

**L.S. Semyonova** \*  
**I.N. Klimentko** \*\*

**ANTON CHEKHOV  
AND HIS LITERARY WORKS  
AS SOURCES OF STUDYING  
HUMANISM IN MEDICINE**

*SE «Dnipropetrovsk medical academy of Health Ministry of Ukraine»  
Department of Social Medicine Organization and Health Administration \**  
*Language training department \*\**

*V. Vernadsky str., 9, Dnipro, 49044, Ukraine*

*ГУ «Днепропетровская медицинская академия МЗ Украины»  
кафедра социальной медицины, организации и управления здравоохранения \*  
кафедра языковой подготовки \*\**

*ул. В. Вернадского, 9, Днепр, 49044, Украина*

*e-mail: dsma@dsma.dp.ua*

**Key words:** *Chekhov, humanism, literary works, story*

**Ключевые слова:** *Чехов, гуманизм, литературные произведения, рассказ*

**Abstract.** *Anton Chekov and his literary works as sources of studying humanism in medicine. Semyonova L.S., Klimentko I.N. This article is devoted to a well-known doctor and writer A.P. Chekhov. It shows the influence of his doctor's activity on the creative literary process and concept of humanism in his literary works.*

**Реферат.** *Антон Чехов и его литературные произведения как источник изучения гуманизма в медицине. Семенова Л.С., Клименко И.Н. Эта статья о враче и хорошо известном в мире писателе А.П. Чехове. Показано влияние его врачебной деятельности на литературное творчество, а также представление гуманизма в его литературных произведениях.*

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was not only a well-known in the world writer but he was a doctor.

This is a study of the influence of medicine and medical practice on Chekhov's writing, and humanism of his literary works.

Anton Chekhov was born on the 29th of January 1860, the third of the six survived children, in

Taganrog, a port on the Sea of Azov in the Yekaterinoslav Governorate. His father, Pavel Yegorovich Chekhov, the son of a former serf and his Ukrainian wife came from the village Vilkhovatka (Poltava Governorate) and ran a grocery store. A director of the parish choir, devout Orthodox.



The house in Taganrog where Anton Chekhov was born

Christian and physically abusive father, Pavel Chekhov has been seen by some historians as a model of hypocrisy described in many portraits of his son's novels. Chekhov's mother, Yevgeniya (Morozova), was an excellent story-teller, she entertained her children with tales about her travels all over Russia with a father, cloth-merchant. "Our talents we got from our father," Chekhov remembered, "but our soul - from our mother." In adulthood Chekhov criticized his brother's Alexander treatment of his wife and children by reminding him father's tyranny: "Let me ask you to recall that it was despotism and lying that ruined your mother's youth. Despotism and lying so mutilated our childhood that it was painful to think about it. Remember the horror and disgust we felt in those times when Father threw tantrum at dinner over too much salt put in the soup and called Mother a fool."



**Young Chekhov in 1882**

Chekhov attended the Greek School in Taganrog and the Taganrog Gymnasium (since renamed the Chekhov Gymnasium), where at the age of fifteen he was kept down for a year for failing an exam on Ancient Greek. He sang at the Greek Orthodox monastery in Taganrog and in the choir of his father. In a letter written in 1892, he used the word "suffering" to describe his childhood.

In 1879 Chekhov completed his schooling and joined his family in Moscow, having gained admission to the medical school at I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University.



**Portrait of young Chekhov in country clothes**

In 1884 Chekhov qualified as a physician, which he considered his principal profession though he made little money from it and treated the poor free of charge.

In 1887, exhausted from overwork and poor health, Chekhov took a trip to Ukraine, which delighted him with the beauty of the steppe. On his return, he began writing a novella-length short story "The Steppe," which he called "something rather odd and much too original," and which was eventually published. In the narrative Chekhov evokes a chaise journey across the steppe through the eyes of a young boy sent to live away from home, and his companions, a priest and a merchant. "The Steppe" has been called a "dictionary of Chekhov's poetics".

In 1887 Chekhov published a collection of short stories "Dusk" and in 1888 he was awarded with Pushkin Prize for it.

In 1890 Chekhov undertook an arduous journey by train, horse-drawn carriage, and river steamer to the Russian Far East and the katonga, or penal colony, on Sakhalin Island, where he spent three months interviewing thousands of convicts and settlers taking up census. The letters which Chekhov wrote during the two-and-a-half-month journey to Sakhalin are considered to be the best description of living on Sakhalin. His remarks to his sister

about Tomsk were: "Tomsk is a very dull town. To judge from the drunkards whose acquaintance I have made, and from the intellectual people who have come to the hotel to pay their respects to me, the inhabitants are very dull, too."

Later, the inhabitants of Tomsk repaid Chekhov by erecting the monument to him.

Chekhov witnessed much on Sakhalin that shocked and angered him, including floggings, embezzlement of supplies, and forced prostitution of women. He wrote, "There were times I felt that I saw before me the extreme limits of man's degradation." He was particularly moved by the plight of the children living in the penal colony with their parents. For example:

"On the steamer "Amur" which was going to Sakhalin, there was a convict who had murdered his wife and wore fetters on his legs. His daughter, a little girl of six, was with him. I noticed wherever the convict moved, the little girl scrambled after him, holding on to his fetters. At night the child slept with the convicts and soldiers all in a heap together."



**Portrait of Anton Chekhov**

Later, Chekhov concluded that charity was not the answer, the government had to finance humane treatment of the convicts. He inspected sanitary condition of the hospitals and medical care rendered to children. His findings were published in 1893 and 1894 as "Sakhalin Island", a work of social science, not literature, that is worthy and informative rather

than brilliant [5]. Chekhov found literary expression for the "Hell of Sakhalin" in his short story "The Murder". In this story Chekhov described hard life of people on the island Sakhalin.



**Monument to Anton Chekhov  
in Alexandrovsk-Sakhalinsky**

In 1892 Chekhov bought a small country estate of Melikhovo, about forty miles south from Moscow, where he lived with his family until 1899. "It's nice to be a lord," he joked to his friend Ivan Leontyev (who wrote humorous pieces under the pseudonym Shcheglov), but he took his responsibilities as a landlord seriously and soon made himself useful to the local peasants.

As well as rendering relief for victims of the famine and cholera outbreaks of 1892, he built three schools, a fire station, and a clinic, and made charitable donations for medical services to peasants in the outskirts of the village, despite frequent recurrences of his tuberculosis.

Mikhail Chekhov, a member of the household at Melikhovo, described the extent of his brother's medical commitments:

"From the first day that Chekhov moved to Melikhovo, the sick began flocking to him from twenty miles around. They came on foot or were brought in carts, and often he was fetched to patients at a far distance. Sometimes since early morning peasant women and children were standing before his door waiting."

Chekhov's expenditure on drugs was considerable, but the greatest cost was making journeys of several hours to visit the sick, which reduced his time for writing. However, Chekhov's work as a doctor enriched his writing because he delivered medical care all strata of society: on the one hand he described unhealthy living conditions of the pea-

sants, for example a short story "Peasants". On the other hand Chekhov visited the upper classes as well. In spite of wealth, he considered that money not always bring health and happiness. He described the same end of life of the poor and the riches: the same ugly bodies, physical helplessness and disgusting death.



**Melikhovo, now a museum**

In 1894, Chekhov began writing his play "The Seagull" in a lodge which he had built in the orchard at Melikhovo. In two years since he had moved to the estate, he had refurbished the house, followed the plow, planting many trees, which he looked after as though they were his children.

The first night of "The Seagull" in the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1896 was a fiasco. But the play so impressed the theatre director Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko that he convinced his colleague Konstantin Stanislavski to make a new production for the innovative Moscow Art Theatre in 1898. Stanislavski's attention to psychological realism helped Chekhov to restore interest in playwriting. The Art Theatre commissioned more plays to Chekhov and the next year staged "Uncle Vanya", which Chekhov had completed in 1896. In March 1897, Chekhov suffered a major hemorrhage of the lungs during his

visit to Moscow. With great difficulty he was persuaded to be admitted to the clinic where doctors diagnosed tuberculosis of the upper parts of his lungs.

After his father's death in 1898, Chekhov bought a plot of land at the outskirts of Yalta and built a villa into which he moved with his mother and sister the following year. Though he planted trees and flowers, kept dogs and tamed cranes and received guests such as Leo Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky, Chekhov always enjoyed travelling to Moscow and abroad. In Yalta he completed two plays for the Art Theatre "The Three Sisters" and "The Cherry Orchard".

On 25<sup>th</sup> May 1901 Chekhov married an actress Olga Knipper,

In May 1904, Chekhov was terminally ill with tuberculosis. Mikhail Chekhov recalled that "everyone who saw him secretly thought the end was not

far off, but the nearer [he] was to the end, the less he seemed to realize it." On the 3rd of June, he left for the German spa town of Badenweiler with his wife Olga, from where he wrote outwardly jovial letters to his sister Masha, describing the food and surroundings, and assuring her and his mother that he was getting better. In his last letter, he complained of the way German women dressed [1].

Despite that Chekhov was an optimist and full of the joy of living, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July of that year he died at the age of 44.

He insisted on the human nature of a medical profession, urging doctors to careful and patient treatment of the sick people. In many respects thanks to A.P. Chekhov, literary type of a cultural doctor, a doctor-humanist appeared in the world literature.

Such literary works as "The Doctor's Visit", "The Misery" could be written not only by the writing doctor, but by a doctor who is well-informed about the human soul and can describe the best characters [9].

In the story "Typhus" A.P. Chekhov described a portrait of a patient and a kind doctor who didn't leave a sick man at hard time and saved his life [8].

In the story "Ward № 6" A.P. Chekhov considered the problem of improvement of medical care to rural population, the advancement of quality of medical care for the poor, humane treatment of mentally ill patients [8].

The hero of Chekhov's story "Attack" gained mental balance and rest thanks to a delicate, responsive doctor [7].

Problems of mental disorders and timely given medical care were described by Chekhov in the story "The Black Monk" [8].

Medicine not always can save people's lives. In the story "Doctor" A.P. Chekhov described humane feelings of a doctor who treated a hopelessly ill boy. Doctor considered that boy to be his own son [6].

A big sorrow came into the family of the doctor Kirilov - his only son died (the story "Enemies"). The same evening the doctor fulfilling his duty went to save the life of another person [8].

Many literary personages are devoted to doctors, their hard and dangerous work.

Doctor Dymov (the story "Jumper") was a talented and respected person, he always treated his patients selflessly. Having saved the life of a seriously ill boy he got infected with severe disease which led to his death [8].

The image of an honest, selfless doctor who had not been on leave for decades was described by Chekhov in his story "Princess" [8].

Medical profession requires striking a chord with any person. Such a personage of a kind, merry doctor is presented in the story "Fugitive" [6].

A man has to work heartily, must be useful for the society. This idea was described by Chekhov in his story "A Boring Story". A well known doctor, scientist, professor knew that because of a grave disease he would close his days soon. He tried to be active till the end of his life, to benefit people [8].

Doctor Sobolev (the story "Wife") told that he had been working hard during 10 years but sometimes he didn't have money to buy tobacco. He said that society had to be humane with respect to poor people and to help them more [4].

In the play "Uncle Vanya" doctor Astrov tells that he has been working hard from the morning till the evening without day-offs. Even at night he could be called in. He told about tight situation of the poor, about spread of epidemics among them [3].

As example of the honest, hard-working, humane doctor was doctor in Chekhov's story "Ionych".

Poor working conditions were the causes of many diseases. In the story "The case from the practice" Doctor Korolyov named that the living and working conditions of factory workers were unhealthy. He considered the problem of humane attitude to working people [2].

Chekhov's literary works have become sources of the description of humanism in medicine. In these works the author described unforgettable portraits of the skilled doctors who were the great humanitarians as well. Problems of humanism in medicine are discussed at the lessons on History of Medicine and Language Training. We consider it to be of great importance for the moral education of medical students as future doctors.

## REFERENCES

1. Anton Chekhov [Internet]. Available from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Chekhov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Chekhov)
2. Chekhov AP. [Selected compositions]. Moskva, Khudozhestvennaya literatura. 1988;639. Russian.
3. Chekhov AP. [Tales, plays ]. Moskva, Publishing house "Pravda". 1987;460. Russian.

4. Chekhov AP. [Complete collections of compositions in 30 Volumes]. Moskva, Nauka, 1987;7:730. Russian.
5. Chekhov AP. [Complete collections of compositions in 30 Volumes]. Moskva, Nauka, 1987;14-15:925. Russian.

6. Chekhov AP. [Collection of compositions: in 12 Volumes]. Moskva Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1962;5:535 Russian.

7. Chekhov AP. [Collection of compositions: in 12 Volumes]. Moskva, Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1962;6:526. Russian.

8. Chekhov AP. [Compositions: in 2 volumes]. Moskva, Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1982;1:417. Russian.

9. Reyholds R, Stone G, Nixon L, Wear D. [On doctoring]. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1995;448.

### СПИСОК ЛІТЕРАТУРИ

1. Антон Чехов [electronic resource]. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Chekhov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Chekhov)

2. Чехов А.П. Избранные сочинения. – Москва: Худож. лит., 1988. – 639 с.

3. Чехов А.П. Повести, пьесы. – Москва: Изд-во «Правда», 1987. – 460 с.

4. Чехов А.П. Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 т. Т 7. – Москва: Наука, 1987. – 730 с.

5. Чехов А.П. Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 т. Т 14-15. – Москва: Наука, 1987. – 925 с.

6. Чехов А.П. Собрание сочинений: в 12 т. Т. 5. – Москва: Худож. лит., 1962. – 535 с.

7. Чехов А.П. Сочинения: в 2-х т. Т 1. – Москва: Худож. лит., 1982. – 417с.

8. Чехов А.П. Собрание сочинений: в 12 т. Т. 6. – Москва: Худож. лит., 1962. – 526 с.

9. On doctoring / R. Reyholds, G. Stone, L.C. Nixon, D.Wear. - New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995. – 448 p.

Стаття надійшла до редакції  
28.12.2017

