

Anton Chekhov's Principles of the Short Stories

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If ranking be permitted, Anton Chekhov is a brilliant superstar in the realm of short story writing. He is a unique celebrity who brought a new revolution in literary world by presenting a new device and miraculous principles of story writing and left, Tolstoy, Gogoi and Turgenev far behind him. The first thing about the short story which strikes our mind is that it is a story that is short. But since it is also a genre, it must have a definite form and a set of rules to govern it. The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning and the purpose of making statements about the meaning of the story is only to help us to experience that meaning more fully. The novel prize winner describes a short story as 'a world seen in a quick glancing light' but on the other hand, Frank O' Connar says that the short story is the nearest fictional form to lyrical poetry. We may say that a short story is a story that can be easily read at a single sitting. Brevity is the distinctive mark of the short story. The short story is concerned with episodes, and is confined with one person or a small group within limited time and limited activities: There is economy and precision in plot character and setting and it maintains unity of theme or mood. A typical short story contains Introduction, Development, Conflict, Climax and Conclusion.

Anton Chekhov developed a new style by inventing six fundamental principles of a good story. They are (i) absence of lengthy verbiage of a political-social economic nature, (ii) total objectivity, (iii) truthful description of persons and objects, (iv) extreme brevity, (v) audacity and originality and (vi) compassion. Chekhov's stories are generally impartial and neutral. He is all honest about his characters and never tries to make them infinitely evil. He is objective and honest in presenting the personalities of characters. He writes with extreme conciseness and gets straight to the point. He seems to be generous and large hearted enough to excuse all human weaknesses in his stories. It is his short stories that have had the greatest influence on modern writing. From his early comedic sketches to later more mature short stories, no writer gets closer articulating the human condition. Before the beginning 20th century readers expected action, plot twists, high dramas and finally resolution as the very essence of the short stories. Chekhov rejected all of that and wrote about life as it is. The story arises from the characters and their actions rather than having the characters react to a story imposed upon them. This new concept of the short story influenced generations of great writers from Hemingway and Katherine Mansfield to Raymond Carver. Chekhov's literary techniques were explored and employed by the modernists. Almost all good contemporary writers have been under his influence. Chekhov believes that an artist is gifted with the blessing of visualizing not the whole of reality but a very little part of it at a time and his essential response should be to portray rather than expound such minute aspects of reality as he is gifted to see. To the short story writer the approach to truth is accompanied first by the gift of creative vision and secondly by the elimination of any personal importance or any personal interpretation in the portrayal. The particular domain of the short story is unique for it is a flash of insight that leads to a story. Chekhov admits that he is deeply moved by nature, yet there is an inner urge in him that compels him to write about people. The short story writer, like any artist, has to deliver this vision what Joyce calls the moment of 'epiphany' the fleeting spiritual manifestation of life's truth to his audience or readers. But an artist is just a medium through

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which the write, celestial light passes, and in its passage from the divine to the human, it must not be corrupted by any personal hue. It must stand in itself, in complete objectivity, like painting, sculpture or music without any attempt of interpretation. The artist is therefore, required to possess an element of depersonalization, the quality of self-annihilation or self abnegation, the negative capability of Shakespeare to enter truly into the joys and sorrows of other people.

Chekov always emphasized the writer's need for objectivity, the importance of seeing clearly, without judgement. To Chekov authentic writing seeks to depict the World itself, not an interpretation of it. Chekhov's another principle is related to the proximity between the short story and the visual arts and their employment in literature to create a deeper effect. An attractive postoral scene in Chekhov is a beautiful little picture. In Chekhov, we come across 'word pictures' standing like delightful images of light and shade, actions, gestures or landscapes. Chekhov established himself as the pioneer of the plotless story and introduced a lot of technical innovations in the art and craft of writing short stories. The stories of Chekhov ushered in 'an era of plotlessness' in the history of the short story which proved highly congenial to the taste of the exponents of the stream of consciousness technique as a mode of narration.

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