THE QUARREL AS A “LIVING WORD”
IN CHEKHOV’S EARLY SHORT STORIES

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opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of the quarrel in Chekhov’s text has not yet been posed as a separate question, but the discussion is a necessary one, by virtue of contributing to research in the most essential problem of communication and miscommunication in Chekhov’s text in general.

The problem of communication in Chekhov’s text still remains one of the most discussible in literary criticism. There is no univocal point of view, for even the position of the author is arguable: one cannot define whether he is compassionate to his characters (Filosofov, Aihenvald), or simply leaves no hope for them (Mikhailovsky, Shestov). We are leaning towards the opinion of Andrey Stepanov, expressed in his book Problems of Communication in Chekhov’s Text [Проблемы коммуникации у Чехова]. Stepanov recognizes the problem of communication in Chekhovian texts as an all-sufficient one: it does not predetermine the plot of Chekhov’s works, but appears to build or even to replace it.

However, this research in the use of quarrel in Chekhov’s early short stories aims not only to analyze the particularities of the Chekhovian quarrel and its role in communication of characters, but also to contribute to the understanding of development of Chekhov’s short stories in time.

This paper focuses on early Chekhov’s stories written in the period from 1879 to 1886 and argues that the Chekhovian quarrel is a particular type with its functions, uses and role in the development of Chekhov’s texts.
The use of the quarrel in Chekhov’s stories can be explained from various positions depending on the perception of Chekhov by different literary critics.

For example, Robert Hass in his article “Chekhov’s Anger” explains it psychologically. In his opinion, the root of Chekhov’s anger lay mainly in his family background, which Chekhov himself identified as “plebeian”, and those severe ordeals which he had to undergo in order to “squeeze the slave out of himself” (qtd. in Hass 7-8). While projecting his personal experience onto society Chekhov began using his art as a device to explain the problems that exist in personal relations. It is important that Hass identifies anger as one of the most sincere emotions and also an engine of violence in Chekhov’s stories. Because of its sincere, anger frequently leads to the truth. Analysis of Chekhov’s early short stories reveals that quarrels are caused by anger and also serve to reveal the truth about the characters’ relations.

In his article “Creation from the Void” Lev Shestov considers Chekhov’s art through religious lens. In Shestov’s opinion, every story written by Chekhov is rooted in a lie, – because of the author’s faulty perception of reality. In this context the quarrel becomes one of the means for the destruction of people’s dreams and aspirations, a part of the abnormal “hopeless” reality created by Chekhov, as perceived by Shestov. Shestov denies the complete despair of Chekhov’s characters, arguing that every “normal” person would rather try to solve a problem than willfully sink in the depth of hopelessness:

Ведь Чехов надорвавшийся, ненормальный человек. … Нормальный человек, если даже он метафизик самого крайнего, заоблачного толка, всегда пригоняет свои теории к нуждам минуты; он разрушает лишь затем, чтобы потом вновь строить из прежнего материала. Оттого у него никогда не бывает недостатка в материале…. Мысль творить из ничего едва ли даже приходит ему в голову. Чеховские же герои, люди ненормальные par excellence, поставлены в противоестественную, а потому страшную необходимость творить из
ничего. Пред ними всегда безнадёжность, безысходность, абсолютная невозможность какого бы то ни было дела. А меж тем они живут, не умирают (Shestov 197);

But he [Chekhov] is an overstrained, abnormal man. … A normal person, even though he be a metaphysician of the extremest ethereal brand, always adjusts his theories to the requirements of the moment; he destroys only to build up from the old material once more. This is the reason why material never fails him. … The idea of creating out of a void hardly even enters his mind. But Chekhov's heroes, persons abnormal par excellence, are faced with this abnormal and dreadful necessity. Before them always lies hopelessness, helplessness, the utter impossibility of any action whatsoever. And yet they live on, they do not die (Shestov, “Creation from the Void” 28).

Shestov’s position seems to be rather one-sided, because, through exaggerating the atmosphere of despair, he represents Chekhov’s stories as static snapshots. If all of Chekhov’s characters are “overstrained, abnormal” people, then there is no room for their development. In actual fact, most of Chekhov’s stories focus on an important change happening or only starting in a person’s mind, a new question that remains unsolved, but leaves its trace in the reader’s memory.

While Shestov focuses on despair in Chekhov’s stories, another critic, Grigory Byaly, finds some positive traits even in the sense of grief. Byaly believes that Chekhov is concerned with the moral transformation of his characters, but this transformation can be achieved only after undergoing certain ordeals. Byaly writes:

Чехов не отрицает возможности полного и глубокого возрождения человека под влиянием постигшего его несчастья, вплоть до коренного изменения самой его жизни и всего нравственного сущеста, но никогда не скрывает трудности и сложности этого процесса (Byaly 364);

Chekhov does not deny an opportunity of a full and complete revival of a man under the influence of a misfortune, even a fundamental change in his life and all his moral nature, but he never conceals the difficulty and complexity of this process [Trans. E.Z.]
In this case the quarrel becomes a crucial element of moral transformation. For example, in the short story “Difficult People” [“Тяжёлые люди,” 1886], moral transformation begins after a young man, a student, quarrels with his father, who is “a difficult person.” The student then leaves the house for a stroll and analyses their family life. He comes to understanding that everyone in the family, including his poor timid mother and his pale delicate sister, are suffering from the constant quarrels between father and son. After experiencing an initial sense of shame, he returns home and tries to explain to his father – in a manner, close to a quarrel, – how bitter his reproaches are for the other members of the family, who turn out to be innocent victims:

Не проходит обеда и чая, чтобы вы не поднимали шума. Ваш хлеб останавливается у всех поперек горла.... Нет ничего оскорбительнее, унизительнее, как попреки куском хлеба... Вы хоть и отец, но никто, ни бог, ни природа не дали вам права так тяжко оскорблять, унижать, срывать на слабых свое дурное расположение. Вы замучили, обезличили мать, сестра безнадежно забита, а я... (Chekhov5: 328);

Not a dinner or tea passes without you making an uproar. Your bread sticks in our throat… nothing is more bitter, more humiliating, that bread that sticks in one’s throat… Though you are my father, no one, neither God nor nature, has given you the right to insult and humiliate us so horribly, to vent your ill-humor on the weak. You have worn my mother out and made a slave of her, my sister is hopelessly crushed, while I… (Chekhov, *The Wife and Other Stories* 82).

As we can conclude from the above-mentioned critical sources, the quarrel in Chekhovian texts is viewed as an instrument for the realization of the author’s ideas. That is never considered to an independent or a self-sufficient element of the text, but rather an instrument the author uses to reveal problems that exist between his characters, to make their communication more sincere, and, as a possible result, to bring them to a moral transformation.
The importance of the quarrel as a motif and a structural element in Chekhov’s early stories appears unarguable not only in light of the critical observations and the conclusions made in this paper. The unique role of the quarrel as such was initially stated by Chekhov himself. In the short story “June, 29th” [“Двадцать девятое июня,” 1882] Chekhov writes about life in the Russian provinces. All the characters are involved in multiple and ongoing quarrels, and the narrator’s final remark provides an explanation for this state of affairs. Chekhov writes:

Глушь – не столица… В Отлетаевке рак – рыба, Фома – человек и ссора – живое слово (Chekhov 1: 231);

Life in the province is different that life in the capital. In Otletaev’s estate, a frog is like a fish, man is a friend, and a quarrel is a friendly word [in original – “a living word” – E.Z.] (Chekhov, The Complete Early Short Stories 125).

As one can conclude from this quotation, a quarrel is not a mere form of argument, but also the basis of communication in Chekhov’s texts. It is “a living word”, as opposed to silence, which in this case correlates with boredom close to anabiosis and death.

In another story, “A Needless Victory” [“Ненужная победа,” 1882], Chekhov also sees the quarrel as an engine of life and a means of fighting boredom. He puts this conclusion in the mouth of one of his characters, Baron von Zainitz:

“Вам скучно и мне скучно… В ссорах и войнах время быстрее течёт, чем в мирное время” (Chekhov 1: 334);

“You are bored and I am bored… In quarrels and wars time flows faster than in peace-time” [Trans. E.Z.].
The motif of boredom would be revealed more explicitly in Chekhov’s later texts, as, for example, in his play *Three Sisters* [*Три сестры*, 1900], in which one of the sisters, Masha, quotes Gogol:

Маша: У Гоголя сказано: скучно жить на этом свете, господа!
Тузенбах: А я скажу: трудно с вами спорить, господа! Ну вас совсем… (Chekhov 13: 147);

MASHA. As Gogol says, “Ladies and gentlemen, to live in this world is boring.”
TUZENBACH. And I say, ladies and gentlemen – to win an argument with you is impossible [in original – “arguing with you is impossible” – E.Z.]. That’s enough. I give up (Chekhov, *Three Sisters* 31).

Of course, in the text above, the verb Chekhov uses is “спорить,” the root of which, “спор”/“dispute” is distinct from that of “ссора”/“quarrel.” These are two different terms describing different communicative situations; that said, both describe different degrees of conflict in which each side wants to achieve some result through arguing with the other. In Chekhov’s later short stories there are far fewer quarrels and arguments, and this suggests that communication in those texts is much more difficult to build, as characters simply avoid argument altogether, because interacting with others is difficult for all Chekhovian characters in general: “Ну вас совсем…” / “I give up,” as Тузенбах says.

These particular references to the genre of quarrel, especially in the early stories, suggest that Chekhov was using quarrels intentionally, and in doing so emphasizing their importance.

Konstantin Sedov has defined the genre of quarrel in linguistic terms:

Ссора – это речевой жанр, который отражает и оформляет в знаковых (вербальных и невербальных) формах типичные ситуации бытовых социально-психологических конфликтов (Sedov 259);
A quarrel is a genre of speech which reflects and models in sign-oriented forms (verbal and non-verbal) the typical situations of common socio-psychological conflicts [Trans. E.Z.].

In this paper, the genre of quarrel will be defined more precisely. In the literary text each genre of speech is limited temporally and spatially, according to the number of words in which the story is presented and the pace of the storyline’s development. Chekhov is famous for the way in which his stories dispensed with traditional expectation for background and exegesis, thus excluding all the “unnecessary” parts of the text. In a similar fashion only certain elements of the quarrel would contribute to the plot. Chekhov’s precision and economy in details requires a precise definition of quarrel, which should not be confused with other genres of speech, such as a controversy or scolding.

This paper focuses on Chekhovian quarrel as a particular type. The main particularity of Chekhovian quarrel is its function: the Chekhovian quarrel primarily serves the purpose of building up communication among characters. The Chekhovian quarrel is “a living word,” life itself, as opposed to silence and boredom.

This paper defines and analyzes the three main features of the quarrel as they appear in Chekhov’s early texts: 1) that both participants are interested in the quarrel (or at least one is pursuing a certain interest and another one is resisting); 2) the quarrel should involve a dilemma, and in Ckekhov, these are usually irritation, action/lack of action, or not meeting someone’s expectations; 3) the quarrel should have a result: the quarrel stops only if the initial problem is solved (or participants stop communicating).

This paper also defines three main functions of Chekhov’s quarrel, which are: 1) to define the genuine attitudes of the participants towards each other; 2) to build
communication between the characters; and 3) to either come to an agreement or cease communication.

Let us now consider the particularities of the Chekhovian quarrel and its representation in the text through close-readings of several short-stories.

CHAPTER 1

TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE QUARREL IN CHEKHOV’S EARLY SHORT STORIES

Chekhovian quarrels can be divided into two main types according to their participants: 1) family quarrels; and 2) social quarrels, which include quarrels between colleagues and acquaintances. Family quarrels are very frequent in Chekhov’s stories and raise a wide range of problems that also exist in society; however, personal relationships remain their main focus. The family quarrels in Chekhov’s stories can be divided into three main types: 1) pre-marriage quarrels (“Which of the Three?”[“Который из трёх?”, 1882], “The Date Happened, But…”[“Свидание хотя и состоялось, но,” 1882], “A Rotten Case” [“Пропащее дело,” 1882]); 2) quarrels between spouses (“Artists’ Wives”[“Жёны артистов,” 1880], “Father and Mother” [“Папаша и мамаша,” 1880]); and 3) quarrels between relatives including quarrels between parents and children (“The Lady of the Manor”[“Барыня,” 1882], “A Trial”[“Суд,” 1881], “Peasant Women” [“Бабы,” 1891]).

The Family Quarrel

Pre-Marriage Quarrels

In chronological order, we begin our analysis with the so-called pre-marriage quarrels.
The short story “Which of the Three?” [“Который из трёх?”, 1882] is about a young woman who is having three love affairs at the same time. The young beauty Nadya is choosing among 1) the merchant Ivan Gavrilovich who is older and does not belong to a noble family, but is rich and is willing to marry her, 2) an ethnic German baron named Shtral, whose mistress she used to be and who is not going to marry her; and, 3) a pure-hearted and inexperienced young man, the musician Mitya Gusev, who is fairly attracted to her and seems to be the most physically attractive among her suitors, but is still too young for her tastes. The story revolves around three conversations that Nadya has with her admirers. The first one includes the proposal of the merchant Ivan Gavrilovich and his confession of love. Nadya responds that she also loves the merchant, but she hesitates answering his proposal, and from the following passage the reader can conclude that Nadya’s love is a lie. Chekhov uses additional signals to demonstrate the lie before it is revealed. For example, the narrator compares the whole scene of the proposal to a dream, a false reality.

— Сделайте милость, Надежда Петровна, — проговорил он, — не терзайте мою душу... Ведь я, ежели лезу к вам, то от любви... Потому... (Пауза.) Ежели... (Пауза.) Ежели вы не ответите мне, то хоть умирай.

Надя повернула свое лицо к Ивану Гавриловичу и улыбнулась... Она протянула ему свою руку и заговорила голосом, который прозвучал в ушах московского коммерсанта песнью сирены: — Очень вам благодарна, Иван Гаврилович... Я уже давно знаю, что вы меня любите, и знаю, как вы любите... Но я... я... Я вас тоже люблю, Жан... Вас нельзя не полюбить за ваше доброе сердце, за вашу преданность...

Иван Гаврилович раскрыл широко рот, засмеялся и, счастливый, провел себя ладонью по лицу: не сон ли, мол?(Chekhov 1: 233-4);

Please do me a favor, Nadezhda Petrovna and do not torture me. Because I, if I come to you, and do this because of love. (A pause). If you do not answer me, I think that I would die.
Nadia turned her face to Ivan Gavrilovich and smiled. She moved her hand [in original: “she extended her hand to him” – E.Z.] and spoke to him in a voice that sounded to the ears of the Moscow tradesman like a siren’s song.

“I am very grateful to you, dear Ivan Gavrilovich. I know for a long time that you love me. But I – I love you too, Jean. I can’t stop loving you for your kind heart, for your true love.”

Ivan Gavrilovich widely opened his mouth and, filled with happiness, rubbed his face with his palm. Is it a dream or what? [sic!](Chekhov, The Complete Early Short Stories 126-7).

It is also interesting that it is Nadya who leads the conversation and describes the feelings of her admirer. For while he says that he is doing everything “because of love” [“out of love” – E.Z.], it is in fact she who trice repeats the formula that includes the verb “to love”: “вы меня любите” / “you love me”; “знаю, как вы любите” / “I know how you love me”; “я вас тоже люблю” / “I also love you”. Verbs express actions, and it is Nadya who takes the lead in this passage. She leads her admirer thorough the stereotypical expectations of a love affair with a happy ending. And because her lie does not fail, the love affair continues and the quarrel is averted.

The quarrel happens only in the second conversation, the one between Nadya and Baron Shtral. Nadya claims that the Baron should continue their relationship with marriage while Shtral wants to end their relationship completely. This conflict of interest provokes the quarrel, but the quarrel itself demonstrates the real state of affairs between them. At first Nadya confesses her love to the German baron, but when he refuses to marry her, she reveals her true attitude:

Мошенник! Немчура! Я тебя терпеть не могу, ненавижу, презираю! Ты гадок! Я тебя и не любила никогда! Если я в тот вечер и поддалась тебе, то только потому, что считала тебя честным человеком, думала, что ты женишься на мне... Я тебя и тогда терпеть не могла! Хотела выйти за тебя, потому что ты барон и богач!(Chekhov 1: 236);
Scoundrel, that’s who you are, you are a rip-off, you are a dirty German. I hate you! I despise you and I don’t want to see you. You are disgusting, and I have never loved you! On that evening I surrendered to you only because I thought that you were an honest man and that you were going to marry me. But I never loved you! I wanted to marry you only because you are a baron and a rich man (Chekhov, *The Complete Early Short Stories* 131).

As one can conclude from this quotation, Nadya’s true attitude was revealed in an attempt to start a quarrel. However, this quarrel, while revealing the truth, serves not to build communication, but to stop it.

The proof that the attitude expressed in Nadya’s final words to the German is her real one can be found in her thoughts as narrated in the following passage, which also suggests that the quarrel is logically rooted in Nadya’s unfulfilled expectations:

Напрасно я ходила сейчас к нему, — думала она, идя домой. — Ведь знала же я, что он не захочет жениться? Вот негодяй! Дура была я в тот вечер! Не поддайся я ему тогда, теперь бы не было надобности унижаться перед этой . . . немчурой (Chekhov 1: 236);

“I went to see him in vain,” she thought going home, “because I knew that he was not going to marry me! I am such a stupid woman. If I had never surrendered to him, I would not be humiliated by this dirty German” (Chekhov, *The Complete Early Short Stories* 131).

Nadya’s conversation with the young musician, the third conversation and final in the text also fails to provoke a quarrel. But in this case the reason is different: Nadya wants to cut off communication with him, and the end of communication in the Chekhovian text usually is the end of the necessity of quarreling. Quarrels in Chekhov’s stories serve to reveal the truth, while Nadya’s confession about her real nature [“Я гадкая, противная, нежорошая” (Chekhov 1: 237) / “I am a terrible, disgusting, bad woman” (Chekhov, *The Complete Early Short Stories* 132)] in her conversation with the young musician is already the truth, which does not need to be refuted.
“Which of the three?” resembles Chekhov’s later stories, because this text already subtly reveals psychological patterns in Nadya’s reflection on the conversations and in author’s remarks. However, even in the comic stories based on anecdotes, which were common for early Chekhov, the quarrel will follow the same rules of development. Comic pre-marriage quarrels in Chekhovian texts use various stereotypical models of behavior. For example, in the short story “The Date Happened, But…” [“Свидание хотя и состоялось, но…,” 1882] the quarrel happens because the young man comes to a date intoxicated, – and his female companion sees and hears him as absolutely different from her expectations. She does not recognize his behavior as genuine or appropriate, which is why she protests against it in a quarrel. Her exclamations in the following passage tell us more about her astonishment than mere irritation. Here is what she says to the young man:

— Мер-р-зкий!! — проворчала она. — Негодный! Так вот ты какой? Так на же, вот тебе! На тебе! На тебе!
И Соня своей маленькой ручкой раз пять коснулась до затылка Гвоздикова, и как коснулась! Ноги ее заходили по его шляпе. Мстительны женщины! (Chekhov 1: 178);

“You’re a rotten scoundrel, nasty! [in the original text there is one more sentence: “So, that is what you are?” – E. Z.]. Take this, and this!” – and Sonya flicked the back of the Gvozdikov’s head several times [the original continues as “and how she flicked it!” – E.Z.] Then she threw his hat on the ground and stamped it. Women are so vengeful! (Chekhov, The Complete Early Short Stories 89).

If Gvozdikov had not been intoxicated and could hear and comprehend Sonya, he would most likely object to her conclusion, but the beer he has consumed creates a situation of miscommunication, which is why the end of the quarrel also brings the relationship to the end.
As we can see, different short stories use different formulaic models and even anecdotes. However, all of the stories are united by one of the main functions of the Chekhovian quarrel, which is the revelation of truth: Sonya learns the truth about her fiancé, and the reader learns the truth about Nadya.

The particularity of the pre-marriage quarrels lies in the relations between their participants. Pre-marriage quarrels can be classified as a subtype of family quarrels because of the concerns that they are based on. The characters of the pre-marriage quarrels are especially attentive to each other, because after the marriage their interaction will stop being an act of free will, instead it will turn into an obligation. Thus it is very important for the participants to get to know each other in advance and to define each other’s interests. Pre-marriage quarrels build a transition from the social level of relationships to a more personal one.

Quarrels between Spouses

The most common type of family quarrel in Chekhov’s stories is the quarrel between spouses. One of the most remarkable examples is the short story “Artists’ Wives” [“Жёны артистов,” 1880]. This story brings the quarrel to a new level and depicts it not as a part of the communicative act, but rather, as a lifestyle, and thus the manner and essence of communication itself. This story is considered a parody of Alphonse Daudet and describes the relationships of several artists living in Lisbon with their wives. A genre of parody was rather common for early Chekhov: he parodied Victor Hugo (“One Thousand and One Passion, or A Night of Horror” [“Тысяча и одна страсть, или Страшная ночь,” 1880]), Jules Verne (“The Flying Islands” [“Летающие острова,” 1883]). In “Artists’ Wives” Chekhov parodies Daudet in the figure of Alfonso
Zinzaga, a young writer who creates very long novels about the complex and mysterious adventures of his literary doubles all over the world. Zinzaga’s novels incorporate broad historical background and try to involve as many social and political concerns, as possible. However, Chekhov uses Daudet’s image only as a canvas, while the main purpose of the story is to represent the hard and, at the same time, ridiculously miserable, life of young artists, writers, singers and other people who dared earn their living by means of art.

Chekhov uses hyperboles and generalizations in this text; more importantly, he places all of his characters in equal conditions – in the tiny rooms of a hotel with the strange name – “The Venomous Swan” [“Ядовитый лебедь”]. All these features together form a typical image of the family of the artist, as well as a typical image of the quarrel as the main form of social interaction. Everything described in the text is brought to the highest degree of development. Hyperbole and the grotesque serve as the first markers of the coming quarrel, because all of the hyperbole describes lifestyles based on constant and ongoing lies. The first sentence describes the main character of the story, the semi-“most famous” Portuguese writer Alfonso Zinzaga:

Свободнейший гражданин столичного города Лиссабона, Альфонсо Зинзага, молодой романист, столь известный… только самому себе и подающий великие надежды… тоже самому себе, утомлённый целодневным хождением по бульварам и редакциям и голодный, как самая голодная собака, пришёл к себе домой (Chekhov 1: 53);

The most independent citizen of the capital city of Lisbon, Alphonso Zinzaga, a young novelist, so well-known… to himself only and showing great promise… also to himself, fatigued by all-day wandering around the boulevards and editorial offices, and hungry as the hungriest of dogs, arrived home [Trans. E.Z.]
The use of grotesque expressed in multiple superlatives helps to represent the conflicts, which lie in the basis of several quarrels in this text. As well as grotesque description of the characters and their life, all the quarrels are based on exaggerations of real state of events in the story. The first quarrel begins when Alfonso comes home and sees his wife asleep with one of his novels in her hands. He assumes that she has fallen asleep because the book is boring. This is the truth that he does not want to recognize. The image of his life is built around the cliché that he is a genius and his wife is his devoted servant and admirer, but the fact that she fell asleep reading his novel proves that he is not a genius, and thus the model no longer works. Alfonso uses the quarrel in order to find another way to continue communication with his wife or to end it entirely. When his wife, Amaranta, claims that she only fell asleep because she hadn’t slept the previous night he calms down, because the previous model by which the spouses can coexist is restored. In actual fact, the lives of all families in the strange place “The Venomous Swan” are based not on true communication; instead, they are based on stereotypical relationships such as “artist and his muse” or “artist and his admirer,” which only encourages miscommunication among the artists and their wives. They act by the behavior rules set by these scenarios without truly understanding each other, and this miscommunication ensures their coexistence. Every artist in this short story quarrels with his wife because she does not recognize him as a genius, but in reality all the artists living in “Venomous Swan” are mediocrities.

The truth comes out in the final quarrel when Amaranta accidentally mistakes her husband’s novel for someone else’s novel and calls it “the silliest one”. Egoism, one of
the main themes of the story, comes out in Alfonso’s monologue, overfilled with cursing addressed to Amaranta:

“Значит, это мой роман глупейший, мой? – крикнул он так громко, что даже у Амаранты заболело горло. – Ах, ты, безмозгая утка! Так-то вы, сударыня, смотрите на мои произведения? Так-то, ослица? Проговорились? Больше меня уж вы не увидите! Прощайте! Гм… бrrр… идиотка! Мой роман глупейший?! Граф Барабанта-Алимонда знал, что издавал!” (Chekhov 1: 62);

“So, it is my novel that’s the silliest, mine?” he shouted so loudly that Amaranta even felt pain in her throat. “Ah, you, brainless duck! So, is that how you, madam, view my writings? Is that so, you she-ass? You misspoke? No, madam, you will not see me again! Fare thee well! Hmm… grrrr… idiot! My novel is the silliest? Count Barabanta-Alimonda knew what he was publishing!” [Trans. E.Z.].

It is remarkable that the artist is trying to assert his worth by noting the opinion of his patron, Count Barabanta-Alimonda. This patron also sponsors all the other artists, singers and writers who live in “The Venomous Swan”; thus the Count’s bad taste forms the basis of all the lies that are performed in that remarkable hotel. The proof that all the miscommunication between artists and their wives is based on lies we can find in the thoughts of the main character. When Zinzaga comes back home he talks to his wife, reviving their model of miscommunication. He claims that he needs Amaranta’s help because the majority of his readers were women. The author’s remark reveals the true state of events in the next lines:

The following author’s remark reveals the true state of events. Zinzaga has only one reader, and he is ready to lie to restore his interaction with Amaranta:

Зинзага немножко солгал. Не большинство, а всех его читателей составляла одна только женщина, потому что Амаранта была не “женщины”, а только всего “женщина” (Chekhov1: 65).
Zinzaga lied a bit. Not the majority, but all his readers consisted of only one woman, because Amaranta was not “women”, but only a “woman” [Trans. E.Z.].

Chekhov’s quarrel between spouses is a situation in which the connection between the participants is the strongest. Thus this type of quarrel is the most productive and brings different results: from arguments and accusations to the need for a final compromise. This last one, compromise, is seen in the mutual agreement between Amaranta and Zinzaga to continue to follow their habitual communicative clichés in order to stay together. It is also important that the quarrel between spouses at its final stage will be limited in most cases to a quarrel between two people, even if other relatives are involved, as we see in the story “The Lady of the Manor” [“Барыня”].

Quarrels between Relatives

Some of the most remarkable and serious quarrels between close relatives can be found in Chekhov’s short story “The Lady of the Manor” [“Барыня,” 1882], which stands out among the early stories because its tragic content lacks the veil of irony or grotesque common in early Chekhov’s stories. In this story one can see the roots of the later Chekhov’s concern for the influence of the trivia on life, the preoccupation with material values leading to indifference in relationships, and thus, to miscommunication in general.

“The Lady of the Manor” describes the rather common story of a landowner, Elena Egorovna Strelkova. After having committing adultery on the 20th day after her wedding and getting divorced, she begins using her male servants as lovers. While her manager, Feliks Adamovich Rzhevetsky, remains constant in that position, she frequently hires men from peasant families, who are formally designated as her coachmen, but in
actual fact fulfill other duties. One of these families is the family of Maxim Zhurkin. Elena Egorovna has chosen one of his sons, Stepan, to be a coachman, but as a pure-hearted person with higher morals, Stepan does not want to leave his young wife to commit the grave sin of adultery with the landowner. However, unable to refuse directly, he hides in his father’s house and relies on the support of his relatives. However, the post of the landowner’s coachman is very profitable for the whole family, and thus everyone (with the exception of Stepan’s wife) forces him to serve. Beaten by his father, Stepan finally agrees and goes to the landowner’s house, but he secretly makes an agreement with Strelkova that his relatives will not profit from his new post. In response, Stepan’s family kicks his pregnant wife out of the house. One day while, heavily intoxicated and irritated by the teasing and scolding of others, Stepan finds her in the street and accidentally kills her during a quarrel. For Mar’ya, Stepan’s wife, is unaware of all the complexity of the situation and thus blames her husband for all her grief and miseries; in response, Stepan takes out on her the anger he feels over the whole situation.

The development of the story is thus based on several quarrels which serve multiple purposes: 1) to reveal a lie; 2) to build up or force someone into communication; 3) to end communication which has become too complicated to handle. In this story, the quarrel not only transcends boredom, but leads to a kind of tragedy which became common in Chekhov’s later stories.

The story starts with a communicative situation based on lies and clichés: “the lady of the manor” arrives at Zhurkin’s house and demands Stepan return to his responsibilities as coachman:

“Ужасно некрасиво с его стороны! Он оставил меня без кучера! По его милости Феликсу Адамовичу приходится самому запрягать
лошадей и править. Ужасно глупо! Вы поймите, что это, наконец, глупо! Жалованья ему показалось мало, что ли?”(Chekhov 1: 253);

“It is terribly graceless on his part! He left me without a coachman! Thanks to him Feliks Adamovich himself has to harness the horse and drive. This is terribly silly! You should understand that it is, after all, silly! Did the recompense seem insufficient or something?” [Trans. E.Z.].

In the previously mentioned “Artists’ Wives” clichés of social behavior serves to maintain communication on a level appropriate for the co-existence of the characters. However, the true attitude of the spouses is only revealed in quarrels. In this story Chekhov goes further and adds to the traditional clichés of social behavior elements of euphemism. In this case euphemism is not a separate word or set of words, but the whole position offered Stepan. At first people do not dare name the real responsibilities of the coachman’s post, so even Stepan’s father talks about common minor duties:

— Коли идти, так идти завтра, да пораньше. Небось лошади не чищены. Да не забудь, что пятнадцать обещала. За десять не иди (Chekhov 1: 259);

“If you go, you should go tomorrow, and better early. I bet the horses have not been brushed. And don’t forget that she promised fifteen rubles. Don’t go for ten” [Trans. E.Z.].

It is especially interesting that while in “Artists’ Wives” the male spouses seem to be at least sometimes sincere in their perception of themselves as geniuses, and only the female spouses see and conceal the truth from them, in “The Lady of the Manor” the specifics of the conflict lie on the surface, and neither euphemisms nor social clichés can conceal it. Alfonso Zinzaga is sincere in his delusions that he is a talented artist, “столь известный … самому себе …и подающий великие надежды… тоже самому себе(Chekhov 1: 53)/ “well-known… to himself only and showing great promise… also to himself” [Trans. E.Z.]. Everyone in “The Lady of the Manor” is already aware of the
truth – it does not need to be revealed – and this is what propels the major quarrel to the end of the story. Instead of building up communication (or miscommunication based on clichés), or revealing some simple basic truth, the quarrel in “The Lady of the Manor” brings truth to a higher level. The idea of truth is no longer connected with the communicative act; it is much broader and touches on existential problems and issues of self-perception and worldview. Through the several quarrels that take place in this story Stepan and his relatives do not only perceive each other’s communicative intentions (they are clear from the very beginning), but also come to an understanding of each other’s nature. It is important, that full understanding (together with irritation, bitterness and late repentance) comes only to Stepan: he is the one who resists committing the covert sin, and it is his resistance that is the source of all the quarrels in the story.

The revelation of truth in Chekhov’s stories is often connected with the effect of surprise. Sometimes the characters themselves are surprised. For example, Alfonso Zinzaga is surprised by his wife’s evaluation of his novel; while both characters of “The Date Happened, But…” are surprised by each other’s behavior. In other instances, characters’ behavior is surprising to the reader. In most literary works, characters are generally divided into positive and negative ones; however, even in the 19th century that division was not that sharp. The division of characters in Chekhov’s story “The Lady of the Manor” lies on the surface and is drawn along an axis of moral values (or lack thereof): Stepan and his wife Mar’ya oppose the wishes of their greedy relatives. The effect of surprise is created when Chekhov, while stating his attitudes rather clearly, starts assigning minor bad details to Stepan’s behavior and minor positive details to the behavior of his brother and father. But first impression created by the appearance of the
characters adheres to the literary tradition. For example, as a positive character, Stepan is more handsome than his brother:

Против них сидел старший сын Максима — Семен, временноотпускной, с красным испитым лицом, длинным рябым носом и маслеными глазками. Семен был похож лицом на отца, он не был только сед, лыс и не имел таких хитрых, цыганских глаз, какими обладал его отец. Рядом с Семеном сидел второй сын Максима, Степан. Степан не ел, а, подперши кулаком свою красивую белокурую голову, смотрел на закопчённый потолок и о чём-то усердно мыслил (Chekhov 1: 255);

Opposite them sat Maksim’s elder son, Semyon, a soldier temporarily on leave with a read scrofulous face, a long spotted nose and little eyes. Semyon resembled his father, he was not only gray, bald but he didn’t have the same cunning gypsy eyes which his father had. Next to Semyon sat Stepan, Maksim’s second son. Stepan was not eating, but supporting his beautiful fair head with his fist, he was looking at the sooty ceiling and eagerly thinking about something [Trans. E.Z.].

Stepan also has higher morals, which is directly expressed in the conversation between the two brothers. He is the one who rejects his brother’s attempts to tempt him describing Strelkova’s attractive appearance and insists that intercourse with her will be a sin:

Семен помолчал немного и продолжал:
— И красивая она. Со старухой связаться беда, а с этой — счастье!
(Семен сплюнул и помолчал.) Огонь баба! Огненный огонь! Шея у ней славная, пухлая такая...
— Грё-эх? Откудова грех? Бедному человеку ничего не грех
(Chekhov 1: 258);

Semyon was silent for a moment, then continued:
“And she’s beautiful. It’s a disaster to get involved with an old woman, but with this one – that’s luck” (Semyon spat and was silent). “What a fiery woman! A fiery fire! She has a nice neck, such a plump one”…
“But what if it’s a sin for the soul?”
“A si-in? Why is it a sin? Nothing is a sin for a poor man” [Trans. E.Z.].
However, Chekhov uses minor details to create a sense of unexpectedness in the actions of each character. For example, Chekhov endows Stepan with brutality as the reverse side of his frankness and simplicity. It is obvious that such a trait is common for men of his environment, but it is also curious that it is Stepan whom Chekhov describes as the one who always instigates acts of physical violence. From the very beginning of the story, one can find a relatively slight form of physical offence towards Stepan’s wife, Mar’ya:

Степан нагнулся к Марье и слегка ударил ее по локтю.
— Ну чего? Замолчи! Тебе говорят! Э-э-э... сволочь! (Chekhov1: 256);

Stepan bent down to Mar’ya and lightly hit her on her elbow.
- So what? Shut up! I’m talking to you! Ehhh… scum! [Trans. E.Z.].

While Stepan demonstrates some of the traits of a villain, such as rough behavior and intemperance that can turn into cruelty, his more corrupt relatives are often described as decent people in normal situations. This sense of normality is created by putting them into relatively innocent situations and common domestic settings:

– Мерси за ужин, господа почтенные! Теперь бы винца выпить, чтоб прекрасные сны снислись! У барыни твоей, должно полагать, вина того тьма-тьмащая! Пей — не хочу! [Semyon’s words];

… Помолчав немного, Семен сел поудобней, закурил маленькую трубочку и заговорил: — Был сегодня у Трофима... Пиво пил. Три бутылки выпил. Хочешь покурить, Степа? (Chekhov 1: 257);

“Merci for the dinner, honorable people! I wish I could drink some wine now in order to see beautiful dreams! Your landlady, I believe, has tons of that wine! Drink to your full content!” [Semyon’s words]

…Having fallen silent a bit, Semyon seated himself a little more comfortably, lit his little pipe and began talking: “I was at Trofim’s today... I was drinking beer. I drank three bottles. Do you want to smoke, Styopa? [“Styopa” is a diminutive of “Stepan” close in meaning to “dear Stepan” – E.Z.]” [Trans. E.Z.].
In the passages, quoted above, Chekhov assigns Semyon minor habits which are hard to call positive, but which are quite common and human and thus unite him with other characters. He likes to drink and smoke, but it seems like he never goes too far. One can hear Anacreontic notes in his idle talk about wine, tobacco, tea and women’s physical beauty. For like the ancient Greek poet Anacreon, Semyon seems to be an innocuous admirer of mundane pleasures. These predilections can be judged ambiguously, depending on the author’s word choice. Here Chekhov’s word choice makes Semyon sympathetic; rather than immoral! This effect is created by various means. For example, it is created by usage of diminutives: “Семён сел поудобней, закурил маленькую трубочку и заговорил” (Chekhov 1: 257)/ “Semyon seated himself a little more comfortably, lit his little pipe and began talking” [Trans. E.Z.].

Semyon’s manner of speaking, in a humorous way, also plays an important role. Unlike his brother, he is much more patient and cool-headed, talks about everything in an easy manner and so honestly that one can even stop paying attention to the subject of his speech. Even scolding and words that are usually considered offensive language sound positive because of his tone:

— Да какой тут грех? Ведь не ты к ней, а она к тебе! Пугало ты!
… — Ты не украдешь, а она сама, собственной ручкой тебе даст. Да что с тобой, дураком, толковать! Как об стену горохом… Мантифолию на уксусе разводить с тобой только (Chekhov1: 258);

“Why is it a sin? It’s not you, she’s the one who started it! Oh you scarecrow!”
… “You will not steal anything, she herself will give it to you with her little hand. But why am I talking to you, a fool! It’s like talking to a brick wall… Too much cry and little wool, that’s all…” [Trans. E.Z.].

All these traits tend to form a more positive and amiable image of Semyon, who in actual fact is deeply morally degraded. On the surface he is reminiscent of a character
from the Russian folk tale, the friendly joker who tells funny stories for adults, a sort of “балагур” / “balagur” [“joker,” “jester”]. But it is hard to deceive the perceptive reader, and the addition of positive traits to Semyon’s image serve mostly to irritate the reader’s sense of truth. The problem that Chekhov raises by adding positive traits to the image of the villain is the problem of lie and hypocrisy, and this problem can only be solved in a quarrel. It is Semyon’s sneers that finally provoke Stepan to beat him: Having met Stepan in a tavern Semyon calls him a “lord” referring to his intercourse with Strelkova:

Ха-ха! Разве можно барину на десять целковых прожить? Что ты? Он сто получает!
Степан посмотрел на сказавшего это и узнал в нем брата Семена, который сидел в углу на скамье и пил …
— Позвольте вас спросить, господин, — заговорил Семен, снимая шапку, — у барыни хорошие лошади или нет? Вам нравятся? … — Должно быть, очень хорошие, — продолжал Семен. — Только жаль, что кучера нет. Без кучера не того... (Chekhov 1: 269);

Hah-hah! How could a lord live for ten silver rubles? What are you talking about? He is paid a hundred!
Stepan looked at one who had spoken and recognized his brother Semyon, who was sitting on a bench in the corner and drinking. …
“Let me ask you, sir,” – Semyon said, taking off his hat – “does the landlady have good horses? Are you pleased with them? … They must be very good” – Semyon continued. “But what a pity, that you don’t have a coachman… It’s not the same without a coachman…” [Trans. E.Z.].

Even if we leave all moral considerations outside of the text, then Semyon’s behavior is at least surprising at this point. As the first one, who tries to convince Stepan to serve at Strelkova’s house, he is also the first one to humiliate him. This is something that Stepan does not expect, and his surprise is expressed in the moment of recognition: he doesn’t recognize his brother by voice, but only by his face, which suggests that he cannot immediately accept the fact of a scolding by his brother as true:

Степан посмотрел на сказавшего это и узнал в нем брата Семена, который сидел в углу на скамье и пил (Chekhov 1: 269);
Stepan looked at one who had spoken and recognized his brother Semyon, who was sitting on a bench in the corner and drinking [Trans. E.Z.].

The story “The Lady of the Manor” reveals another function of the Chekhovian quarrel, which can be called unfulfilled expectations. It is easy to conclude that the whole of “The Lady of the Manor” is build up on many unexpected twists and turns in the common interactions between relatives. The idea of surprise lies deep in the text, and Chekhov does not hesitate to refer to it. The turn from surprise to shock in the final scene, when Stepan accidentally kills his wife Mar’ya, brings the story to its conclusion:

Муж нагнулся к теплому, но уже умершему телу жены, поглядел мутными глазами на ее истрадавшееся лицо и, ничего не понимая, сел возле трупа (Chekhov 1: 272);

The husband bent down to the warm, but already dead body of his wife, looked with clouded eyes at her face worn out by suffering, and, unable to understand anything, sat down near the corpse [Trans. E.Z.].

The same surprise is shared by the other characters of the story, the villagers that surround the murder scene:

В знойном воздухе повисла угнетающая тоска, когда дрожащий народ густой толпой окружи Степана и Марью... Видели, понимали, что здесь убийство, и глазам не верили. Степан обводил мутными глазами толпу, скрежетал зубами и бормотал бессвязные слова. Никто не брался связать Степана. Максим, Семен и Манафуилов стояли в толпе и жались друг к другу.
— За что он ее? — спрашивали они, бледные, как смерть (Chekhov 1: 272);

An oppressive grief hung in the stuffy air when a shivering thick crowd of people surrounded Stepan and Mar’ya… The saw and understood that here was murder, and they couldn’t believe their eyes. Stepan was sweeping the crowd with clouded eyes, gnashing his lips and mumbling disconnected words. No one dared band Stepan. Maksim, Semyon and Manafuilov stood in the crowd pressing themselves together.
“Why did he do that to her?” – they asked, pale as death [Trans. E. Z.].
However, there is one character in this story who is not surprised by the state of events – and that is the one who the story is named after: the lady of the manor:

Доложили о случившемся барыне. Барыня ахнула, ухватилась за пузырек со спиртом, но без чувств не упала (Chekhov 1: 272);

They reported the landlady about the accident. The landlady gasped, grasped a vial of spirit, but didn’t faint [Trans. E.Z.].

It seems to be that Chekhov is judging the peasants less strictly than the landowner, for they perceive the situation from their own perspective. Even as cruel as they are to each other, they have at least a weak excuse: their poverty and a dependent social status that lead to moral degradation. This state of facts was expressed by Semyon insisting that nothing is a sin for a poor person: “Гре-ех? Откудова грех? Бедному человеку ничего не грех” (Chekhov 1: 258) / “Asi-in? Why is it a sin? Nothing is a sin for a poor man” [Trans. E.Z.].

The landowner has no excuse, for she understands the situation differently and is the one who caused the tragedy in the first place. That is why she is not surprised. It is important, that irritation in Chekhov’s text is always sincere (as argued in the article “Chekhov’s Anger”), and as a crucial element of the quarrel, it leads to the revelation of truth. The lady of the manor is not sincere in her irritation, and that is why, despite all her threats, she never punishes the peasants and simply returns to her lifestyle after a while:

— Ужасный народ! — зашептала она. — Ах, какой народ! Негодяи! Хорошо же! Я им покажу! Они узнают теперь, что я за птица!
Утешать явился Ржевецкий. Он утешил барыню и занял опять свое место, отнятое у него капризной барыней для Степана. Место доходное, теплое и самое для него подходящее. Десять раз в год его прогоняли с этого места и десять раз платили ему отступного. Платили немало (Chekhov 1: 272);

“Horrible people!” – She whispered. –“Oh, what people! Scoundrels! All right then! I’ll show them! Now they will know what I am!”
It was Rzhevetsky who came to console her. He consoled the landlady and took up again his spot which had taken away from him by the capricious landlady in favor of Stepan. A profitable and cozy spot, and one that suited him best. Ten times a year he was banished from that spot and ten times he was paid compensation. And the compensation wasn’t small [Trans. E.Z.].

The short story “The Lady of the Manor” demonstrates surprise (or the device of unfulfilled expectations) as one of the important elements of the quarrel. The idea of truth and its revelation is also present in the text, but as far as the truth is known in advance, all quarrels aim not to reveal anything new, but to disrupt the act of communication entirely. This is why all attempts to convince Stepan to go to the landowner and the late accusations made by his wife find no response: Stepan always tries to stop his interlocutor, and, unfortunately for Mar’ya, he tends to do it physically:

Степан топнул ногой, пошатнулся и, сверкая глазами, толкнул локтем Марью...
— Молчи, говорят! Не хватай за сердце!
— Буду говорить! Ты драться? Ну что ж... Бей... Бей сироту. Один конец.... Степан размахнулся и изо всей силы ударил кулаком по искавившемуся от гнева лицу Марьи (Chekhov 1: 272);

Stepan stamped his foot, swayed, and with a glint in his eyes pushed Mar’ya with his elbow...
“You keep quiet, I said! Don’t torture my heart!”
“But I will speak! You want to fight? Well, go ahead... Beat... Beat the orphan. There is one end...” ...Stepan lifted his arm and with all his might struck his fist at Mar’ya’s face, which was contorted with anger [Trans. E.Z.].

In general, the story “The Lady of the Manor” shares all the functions of Chekhovian quarrel, but in a more specific way. Most important is the fact that Chekhov combines here multiple communicative intentions and expectations. The conflict, in which the truth and the root of the problem is known from the very beginning, seems unsolvable, because it is seen from different perspectives. In this manner and thus the quarrel acquires a greater number of participants, for all the minor quarrels in the story
combine to form a chain of events and creating a broader conflict. In “Artists’ Wives”, compromise leads to miscommunication when the participants intentionally prefer clichés of social behavior over sincere communication. However, somewhat paradoxically, this kind of miscommunication can be productive for co-existence. In “The Lady of the Manor” co-existence is made impossible because the number of the participants in the quarrel is too great and there is no chance of finding a compromise to satisfy everyone.

If “The Lady of the Manor” describes a situation in which the truth is known in advance, in “A Trial” [“Суд,” 1881] the truth is a matter of investigation. “A Trial” also describes circumstances that could have led to a quarrel between relatives (the shopkeeper Kuzma Egorov and his son Serapion) and, like “The Lady of the Manor”, has a larger number of participants. The story describes the court case in which Kuzma Egorov tries to discover how and why Serapion has stolen father’s money. In the end the money is found in one of Kuzma’s pockets. The truth in this case is known only by one of the participants of the pre-quarrel situation (Serapion), but he does not want to start the quarrel himself, because, as in “The Lady of the Manor” the number of his opponents is greater. There are seven members of the court:

Кузьма Егоров, староста, фельдшер Иванов, дьячок Феофан Манафуилов, бас Михайло, кум Парфентий Иваныч и, приехавший из города в гости к тетке Анисье, жандарм Фортунатов (Чехов 1: 95);

Kuzma Egorov himself, the mayor of the village; Ivanov, the nurse; Feofan Manfuilov, the deacon; Mikhailo, the bass from the choir; Parfenty Ivanovich, the godfather; and constable Fortunatov who has come from the city to visit his aunt Aksin’ya (Chekhov, *The Complete Early Short Stories* 46).

In this case the quarrel is again combined with the juxtaposition of the individual and the crowd. Serapion reluctantly denies the accusations and prefers to take the
punishment, while other members of the court seem to be irritated, which can be explained by their intention to learn the truth:

— Молчи! — говорит строго Кузьма Егоров. — Материй ты не разводи, а говори нам толком: куда деньги мои девал?
— Деньги? Гм... Вы настолько умный человек, что сами должны понимать, что я ваших денег не трогал. Бумажки свои вы не для меня копите... Грешить нечего... (Chekhov 1: 95);

“Shut up!” says Kuzma Egorov. “Don’t talk to me about philosophy. Just tell me where you spent my money?”
“Your money? You’re a clever man, and you should know that I never touched your money. You save your money, but not for me” (Chekhov, The Complete Early Short Stories 47-8).

The quarrel is not necessary in this case because it would be very difficult to find a truth that would satisfy all the participants. Like in many other Chekhov’s stories (for example, “Artists’ Wives”), people do not want to recognize the truth and prefer miscommunication based on clichés. The number of participants and the difference in their communicative intentions do not allow for compromise. Some participants in general enjoy the situation in the court. For example, the most aggressive member of the court committee, Fortunatov, obviously has come only to see the punishment, because it pleases his rude nature:

Закурив трубку, жандарм встает из-за стола, подходит к Серапиону и, глядя на него со злобой и в упор, кричит пронзительным голосом:
…А жандарм Фортунатов долго потом ходит по двору, красный, выпучив глаза, и говорит:
— Еще! Еще! Так его!(Chekhov 1: 97-9);

[Having smoked a pipe – E.Z.] The policeman stands up from the table [approaches Serapion – E.Z.], looks Serapion straight in the eye [with anger – E.Z.], and yells at him in a screaming high-pitched voice:
“Who are you? What are you? And why are you doing this? Why? Why don’t you answer me? You are disobedient to the authorities, [that – E.Z.] is what you are! Shut up! Answer! Answer me!”

…The policeman Fortunatov walks along the backyard with his red face and sparkling eyes, and says,


From this passage it becomes obvious that Serapion’s resistance will not help him much. However, Serapion uses an approach that theoretically could have saved him: while it is impossible to reveal the truth to all the members of the court at the same time, he tries to do so individually, and, curiously enough, by means of the quarrel. Serapion tries to break their shield of indifference and conventional behavior by means of irritation; in this case, by mentioning their shortcomings. For example, he reminds the doctor of a patient who died because of improper treatment; he also tells Fortunatov that he is not afraid of him while Fortunatov obviously attempts to instill fear in everyone around him. These attempts don’t work, because in Chekhov’s stories, people in a crowd are even more closed off than isolated individuals. Serapion receives undeserved punishment.

It is interesting, that in the short story “A Trial”, the end of the quarrel combines with the motive of surprise in which the money is suddenly found. Surprise plays a significant role in the Chekhovian quarrel, for it signals that communicative expectations have not been fulfilled by one or more participants of the quarrel. Thus the sense of surprise or shock forms the basis of the quarrel as creating misunderstanding between participants.

Social Quarrels
The examples of the two stories analyzed above, “The Lady of the Manor” and “A Trial,” already moves the family quarrel into a larger social context. The number of participants not only influences the result of the quarrel, but also defines its parameters. For example, in “The Lady of the Manor” the involvement of the village in the family context brings in all the particularities of village life, including the religious beliefs of the villagers in their rough interpretation. Because of sharp religious views and inflammatory gossip, the act of adultery acquires characteristics of tragedy. Alternatively, in the short story “A Trial,” different perspectives on the same situation turn the investigation into a farce when the truth appears to be on the side of the accused. The main difference between these two stories is in the necessity of the revelation of truth. In “The Lady of the Manor” no one cares to perceive the real state of events and everyone prefers gossip; as a result, the crowd becomes the oppressor of the main character and his wife. In “A Trial,” the purpose of the investigation is to reveal the truth, but the truth is revealed too late, because the characters do not obtain the necessary level of sincerity, which can be achieved in an individual quarrel, a quarrel that never takes place in this particular story.

It is interesting, that sometimes Chekhov chooses the same or similar elements to arrange his stories. For example, he frequently repeats names of characters, and while assigning new roles and social occupation to them, creates a sense of connectedness among different stories. In most stories quarrels come one after another, as if one quarrel generates another (“The Lady of the Manor,” “Artists’ Wives”). The chain structure of the quarrel also adds to this sense of connectedness created by parallel elements.

An example of parallel elements can be found in “A Trial” and “The Lady of the Manor”: two very similar characters, both church clerks, share the same unusual last
name, Manafuïlov [Манафуилов]. Such minor details create a broader perspective on the artificial realities and sub-realities in Chekhov’s stories: in “The Lady of the Manor” we see Manafuïlov drinking in a tavern and scolding Stepan; in “A Trial” he is judges Serapion for the supposedly stolen money. Such parallels in actual fact create constants of the Chekhovian reality, and it is important for the quarrel, because quarrel is indeed a constant part of it as well.

Travelling from one story to another, the quarrel nonetheless develops by the same rules and has similar elements. “St. Peter’s Day” and “June, 29th” are particularly interesting in this regard not only because they finally represent quarrel as a major form and manner of social intercourse, when ongoing quarreling becomes something similar to a mode of living, but also because they share very similar settings and the exact same date: the 29th of June is also the Day of St. Peter, and the day on which the hunting season opens. This detail adds to the sense of cyclicality that is also present in Chekhovian quarrels: each side returns to and repeats the very same problems until the conflict is resolved.

“St. Peter’s Day” [“Петров день,” 1881] is indeed a remarkable story which represents quarrel as a model of social intercourse. The short stories analyzed earlier in this paper were mostly examples of the quarrel as such, e.g. a strong argument that can lead either to the resolution of a problem, a compromise or an entire break in relationship. It is important that previously we concentrated on quarrels happening in families, where the connections are tighter and, thus allow for the exploration of deeper problems. Social relations among acquaintances, friends and colleagues give more freedom to the participants, and if they start a quarrel it is also more an act of free will. Social interaction
can always be ended more easily, but instead of ending relationships, the characters of the early stories tend to keep the relationship and to turn the quarrel into its other form, e.g. a squabble. The main difference between a quarrel and a squabble in this case lies in the initial intentions of the participants. If spouses and relatives quarrel without having a way out of their interaction (except a tragic one, as in “The Lady of the Manor”), then friends and acquaintances find pleasure in quarreling with each other. “St. Peter’s Day” is one of the best examples of this impulse. Quarrels and squabbles not only guide relations in this story, but also change the flow of time. One of the first paragraphs paints the image of a squabble as an engine of life:

В доме и во дворе поднялась страшная кутерьма. Всё живущее вокруг Егора Егорыча заходило, забегало и застучало по всем лестницам, сараям и конюшням... Переменили одного коренного. У кучеров слетели с голов картузы, у лакея, Катькина прихвостня, засиял под носом красный фонарь, кухарок назвали «стервозами», послышалось имя сатаны и ангелов его... В пять минут таранты наполнились коврами, полостями, кульками с провизией, ружейными чехлами (Chekhov 1: 67);

A fearful uproar arose, both inside and outside the house. Every living thing in the neighborhood of Yegor Yegorich began to walk, rush and stomp up and down the stairs and through the barns and stables. They changed one of the shaft horses. The coachmen’s caps flew off; a red lantern of a boil appeared under the nose of the footman who haunted the house maids; someone called the cooks “carrion,” and the names of Satan and his angels were overhead… In five minutes the carriages were loaded with fur, rugs, gun cases, and sacks full of food(Chekhov, *Forty Stories* 11-12).

R. O. Jacobson defines quarrel as a “phatic genre of speech” [“фатический речевой жанр”], which means that the main purpose of it is not to share information or to express one’s feelings, but to deliver a message that will have some strong influence on the interlocutor; thus the quarrel (as well as a squabble) is an instrument of manipulation.
Chekhovian social quarrels usually have more participants and a broader range of triggers, because the quarrel as the major manner of social intercourse (and a living mode) does not require a strong reason for its inception, thus allowing the author to combine quarrels and squabbles in one text. This happens in “St. Peter’s Day” in which Chekhov portrays a rowdy individual, who habitually quarrels more than all the other characters. Before the huntsmen can go to the woods to enjoy the shoot, the main character’s brother appears and tries to get into one of the coaches. It is remarkable that even in the representation of such characters Chekhov emphasizes the role of the quarrel. In the figure of Mikhei Yegorich, the most scandalous person in the county, Chekhov endows the quarrel some serious mystical feature: it becomes a part of fate – “cruel fate” [“злая судьба”]. This is a very important statement, because, on the one hand, it answers that sense of justness that is present in all of Chekhov’s stories and is defined not by the ending of story, but by the attitude of the author. This sense of justness comes from Chekhov’s anger against servile features in human nature and the necessity of “squeezing them out”. Chekhov’s interest in depicting the moral transformation of his characters was also noted by Byaly. In this case the existence of a higher power serves to resolve the deepest conflicts among Chekhov’s characters. On the other hand, the perception of the quarrel as a higher power connected with fate unites Chekhov’s stories with the previous Russian literary tradition by parodying its “unique” characters who stand opposed to their contemporaries. There is an obvious connection between this story and Lermontov’s Герой нашего времени / The Hero of Our Time. Both works describe an individual who spoils life for everyone around him, but they do it in two different ways. If in Lermontov’s text Pechorin is represented as a mysterious power whose abilities lie
beyond normal human skills (like his ability to predict future, e.g. his fellow officer Vulich’s death), then Mikhey Yegorich is a very common, mundane character. Chekhov retains the notion of Mikhey Yegorich’s uniqueness through hyperbole [superlatives, such as “the most insufferable man in the world, a brawler and roughneck, as was well known to everyone in the entire province” (Chekhov, *Fourty stories* 13) / “невыносимейший в мире человек, известный всей губернии скандалист” (Chekhov 1: 69)], while replacing the traits of the romantic villain and his malign influence on other people with mere obtrusiveness and roughness. In this fashion, character with a unique nature is replaced by another character with a bad temper and poor manners. This feature of the Chekhovian quarrel-instigator thus can be classified as one of literary style, as a comparison of the Romantic hero Pechorin with the parody character Mikhey Yegorich; and genre, as comparison of the thoroughly described, reflecting character of the Romantic novel to a character of a humorous short story whose personality is revealed in quarrel.

This is how Chekhov describes the reaction of the hunters at Mikhey Yegorich’s appearance:

Охотники улыбнулись все разом и захлопали от восторга в ладоши. Все почувствовали себя на седьмом небе, но… злая судьба!.. не успели они выехать со двора, как случился скандал...
— Стой! Подожди! Стой!!! — раздался сзади тройки пронзительный тенор.
Охотники оглянулись и побледнели. За тройками гнался невыносимейший в мире человек, известный всей губернии скандалист, брат Егора Егорыча, отставной капитан 2-го ранга Михей Егорыч... (Chekhov 1: 68-9);

The hunters were all smiles, clapping their hands in an access of joy. They were in their seventh heaven when… Oh, cruel fate! – they have no sooner left the courtyard than a ghastly accident occurred.
“Stop! Wait for me! Halt!” a piercing tenor voice called from somewhere behind. The hunters looked back and turned pale. Stumbling after the carriages was the most insufferable man in the world, a brawler and roughneck, as was well known to everyone in the entire province, a certain Mikhey Yegorich Optemperansky, brother of Yegor Yegorich, and a retired naval captain, second class (Chekhov, *Fourty Stories* 13).

The Chekhovian quarrel is a means of interpreting the concerns of previous literary currents in the context of realism. Through the use of quarrels Chekhov represents those concerns in an ironic light. The quarrel as a lifestyle destroys Romantic clichés, because it builds interaction between characters and thus destroys the basis of Romanticism: the ultimate sense of uniqueness. Mikhey Yegorich is not more special than others, but simply the bearer of common traits in their highest degree. It is obvious, that the squabble begins before Mikhey Yegorich appears near the coaches. It starts “inside and outside the house” when the excitement over the hunt mixes with the irritation caused by any possibility of its delay. However, Mikhey Yegorich is the worst quarreler among them, because he is able to create a quarrel from the void; irritation and anxiety are his major traits, and thus he becomes an ideal quarrel instigator.

Chekhov depicts quarrel as a normal part of social interaction by different means. One of them is the combination of normative polite language and manners of address (“Your Excellency” [“ваше превосходительство”]; “excuse me, gentlemen” [“позвольте, господа”] etc.) with similar “naming” words having strong negative connotations (“You’re a Judas, a beast, a swine!” [“Иуда, скотина, свинья!”]). These two levels of language (normative and offensive) share equal positions in the speech of many Chekhovian characters including Mikhey Yegorich, and thus turn the quarrel into the norm.
— То такое, — закричал Михей Егорыч, — что ты Иуда, скотина, свинья!.. Свинья, ваше превосходительство! Ты отчего не разбудил меня? Отчего ты не разбудил меня, осел, я тебя спрашиваю, подлеца этакого? Позвольте, господа... (Chekhov 1: 69);

“What’s going on?” shouted Mikhey Yegorich. I’ll tell you what’s going on! You’re a Judas, a beast, a swine! Yes, a swine, Your Excellency! Why didn’t you wake me, you fool? What a scoundrel you are! Why didn’t you wake me? Excuse me, gentlemen... [Chekhov, Fourty Stories 13-14).

As a norm, the quarrel has a right to be a purpose unto itself. The following words of Mikhey Yegorich prove that he begins a quarrel not because he wants to cut off relations with his brother, but because it is their style of interaction:

— Я ничего... Я его только поучить хочу! ... Позвольте, ваше превосходительство... Я его только раз... смажу... Позвольте! ...
— Господа... — вмешался генерал. — Я полагаю... достаточно. Братья, родные братья!
— Он родной осёл, ваше превосходительство, а не брат!(Chekhov 1: 70);

“I never... I only want to teach him a lesson! ... Excuse me, Your Excellency... I only want to hit him once... only once! ... Excuse me!” ... “Gentlemen,” interrupted the general. “I think it can be said we have all had enough! Remember, you are brothers both born from the same mother!”

“He’s the brother of an ass, Your Excellency – no brother of mine!”» (Chekhov, Fourty Stories 14-15).

Like family quarrels, social quarrels retain the chain structure, in which one quarrel generates another. However, the particularity of social quarrels lies in the fact that the quarrel is often personified in one specific character who is the most active part of the community and a provocateur. For example, Mikhey Yegorich gives one of the characters of the story, the general, advice that will inevitably start an argument between the latter and Mikhey Yegorich’s brother. The fact that the seed of quarrel have been planted is shown by the switch to offensive language in general’s speech:
— Вы, ваше превосходительство, векселя его протестуйте! — посоветовал Михей Егорыч.
— А? Векселя? Нда-с... Пора уже ему... Нужно честь знать... Я ждал, ждал и наконец утомился ждать... Скажите ему, что протест... Прощайте, господа! Прощу ко мне! А он свинья-с!(Chekhov 1: 79);

“You should protest his bill of exchange, Your Excellency,” Mikhey Yegorich suggested.
“What’s that? Bill of exchange? Why, yes, he shouldn’t take advantage of my kindness, should he? I’ve waited and waited, and now I’m tired of waiting. Tell him I’m going to pro- Good-bye, gentlemen! Come and visit me. Yes, he’s a swine all right!” (Chekhov, *Fourty Stories* 25).

The sense of absolute infiniteness and cyclicality of the quarrels in Chekhov’s texts is created by repeated features, motifs and settings that we have also seen in family quarrels. Chekhov gains maximum inevitability in his representation of quarrels by protesting previously announced statements. For example, “St. Peter’s Day” ends with a promise to never go hunting. As pronounced by a doctor, one of the characters of the story, it can be viewed as a representation of the author’s irony expressed in a false promise. Also, the initial word combination of the passage – “побранившись всласть” / “having enjoyed giving a tongue-lashing” [literal translation – E.Z.] – demonstrates the enjoyment that Chekhov’s characters receive through quarrels:

Побранившись всласть с фельдшерами, акушеркой и больными, он принялся сочинять огромнейшее письмо к Егору Егорычу. В этом письме требовалось «объяснение неблаговидных поступков», бранясь ревнивые мужья и давалась клятва не ходить никогда более на охоту, — никогда! даже и двадцать девятого июня (Chekhov 1: 79);

He gave a tongue-lashing to the orderlies, the patients and the midwife, and then he began to compose an immensely long letter to YegorYegorich. In this letter he demanded “explanations for your unseemly conduct,” said some injurious things about jealous husbands, and swore on oath that he would never go hunting again – no even on the twenty-ninth of June (Chekhov, *Fourty Stories* 26).
The irony of the false promise is also revealed on the level of intertext, when, soon after “St. Peter’s Day” Chekhov writes another story with a title remarkable in its connection to the passage cited above – “June, 29th”. This story is a crucial piece for the understanding of the Chekhovian quarrel, for it is the one in which Chekhov provides an explicit definition of the quarrel and its relation to all his literary works: “…ссора – живое слово” / “… the quarrel is the living word”.

Like “St. Peter’s Day”, “June, 29th” [“Двадцать девятое июня,” 1882] describes the events that happen on the day when the hunting season is being opened. The main character, Akim Petrovich Otletaev goes hunting with his relatives and acquaintances:

Аким Петрович Отлетаев, мировой судья, земский врач, я, зять Отлетаева Предположенский и волостной старшина Козоедов ехали все шестеро на отлетаевой коляске-розвальне на охоту (Chekhov 1: 224);

All six of us went hunting: Akim Petrovich Otletaev; a county judge; a village doctor; Mr. Predpolozhensky, Otletaev’s son-in-law; Mr. Kozoedov, a local police chief; and me (Chekhov, The Complete Early Short Stories 116).

Acting as a passive provocateur, Otletaev makes everyone feel uncomfortable and incites multiple quarrels. However, no matter how rude Otletaev’s behavior becomes (at one point he almost fulfills his intention to leave the hunt and abandon several members of the group in the woods), no matter how other participants act, their interaction never stops, because in the early Chekhov’s stories the characters have no strong initial intention to stop the interaction. The quarrel is a vital power that brings their senses to their sharpest and their interaction to their most sincere. This maximum degree of sincerity is gained through hyperbole:
Все мы толкались, пыхтели, морщились, всей душой ненавидели друг друга и с нетерпением ждали того времени, когда нам можно будет вылезть из коляски (Chekhov 1: 224);

We were all pushing each other, breathing heavily, screwing our faces and hating each other’s guts. We were looking forward to getting out of the carriage (Chekhov, *The Complete Early Short Stories* 116).

Emotional sincerity correlates with truth as one of the main goals of Chekhovian quarrel. Otletayev’s son-in-law, Predpolozhensky, instigates the quarrel when he has doubts about the honesty of Otletayev’s words on the price of his gun:

Не люблю, тесть, когда вы врете! Зачем врать? Я не понимаю, зачем врать? … Пусть он не врет! … Моя душа возмущается, ежели кто врет… И свиньей пусть не бранится. Сам он свинья, вот что! А если ему неприятно, что я еду, так… шут с ним! Я могу и не ехать! (Chekhov 1: 226);

“I don’t like it when you lie, even if you are my father-in-law. Why do you lie to us? Why lie? … He should not lie … I become indignant when I see that he lies. And he should not call me a swine. It is he who is a swine. If he doesn’t like me, I can live without him. And I can live without this hunt as well!”(Chekhov, *The Complete Early Short Stories* 118).

As in the previous story, Predpolozhensky gives a false promise to cut off relations with Otletaev. This device emphasizes the unavailing efforts of Chekhovian characters to stop quarreling. However, it is the “doctor” character who provides the others with the key to avoiding quarrels. Perhaps, ironically, that key is silence, which in Chekhov’s later stories becomes a basis of miscommunication.

— Перестаньте, господа! — вмешался я. — Полно вам друг другу мораль читать! Давайте молчать… (Chekhov 1: 226);


Chekhov is often unintentionally prophetic in his early short stories, but this early appeal to silence turns into the communicative deafness of his later characters, who stop
paying attention to each other. As a result, the sense of sincerity is lost together with the quarrel. Quarrel breaks the communicative “silence”, e.g. the inability of Chekhovian characters to hear each other – and this fact is expressed in the imagery of “June, 29\textsuperscript{th}”, in which the sound of men’s quarrel is juxtaposed to the peaceful silence of nature:

Между тем пока мы, не выспавшиеся, полупьяные, каверзили друг против друга, солнце поднималось всё выше и выше... Туман исчез окончательно, и начался летний день... Было кругом тихо, славно... Только мы одни нарушали тишину...(Chekhov 1: 228);

While we, half asleep, half drunk, kept on scolding each other, the sun rose higher and higher in the sky. The fog disappeared completely, and a nice summer day began. Everything around us was quiet and nice. We alone broke the silence(Chekhov, \textit{The Complete Early Short Stories} 121).

The text of “June, 29\textsuperscript{th}” ends with another example of the cyclicality of Chekhovian quarrel and of an important trait of early Chekhovian characters – their disinclination to stop communication:

Дня через два Отлетаев, Предположенский, Козоедов, мировой, земский врач и я сидели в доме Отлетаева и играли в стуколку. Мы играли в стуколку и по обыкновению грызли друг друга... Дня через три мы поругались насмерть, а через пять пускали вместе фейерверк... Мы ссоримся, сплетничаем, ненавидим, презираем друг друга, но разойтись мы не можем (Chekhov 1: 232);

Two days later, Otlelaev, Predpolozhensky, Kozoedov, the judge, the doctor and I – we all sat at the table in Otlelaev’s house, playing cards. We played cards, and, as usual, were fighting with each other. About three days later, we became deadly enemies, and five days after that we made firework together. So we fight, gossip, hate and despise each other, but we cannot part (Chekhov, \textit{The Complete Early Short Stories} 125).

As can be seen from the analyses of Chekhov’s short stories here (and of those that at this point have been left beyond the thesis), the division of Chekhov’s stories into social and family ones, based on the nature of quarrel, seems feasible. The nature of the
quarrel indeed depends on the number of participants and their relations. Both family and social quarrels tend to turn into a mode of living, a manner of social intercourse. Minor misunderstandings will lead to quarrels and squabbles which do not, however, end the relationships. That said, misunderstandings are resolved differently in the social and family contexts. Social intercourse is not obligatory, thus all the problems at this level can be resolved more easily: here quarrel can even become entertainment. On family level relationships include certain obligations and the connections between relatives are tighter; thus relatives will always have to compromise or to communicate through quarrels without being able to end their relationships. If a compromise is impossible, a quarrel can reach tragic dimensions. The important difference between family and social quarrels lies in the ability of the participants to begin or end the quarrel. Conflicts between family members are usually begun unwillingly and are recognized as conflicts, while in situations that involve acquaintances, colleagues and friends, the quarrel often becomes the norm for interaction. At the same time social and family quarrels share similar concerns, such as the revelation of truth) and functions, such as building up communication.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY AND LATE SHORT STORIES. A BRIEF COMPARISON

Like most artists, Chekhov was always concerned with the purpose of his art. He didn’t share the post-conversion Tolstovian approach that saw art as means to teach people correct behavior, but appealed to art to provide a good example. He saw the purpose of art as asking good questions, making diagnose without providing immediate
treatment. Here is what Boris Eikhenbaum writes about Chekhov’s approach in his article “About Chekhov” [“О Чехове”]:

Сначала он решительно и много раз утверждал, что от художника можно и нужно требовать не решения вопросов (на это есть другие специалисты), а только “правильной постановки” их, то есть диагноза. Он говорил: “В “Annie Karenine” и в “Onegine” не решен ни один вопрос; но они вас вполне удовлетворят потому только, что все вопросы поставлены в них правильно” (14, 208, письмо к Суворину от 27 октября 1888 года). Он мог бы сослаться еще на Лермонтова, который в предисловии к “Герою нашего времени” (как бы предвидя в будущем появление Чехова) определил свою позицию в медицинских терминах: “Будет и того, что болезнь указана, а как ее излечить — это уж бог знает!” (Eikhenbaum 363-4);

At first he positively and persistently stated that one may and should demand from an artist not a solution of problems (other specialists serve that purpose), but only “their correct formulation”, e.g., their diagnosis”. He said: “In Anna Karenina and Onegin not a single question is resolved, but they completely satisfy you only because they are formulated correctly” (14, 208, letter to Suvorin, October, 27th, 1888). He could have also referred to Lermontov, who, in the foreword to The Hero of Our Time (as if foreseeing Chekhov’s appearance in future) defined his principle in medical terms: “It would be enough to define a disease, but how to cure it – only God knows!” [Trans. E.Z.].

This passage casts light on Chekhov’s attitude towards the genre of quarrel. None of the quarrels that he inserts in his texts come to a positive resolution: they either make the conflict sharper or put it into a cycle. One of the purposes of the quarrel in early Chekhov’s stories was to reach the aim mentioned above: to diagnose a specific problem and to leave the solution for the reader. The later stories differ from the early ones in that Chekhov tends to avoid the quarrel. This can be explained by Chekhov’s change in his intentions as a writer. The quarrel was a good device for diagnosing certain problems, when the role of the author was minimal and characters could speak for themselves, thus creating a realistic effect. According to Eikhenbaum, in later stories Chekhov switched...
from diagnostics to “treatment” of those transgressions in society. Both the author and his characters started speaking more directly:

С годами художественные диагнозы Чехова уточнялись и углублялись. Болезнь русской жизни приобретала под его пером все более резкие и яркие очертания. И чем яснее становилась самому Чехову эта болезнь, тем чаще и определеннее стали говорить о ней его герои. От диагнозов Чехов стал переходить к вопросам лечения (Eikhenbaum 369);

Year by year Chekhov’s artistic diagnosis was improving and deepening. The disease of the Russian life gained sharper and clearer shapes under his quill. And the clearer this disease was becoming for Chekhov himself, the more frequently and more distinctively his characters were speaking about it. From diagnosis Chekhov moved to the questions of treatment [Trans. E. Z.].

Thus we can conclude that while the author’s voice itself becomes stronger and the characters of his stories are allowed to make conclusions themselves, the quarrel as a device loses its usefulness. In a quotation from “Gooseberries” [“Крыжовник,” 1898] (also cited by Eikhenbaum) one can see problems similar to the ones in early stories, such as degradation, poverty, lies and hypocrisy, but now expressed in the form of more profound monologue. The main character of the story, Ivan Ivanych, appears to speak on behalf of Chekhov:

“Вы взгляните на эту жизнь: наглость и праздность сильных, невежество и скотоподобие слабых, кругом бедность невозможная, теснота, вырождение, пьянство, лицемерие, вранье…”(Chekhov10: 62);

“Just look at this life: the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and brutishness of the weak, impossible poverty all around us, overcrowding, degeneracy, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lies…”(Chekhov, Selected Stories of Anton Chekhov 318).

In general, the late stories give much more space to the characters’ reflections, and thus the quarrel gives place to characters’ monologues or more detailed narrative descriptions. For this reason there are not many late Chekhov stories that include a
quarrel, while the plays do. Chekhov’s late short stories tend to focus on characters’ internal state and give more space to reflection, which excludes the need for quarrel. That said, Chekhov’s dramas continue using quarrels. Social interaction as expressed in dialogues and polylogues are crucial elements of drama in which Chekhovian quarrel reveals ways to build up communication among the characters.

Although the quarrel becomes a rare element in late Chekhov stories, there is one short story that deserves particular attention. “The Helpmate” [“Супруга,” 1895] touches upon one of Chekhov’s main concerns, which is woman’s moral nature. This story has a full quarrel and shares the concerns of Chekhov’s earlier stories. For example, it can be compared to “The Lady of the Manor”, for they both share the theme of adultery committed by a woman.

The short story “The Helpmate” [“Супруга,” 1895] depicts a tortuous cohabitation that can hardly be called a marriage. Doctor Nikolay Yevgrafitch, who also has consumption, is suffering not only physically, but also morally from the continuous adulteries committed by his young wife, Olga Dmitrievna. The situation is made more complex by the immoral nature of Olga Dmitrievna. Caught in her lies and having hypocritically acknowledged her guilt, she nonetheless not only refuses to accept the divorce offered her by Nikolay Yevgrafitch (who also offers to take the guilt of adultery upon himself), but also insists on a one-year trip abroad in order to spend time with her current lover. As in most Chekhov stories, this situation has no way out. However, one can definitely see both differences and similarities between this story and the early ones, out of which “The Lady of the Manor” would be the best match.
First of all, both stories describe serious family quarrels. Given the deep conflict at their root, these quarrels cannot be considered as a manner of interaction likely to bring any amusement to the participants (as with social quarrels), or bring the participants to a compromise (as in “Artists’ Wives”). Like the landowner Strelkova, Olga Dmitrievna has multiple lovers and does not recognize her actions as a sin. Here the problem of surprise is raised again: while Nikolay Yevgrafitch knows the habits of his spouse perfectly, he still cannot stop being surprised, or even shocked, by them. Her consistent absences until five in the morning irritate all of his feelings, but, unlike in the social quarrels, his anger is mixed with pain and grief, and thus he never feels relief, even after a quarrel. The sense of surprise or shock prevents him from recognizing his wife’s behavior as a norm, even if such things happen every night:

“Был уже первый час ночи. Николай Евграфыч знал, что жена вернется домой не скоро, по крайней мере часов в пять. Он не верил ей и, когда она долго не возвращалась, не спал, томился, и в то же время презирал и жену, и ее постель, и зеркало, и ее бонбоньерки, и эти ландыш и гиацинты, которые кто-то каждый день присылал ей и которые распространяли по всему дому приторный запах цветочной лавки” (Chekhov: 92);

“It was past midnight. Nikolay Yevgrafitch knew his wife would not be home very soon, not till five o’clock at least. He did not trust her, and when she was long away he could not sleep, was worried, and at the same time he despised his wife, and her bed, and her looking-glass, and her boxes of sweets, and the hyacinths, and the lilies of the valley which were sent her every day by some one or other, and which diffused the sickly fragrance of a florist's shop all over the house” (Chekhov, *The Darling: And Other Stories* 129).

The strongest sense of surprise is revealed in the quarrel, when Olga Dmitrievna refuses to accept the divorce and marry her lover:

— Ты поедешь к Рису навсегда. Я дам тебе развод, приму вину на себя, и Рису можно будет жениться на тебе.
— Но я вовсе не хочу развода! — живо сказала Ольга Дмитриевна, делая удивленное лицо. — Я не прошу у тебя развода! Дай мне паспорт, вот и всё.
— Но почему же ты не хочешь развода? — спросил доктор, начиная раздражаться. — Ты странная женщина. Какая ты странная! Если ты серьезно увлеклась и он тоже любит тебя, то в вашем положении вы оба ничего не придумаете лучше брака. И неужели ты еще станешь выбирать между браком и адюльтером?(Chekhov 9: 98);

"You'll go to Riss for good. I'll get you a divorce, take the blame on myself, and Riss can marry you."

"But I don't want a divorce!" Olga Dmitrievna retorted quickly, with an astonished face [The translation of this sentence is not precise. In the original Olga Dmitrievna “retorted quickly making an astonished face” – E. Z.]. "I am not asking you for a divorce! Get me a passport, that's all."

"But why don't you want the divorce?" asked the doctor, beginning to feel irritated. "You are a strange woman. How strange you are! If you are fond of him in earnest and he loves you too, in your position you can do nothing better than get married. Can you really hesitate between marriage and adultery?"(Chekhov, The Darling: And Other Stories 136-7).

This passage also suggests that Chekhov is intentionally playing with the sense of surprise and uses it as the engine of the quarrel. Olga Dmitrievna “makes a surprised face”, which demonstrates that in actual fact she is not surprised. The same happens in

“The Lady of the Manor” when Strelkova does not faint and only feigns worry:

Доложили о случившемся барыне. Барыня ахнула, ухватилась за пузырек со спиртом, но без чувств не упала (Chekhov 1: 272);

They reported the landlady about the accident. The landlady gasped, grasped a vial of spirit, but didn’t faint [Trans. E.Z.].

The real quarrel starts between the doctor and his wife, not because of another adultery, but because of the sense of shock as a stronger degree of surprise. This sense of shock breaks the communicative expectations of at least one of the participants in the conversation, thus turning it into a quarrel. In other words, the root of all misunderstandings lies in the sense of surprise that Chekhov intensifies intentionally.
The late stories raise the degree, to which the participants are connected, and deepen their reflection upon the situation. In early Chekhov stories, such as “The Date Happened, But…” and “Which of the Three?”, the character responsible for the quarrel can come closer to realizing of his or her own fault (for example, Nadya describes herself as a horrible person); or the character has a faint excuse of being unaware of the reasons of the quarrel (for example, Gvozdikov forgets the events of the evening when he was intoxicated and writes a letter of apology to his ex-fiancé). But in the later story “The Helpmate” Olga Dmitrievna lacks any concern for her immorality. While even Strelkova in “The Lady of the Manor” pretends to be concerned by the events she has caused (even though she does not recognize her fault), Olga Dmitrievna remains completely indifferent. Indifference becomes one of the key problems in Chekhov’s late stories, and on the level of quarrel it is expressed by the denial of any responsibility for one’s actions.

The biggest difference between quarrels in early and late Chekhov stories can be found in the attitudes of the participants and their level of reflection before and after the quarrel. The late stories tend to present more of the inner world of each character. One can only guess about Stepan’s feelings in “The Lady of the Manor” judging by his gestures, the limited narratorial remarks and Stepan’s own rare comments, while in “The Helpmate” there is a much more detailed description of Nikolay Yevgrafitch’s inner reflection before and after the quarrel with his wife. The following passage conveys Nikolay Yevgrafitch’s thoughts before the quarrel:

“К пяти часам он ослабел и уже обвинял во всем одного себя, ему казалось теперь, что если бы Ольга Дмитриевна вышла за другого, который мог бы иметь на нее доброе влияние, то — кто знает? — в конце концов, быть может, она стала бы доброй, честной женщиной; он же плохой психолог и не знает женской души, к тому же неинтересен, груб…”(Chekhov 9: 95);
“By five o'clock he grew weaker and threw all the blame on himself. It seemed to him now that if Olga Dmitrievna had married someone else who might have had a good influence over her--who knows? -- she might after all have become a good, straightforward woman. He was a poor psychologist, and knew nothing of the female heart; besides, he was churlish, uninteresting…” (Chekhov, The Darling: And Other Stories 133).

Nikolay Yevgrafitch’s thoughts after the quarrel are in sharp contrast with the ones quoted above. Shocked by Olga Dmitrievna’s behavior, he returns to self-reflection, but with a different attitude: now he recognizes the predatory nature of his wife, but the revelation of truth does not remove the sense of surprise he experiences at her behavior.

И опять, с недоумением, спрашивал себя, как это он, сын деревенского попа, по воспитанию — бурсак, простой, грубый и прямой человек, мог так беспомощно отдаться в руки этого ничтожного, лживого, пошлого, мелкого, по натуре совершенно чуждого ему существа (Chekhov 9: 99);

And once more he asked himself in perplexity how he, the son of a village priest, with his democratic bringing up— a plain, blunt, straightforward man—could have so helplessly surrendered to the power of this worthless, false, vulgar, petty creature, whose nature was so utterly alien to him (Chekhov, The Darling: And Other Stories 139).

In both of his reflections one can see the strong sense of surprise that he tries to overcome. The adultery that he would never be able to recognize as a norm brings him to the need to discover a reason for his wife’s behavior. If he accepts the fact that such immoral behavior is the norm for Olga Dmitrievna (and only this explains why she remains calm and rejects the possibility of divorce), this conflict has resolution. Thus he cannot accept her immorality and tries another approach, which brings him to the idea that the guilt is on him, because of his roughness and poor psychological skills. In this case, the quarrel cannot serve to resolve the conflict, because the real struggle develops not between two interlocutors with different views on the same situation, but within a
single bearer of the conflict. After a useless talk with his wife, the doctor returns to his reflections with the same sense of surprise: “И опять, с недоумением, спрашивал себя…”(Chekhov 9: 99) / “And once more he asked himself in perplexity…”(Chekhov, *The Darling: And Other Stories* 139).

This example shows the importance of the more detailed process of self-reflection found in characters of the late stories: the conflict that lies within the quarrel is comprehended and experienced within one character, and everything that could be demonstrated externally remains internal. This is indeed an internal conflict, because while there are potential external means to resolution, the character does not want to use them. Nikolay Yevgrafitch could have gone to court and gotten rid of his wife by accusing her of adultery, but he is unable to recognize and accept her immoral nature. The sense of surprise does not let him resolve the internal conflict.

The characters of Chekhov’s late stories are also more isolated in their attempts to solve their problems. While in “The Lady of the Manor” the conflict is visible to the public and the whole village discusses it and thus in some way shares it with Stepan, Mar’ya and their relatives, the conflict between the doctor and his wife remains locked behind the doors of their household. Moreover, there is another issue with the sense of surprise that can be shared by the witnesses of the conflict. When in “The Lady of the Manor” Stepan accidently kills his wife, the villagers are shocked:

В знойном воздухе повисла угнетающая тоска, когда дрожащий народ густой толпой окружил Степана и Марью... Видели, понимали, что здесь убийство, и глазам не верили (Chekhov 1: 272);

An oppressive grief impended in the stuffy air when the shivering thick crowd of people surrounded Stepan and Mar’ya... The saw and understood that that was a murder, and they couldn’t believe their eyes [Trans. E. Z.].
In the doctor’s home the only witness of his family life is the maid, and she remains absolutely indifferent to the quarrels between the spouses:

Горничная, бледная, очень тонкая, с равнодушным лицом, нашла в корзине под столом несколько телеграмм и молча подала их доктору…(Chekhov 9: 92);

The maid – a pale, very slim girl with an indifferent expression – found several telegrams in the basket under the table, and handed them to the doctor without a word…(Chekhov, The Darling: And Other Stories 129).

Her reaction is especially remarkable, for here Chekhov mentions again “silence” as an expression of indifference and an active refusal to communicate.

Thus late Chekhov stories demonstrate significant differences from the early ones in their representation of the quarrel. While the mechanism of the quarrel remains the same (the quarrel is begun by means of surprise and because of unfulfilled expectations), and the concerns are again about the truth and communication, the conflict itself cannot be resolved because it has become internalized and locked within a single individual. Thus the conflict now has to be solved not between two sides, but inside one of them.

CONCLUSION

There is one general point of agreement among most of the literary critics who have written about Chekhov: they recognize him as an innovator that brought to Russian literature the modern short story. As Eikhenbaum writes in his article “About Chekhov” [“О Чехове”], this innovation lies even deeper:

Дело не только в том, что Чехов ввел в русскую литературу короткий рассказ, а в том, что эта краткость была принципиальной и противостояла традиционным жанрам романа и повести, как новый и более совершенный метод изображения действительности. Именно поэтому всё, написанное до Чехова, стало казаться несколько старомодным — не по темам или сюжетам, а по методу (Eikhenbaum 365);
It is not only that Chekhov introduced the genre of short-story to Russian literature, but the fact that this brevity was the key feature juxtaposed to the traditional genres of a novel and a novella, as a new and more advanced method of depiction of reality. That is why everything written before Chekhov began to look rather old-fashioned – not because of their themes or plots, but because of the method [Trans. E. Z.].

In this case it is important to recall the particularities of Chekhov’s short story, because in many ways they were developed in part by the use of the quarrel as both structural device and problem at the same time. The quarrel serves multiple purposes: it reveals certain features of the characters’ psychology, necessary for the plot of the story; it sharpens conflict; creates comic and grotesque effect to paint stereotypes, only to reject them to reveal the true attitude of characters towards each other. The genre of quarrel enabled Chekhov to express a large variety of motives in a very compact textual format. In Chekhov’s hands, the quarrel focused attention on communicative interaction between people by providing a key to major social and psychological concerns into the short-story, rather than longer novelistic form. I dare say that the use of the quarrel influenced the development of the new genre of Chekhovian short story.

The quarrel as form of interaction in the Chekhovian text also contributed to the development of late Realism and helped to create a contrast between Chekhov’s stories and the previous Russian literary tradition. Chekhov reworked some literary types, among which were happy and unhappy spouses, petty officers, landowners, as well as the one particularly analyzed in this paper, the Romantic extraordinary individual. Through the quarrel Chekhov created a parody of the Lermontovian type in his story “St. Peter’s Day” [“Петровдень”]. He endowed the appearance of uniqueness to a character, who in fact embodied only irritation and bad temper in the highest degree. MikheyEgorych is a
debunked Pechorin in Chekhov’s far more trivial world. Thus the use of the quarrel also contributed to the development of literary types and genre of parody.

A closer look at the Chekhovian quarrel also demonstrates that the division of quarrels in Chekhov’s texts into “family” and “social” ones is feasible because of the important differences that exist between these two groups. If family quarrels are harder to resolve because the connections between participants are much stronger, then social quarrels are more often a willingly chosen manner of social interaction, an instrument for fighting boredom. As Baron Von Zainitz says:

“Вам скучно и мне скучно… В ссорах и войнах время быстрее течёт, чем в мирное время” (Chekhov 1: 334);

“You are bored and I am bored… In quarrels and wars time flows faster than in peace-time” [Trans. E.Z.].

Social quarrels more often turn into squabbles and can even bring amusement and emotional relief to the participants.

The quarrel in Chekhovian stories is subordinated to the meaning of the text. It is an important device that reflects the author’s concerns, such as everyday morality and the problem of truth and cliché in models of social interaction. As a communicative act driven by anger and irritation, the quarrel makes communication more sincere. At the heart of such quarrels lies a sense of surprise or shock, which is a consequence of unfulfilled expectations.

The genre of quarrel also has particular meaning for Chekhov’s early short stories. While late ones give more space to character self-reflection and draws the conflicts deep inside the individual, making him or her endure each concern on his or her own, the early stories keep the conflict external: it is shared with people and it is loud (“St. Peter’s Day,”
“June, 29th,” “The Lady of the Manor,” “Artists’ Wives”). The conflicts in later stories find no compassion and remain in silence (“The Helpmate”). Silence and reflection are not common for the quarrel, and it is not surprising that Chekhov used this genre less in his late stories.

In conclusion it is possible to say that the Chekhovian quarrel is a multipurpose device which serves the aims of each story in which it is found; reveals the development of Chekhov’s writing style and the difference between his early and late stories; and finally also contributes to the development of broader literary concepts, such as genre (short-story, parody), literary type, and the broad literary currents (Realism).


--- *Mir Chekhova: vozniknovenie i utverzhdenie* [Chekhov’s World: Genesis and Affirmation]. M. [Moscow], 1986.


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