionate letter signed “Seagull” from Nina. Treplev is deeply in love with Nina Zarechny who agrees to play the leading role in his symbolic play.

Treplev has spoiled the ambitions of Nina to exhibit her talents as an actress. Nina falls prey to Trigorin’s fame as a writer and she encourages Trigorin to have her at any time he chooses. Her freshness of youth attracts Trigorin and he wants to prolong his stay in the countryside in order to enjoy the amorous and blissful company of the innocent and attractive Nina.

Irina who has thoroughly known Trigorin indirectly hints that a girl like Nina cannot give him a life of comfort coupled with fame. He can become a giant in the literary circles with the help of Irina. Trigorin has no will of his own and begs Irina to take him away from the countryside. He cannot forget the vivacious Nina who is ready to sacrifice anything in the world for him.

Irina Arkadina, the famous actress, loves Trigorin and is fond of wearing costly and colourful dresses. She is bent upon removing Trigorin from Nina. Her love for Trigorin makes her neglect the future of her only son, Treplev. She is very much worried about the safety and welfare of her lover, Trigorin. She knows the weakness of Trigorin and succeeds in keeping him under her firm control.

There is no change in Irina when she returns to the estates in the company of her lover, Trigorin. When Nina meets Treplev, he tells her that he is lonely and adds that he has not revived the warmth of anyone’s devotion. Nina has succeeded in overcoming her failures and disappointments with the aid of her industry, confidence, faith and stamina.

Treplev confesses to her that he does not even know what his vocation is. Nina continues to love the treacherous Trigorin. She affectionately embraces Treplev and runs out, and even at this juncture Treplev thinks only about his mother. He destroys all his manuscripts and goes out. Soon after a shot is heard off stage. Dr. Dorn informs Trigorin that Treplev has committed suicide and urges him to get Irina out of that place at once.

Chekhov’s next play Uncle Vanya, so different from, yet so extensively based on his earlier play. The Wood Demon, is a dramatic masterpiece. Vanya, the titular hero of Uncle Vanya is a middle-aged peon who has sacrificed the best part of his life for the welfare of his brother-in-law, Alexander Serebryakov.

Profesor Serebryakov marries a young woman, Helen, and brings her to his estate. When Vanya sees Helen, he falls in love with her at first sight, and remembers with immense pain his wasted youth. The industrious Vanya becomes lazy and strives hard to capture the heart of Helen.

Sonya, the only daughter of Serebryakov by his first wife, is a simple, honest and industrious woman. She knows that she is not beautiful. Dr.Astrov’s frequent visits to hr place kindles love in her heart for the idealist. Dr.Astrov’s company gives her satisfaction and makes her existence purposeful.

Sonya requests Dr.Astrov to up drinking, and she succeeds in eliciting a promise from him that he will not touch liquor. When she comes to know that Dr.Astrov is not in love with her, she takes her disappointment philosophically and returns to hard work to console her broken-heart and make her life meaningful.

Serebryakov accepts Vanya’s apologies and Vanya promises to send the professor a regular amount as in the past. Before Serebryakov leaves, he exhorts the others to work hard. Vanya does not want to see the professor and Helen off as he wants to get down working quickly.

Sonya consoles her depressed uncle. She believes in the mercy of God and she is optimistic that she and Vanya would find peace in the end. Chekhov’s masterpiece, Three Sisters, is an organic whole and is perfect in its conception. The play has a unity between the plot line and the developing characterization. Andrew Prozorov is a promising young scholar who believes that one day he will become a professor at the University of Moscow.

Masha has married the schoolmaster without love and hence her married life is a failure. She is a wonderful pianist, but her talent remains unrecognized. Irina has marvelous thoughts and she can inspire others with her spirited speech. She is not satisfied with her mechanical job at the telegraph office. Her dissatisfied sour yearns to perform great deeds to achieve satisfying results and consolation in her life. Irina receives Olga’s suggestion to marry Tuzenbakh.

She likes Tuzenbakh but she does not love him. She makes up her mind to marry Tuzenbakh and become a teacher. When Olga reveals to Irina the tragic death of Tuzenbakh.

Solyony has challenged Tuzenbakh to a duel. Irina wants to take up the teaching profession like Olga, who has become the headmistress of the school. Irina fears that something awful is going to happen to her.

Andrew’s degeneration is complete as he is forced to push...
the pram for his wife. He thinks about his past ambitions to succeed in life and his present predicament. Vershinin leaves his wife and daughters temporarily under the care of Olga, Natasha succeeds in driving her two unhappy sisters and says that they still have their lives ahead of them. The three sisters remain as helpless and aimless as at the beginning of the play.

Chekhov’s last play, The Cherry Orchard, is a play beautifully balanced between pathos and humour. The plot hinges on the tragic loss of a family estate up an upstart business man. Peter Trofimov has revolutionary ideas and wants to wander in the ideal world without any responsibility. Anya is attracted by the eternal scholar, Trofimov, who has transformed her into a brave girl. Her deep love for Trofimov, enables her to face the new challenges of life.

Trofimov and Anya do not attach importance to animal passion, and the most significant thing is that they do have a perfect understanding of each other. Anya is prepared to follow Trofimov wherever he goes and in his company she is sure that she will enter a brave new world. The other relationship is that of Lopakhin and Varya. Lopakhin is in love with Lyuba’s adopted daughter, Varya. His inferiority complex prevents him from proposing to Varya. He is firm in his belief that she is socially superior to him.

The personal crisis cannot provoke a profound reaction in Lyuba and Gayev, the evicted owners of the estate. Though Chekhov ridicules them, he does not withhold his sympathies for them. The last Act is a comedy of errors. Nothing happens in The Cherry Orchard except that the estate is sold and the former owners leave in a vale of tears.

3. Conclusion

Chekhov concentrated on portraying the most ordinary features of everyday life. To Chekhov, plot is not as important as characterization. Chekhov’s characters are decent sensitive people. They dream of improving their life, but most of them fail and become victims of their own sense of helplessness and uselessness.

Chekhov is more concerned with the description of the inner lives of his characters. He chooses a situation and then develops it concentrically like a series of tangential circles. The private desires and ambitions of Chekhov’s characters have an extended meaning. His plays appear to be lifeless and static, because most of his characters talk and plan a great deal but they do not seem to act according to their plans.

References
