

## Folklore roots of images in Chekhov's poetics: "The Steppe" and "The Black Monk"

Raíces folclóricas de las imágenes en la poética de Chéjov: "The Steppe" y "The Black Monk"

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### ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of A.P. Chekhov's works in the context of folklore tradition. The topic itself is interesting and productive from the viewpoint of the folklore tradition manifestation in the work of the classic, since Chekhov is often considered a "non-folkloric" writer. More recently, the theme "Chekhov and folklore" began being referred by researchers. The article raises the question about various folklorism forms in poetics, stylizations and borrowings, and latent folklorism forms. The object of research is a later work, the novella "Steppe". The subject of the article is folklorism principles in poetics. The novella is considered in the paradigm with the plot of another later work of the writer - the story "The Black Monk". Also it draws parallels with S. A. Yesenin poems "The Black Man" and the poem of V. Khlebnikov "The Stone Woman" revealing common "folklore" elements in all the texts. Historical-literary, typological analysis methods and folkloristic commentary on the text are leading approaches to the study of this problem. This leads to the following results: figurative system folklore foundations identification in the story makes it possible to raise the question of ontological principle in Chekhov's poetics, bringing the reader and the researcher to ontological narrative scene, despite the fact that the writer was often perceived as a portrayer of ordinary life.

**Keywords:** Chekhov, folklore, metaphysics, stories "The Steppe" and "The Black Monk", poetics.

### RESUMEN

El artículo está dedicado al estudio de las obras de A.P. Chekhov en el contexto de la tradición folclórica. El tema en sí es interesante y productivo desde el punto de vista de la manifestación de la tradición folclórica en el trabajo del clásico, ya que Chekhov es a menudo considerado un escritor «no folklórico». Más recientemente, el tema «Chekhov y el folklore» comenzó a ser referido por los investigadores. El artículo plantea la cuestión sobre varias formas de folclorismo en poética, estilizaciones y préstamos, y formas folclóricas latentes. El objeto de investigación es un trabajo posterior, la novela "Steppe". El tema del artículo son los principios del folclorismo en poética. La novela se considera en el paradigma con la trama de otro trabajo posterior del escritor: la historia «The Black Monk». También traza paralelos con S. El poema de Yesenin "The Black Monk" y el poema de V. Khlebnikov "The Stone Woman" que revela elementos comunes del «folklore» en todos los textos. Los métodos de análisis histórico-literarios, tipológicos y los comentarios folclóricos sobre el texto son enfoques principales para el estudio de este problema. Esto lleva a los siguientes resultados: la identificación de los fundamentos del sistema figurativo del folklore en la historia hace posible plantear la cuestión del principio ontológico en la poética de Chéjov, llevando al lector y al investigador a la escena narrativa ontológica, a pesar de que el escritor a menudo se percibía como un retratador de la vida ordinaria.

**Palabras clave:** Chéjov, folklore, metafísica, cuentos "La estepa" y "El monje negro", poética.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are no evidence of any direct impact of folklore and myth on the poetics, figurative system of A.P. Chekhov's works, but this does not prevent the researches from posing "Chekhov and folklore" question, which began to worry researchers in the 1930s-1940s. Let us mention the method that we apply analyzing the classical texts of Russian literature. Literature can involve different types of folklorism. Of course, it is the most convenient to study the external forms of folklorism, stylization, borrowings, direct orientations, folklore motifs sources of one or another writer, but there are other forms of folklorism. The latter are usually called internal (A. A. Gorelov), latent (A. L. Nalepin), intuitive (R. M. Kovalev). It seems that the hidden forms of folklore tradition penetration are relevant to Chekhov's work. The history of Chekhovian folklorism study shows that the researchers considered mainly the external forms: folklore and ethnographic elements, pronounced in poetics, or archetypal structures associated with symbolic overtones. Of course, a number of works attempts to examine a specific folklore motif functions in the work (Rogovskaya, 1974), but mainly early stories were the research object (Tumilevich, 1978), since they illustrate the connection between literature and folklore the most obviously. In contemporary articles and dissertations literary scholars also try to refer, first of all, to folklore texts, to identify the books the writer read (Terekhova, 2002).

In these works, Chekhov's works were analyzed from the point of view of mythopoetics and folklorism (less often) that allows raising the question of the relevance of the topic. In addition, much attention was paid either to early stories, since they illustrate the connection with folklore the most obviously, or the plays filled with symbolic meaning, to which the poetic symbolists turned their attention (A. Bely, F. Sologub). Although, for the sake of justice, it is worth noting that the step towards the *comprehensive* understanding of folklore as applicable to Chekhov's works on the part of researchers has still been made – an example of this is an article of M. Ch. Larionova (Larionova, 2006). Mythopoetics was often given the first place, but, for example, the work of N.I. Ishuk-Fadeeva also applies to systematic approach: the researcher refers to ritual tradition, analyzing the archetypal structures of "The Seagull" (Ishchuk-Fadeeva, 2001). In our chapter, the later Chekhov's novels are considered in the context of folklore tradition, manifested mainly latently that is of particular interest.

The question of folklorism in Chekhov's "The Steppe" has already been raised. An article of D.N. Medrish compares this complex Chekhov's work with the composition of a lyric song having an open ending at the level of poetics, in sacral-ritual discourse (Medrish, 1978). But the essence of this ending (in contrast to the classical ones, which are more typical) consists in the *ritual transformation of the character*, who must grow into himself but new one. After traveling to the steppe Yegorushka, apparently, should be initiated to start a new life. M.Ch. Larionova also paid attention to the transitional ritual element of the novella drew having compared the locus of the steppe with the place of "temporary death", since the steppe for the Russian man and Chekhovian characters is the place of "physical and spiritual pilgrimage, formation, ordering, testing, liberation from the past and preparation for the present" (Larionova, 2009).

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This is what Chekhov himself wrote about his work, "I took a steppe, which has long been remained undescribed. Each separate chapter is a story ... I tried to write them so that they have general smell and general tone..." (Chekhov, 1977). This judgment, the intention expressed in the letters to D.V. Grigorovich, states one of the basic principles of poetics – the writer's immanent perception of his own works. The third and fourth part of the novella make us think about the tradition in which Chekhov continues to create: the description of the steppe itself, of people described so fantastically and symbolically that the steppe performs the function of a special *topic*, that is, reality on the verge of existential world, "Broad shadows move across the plain, like clouds across the sky and in the inconceivable distance, if you look long and intently at it, misty, monstrous shapes rise up and huddle against each other... It is rather uncanny" (Chekhov, 1977) (translated by C. Garnett); "You go and suddenly see a *silhouette, similar to a monk* in front of the road; he does not move, he waits and holds something... Is he a robber? The figure is approaching, growing, so she came up to the chaise, and you see that *this is not a man, but a lonely bush or a big stone*" (Chekhov, 1977) – Yegorushka is in a borderline state, he comprehends the reality in a different way than Kuzmichov, Moisei Moiseich and others. After all, it is the boy's imagination to which both the "The Black Monk" and "stone women" are directed. But a legitimate question arises, "Why did Chekhov use exactly these comparisons? Can they be conditioned by cultural paradigms and its entire creative laboratory?". Curiously enough, but we find the answers to these questions in the figurative system of the poets of the Silver Age. In this case, we will analyze in detail some fragments of the novella "The Steppe", story "The Black Monk" and Khlebnikov's poem "The Stone Woman".

A. T. Khlebnikov had a fine appreciation of Chekhov's literature, especially his poetics (Loshchilov, 1999), his poems directly refer to Chekhov's stories, they feature a commonality of the image that may have been found by the writers' "gut feeling" (a detailed analysis of the Khlebnikov's poem "The Dog Waves its Tail, Barks", in which the reminiscence to the works and personality of Chekhov is hidden, is presented in the article by I. E. Loshchilov). In this context, Balmont's remark about Chekhov seems to be insightful, "...over decades Chekhov's *spiritual forethought* became more visible and charming, it gains more and more strength of virtuous magic" (Balmont, 2007). If to refer to the two well-known texts, Chekhov's "The Steppe", which expresses the main principles of his poetics, and to Khlebnikov's poem "The Stone Woman", we will see that the thing that Chekhov perceived as a mere detail, an element of the steppe landscape (let us denote it so), Khlebnikov considered the core for the figurative system of the poem. In the cognominial poem of Khlebnikov the main character is a stone woman. What is the reason for that? Let us turn to an ethnographic commentary, without which it is difficult to understand the poet's works at all. Khlebnikov, who certainly knew myths and folklore, borrowed certain images from ancient culture, but he always created his own

world, his own myth (Vykhodtsev, 1983). Analyzing the so-called “mythological poems” of Khlebnikov researchers often come to the conclusion that this is a single but not finished “epic poem” (D. Mirsky). The artistic fabric of the poem “The Stone Woman” is fastened by the image of a stone maiden, an idol that connects two realities, one of which is *cosmic*, leading to eternity (combining lyric and epic), and the second one is vernacular, profane:

The stone women of the fields  
are tales told in books of stone.  
Ancient cults erected you.  
You stretch to heaven and back again.  
.....  
A bent old man, his twisted stick,  
the stillness of a magic spell (Khlebnikov, 1986) (translated by Paul Schmidt).

The chronotope is “stillness” and steppe; the opening of the space and the disappearance of the character are followed by the description of the “stone woman”, but the question which, at first sight, does not comply with the artistic fabric of the text, arises:

I expect to be shot. Every day.  
But why? For what? After all, I have loved all creation,  
and spent my childhood here in the steppe,  
amid plume-grass and stones (Khlebnikov, 1986) (translated by Paul Schmidt).

From these lines, the images of the old man and the virgin begin to become clear. The old man is a traveler who aspires to heaven:

What does the child want in the stillness  
that overlies this silver murmur?  
Cry because the Milky Way isn't mine? (Khlebnikov, 1986) (translated by Paul Schmidt).

What is the “stone figure” in Chekhov’s novella “The Steppe” – just a road mark or it is culturally connected with Polovtsian sculptures, sacrificial rituals? If in Khlebnikov’s poetics, which suited for a synthesis of “Balkan and Sarmatian artistic thought” (Khlebnikov, 1986) this is so, is it characteristic of Chekhov’s art system, while many researchers even “deny” his folklore tradition? (Emelyanov, 1978) “A silent old barrow or a *stone figure* put up *God knows when and by whom*, a nightbird floats noiselessly over the earth, the stories of some old nurse from the steppe, and all the things you have managed to see and treasure in your soul come back to your mind (Chekhov, 1977)” – in this case the stone figure is a sort of a “landmark” for Egorushka, who observes the surrounding reality and associates it with “the stories of some old nurse from the steppe”. These parallels suggest that the both masters created this image involuntarily, probably, it can be said that the archetype is associated with the *complex of burial rituals*. This is indicated, first of all, by the fact that the stone figure performed in the Slavic tradition was a sort of totem-conductor for the spirits-ancestors, who came to shamans, wizards and cultural characters.

In another Khlebnikov’s poem under the characteristic title “Shaman and Venus”, the shaman comes to the cave of Venus, but the action is developing on it was / it was not verge. What stands out, is that the ritually similar situation is depicted in Pushkin’s “The tale of the Golden Cockerel”<sup>1</sup>. The subject of the poem “The Stone Woman” as well as of the poem “Shaman and Venus” is eastern philosophical. The actions take place “in the South Russian nature” (Alfonsov, 1982) (Khlebnikov uses archetypes and plots inherent in the East and stylizes them under the Slavic tradition). Moreover, if to talk about receptions and typologies in Chekhov’s works of the 20th century, it should be noted that the difficult and mysterious Yesenin’s poem “The Black Man” is often compared with the story “The Black Monk” and it seems to be reasonable, but in this case the most important thing is the whole immanent perception of Chekhov’s works, which make us wonder whether two late complex stories “The Steppe” and “The Black Monk” were conceived within the framework of a single story. And here is why. Let us pay attention only to some details in the three texts, the plot of the character’s encounter with the black man / monk / lady (the latter occurs at Moisei Moiseich’s inn). Let us start with a fragment of Esenin’s poem, which is often unambiguously interpreted by researchers. The second part of the poem is notable for its sound pattern:

Somewhere a night bird,  
Ill-omened, is sobbing.

—  
1 In Pushkin’s fairy tale:  
With the chariot fell Dadon-  
Gasped again, - And he died.  
A the queen suddenly disappeared,  
As if at all had happened.  
In Khlebnikov’s poem:  
And with a blessing smile  
She disappears by a gentle mistake

## The wooden riders

Scatter hoofbeats (Yesenin, 1997) (translated by Geoffrey Hurley).

From the viewpoint of folkloric tradition, the ritual behavior of ancestral spirits visiting the character with the purpose of opening the veil to another world is revealed (for more details about fainting, phenomena of *volocheb-nichestvo* (spring round of houses with majestic and spellbound songs, an ancient rite of farm cycle, performed before the beginning of sowing, held usually on the evening of Easter Sunday, sometimes on the eve or on Monday), buffoonery, see Z.I. Vlasova "Skomorokhs and folklore"<sup>2</sup>). The black man in Yesenin's poem visits the patient in the night, when "a night ill-omened bird is calling" and "the wooden riders scatter hoofbeats", laughing at their chosen one. By Chekhov, Yegorushka feels the presence of some strange bird in the house of Moisey Moiseich, "Yegorushka felt a draught of cold air, and it seemed to him as though some *big black bird had* passed by him and had fluttered its wings close in his face" (Chekhov, 1977) (translated by C. Garnett). How to explain "such" coincidences in the plot? Of course, one could ignore this detail by mistaking all this only for the boy's "fantasies" (often mentioned by the researcher of Chekhov's works), but here arises some archetypal model associated with the cult of woman, with a reference to ritualistic reality through initiatory sleep, sleepy soul creativity, which happens to Yegorushka in reality. In addition to the basic coincidences, consisting in the "appearance" of the nightbird, sleepy state of the character, the man in black, at the very time of day, we are interested in the metaphysical meaning of the situation, expressed in a laughing opening – Solomon's ominous laughter and the countess's smile.

We see that the boy overcomes cheerful chaos, meets a beautiful lady – and all this occurs in the steppe, in the "plain space". This is bound to lead us to the idea that Chekhov's situation is not accidental, that this is a natural sign of poetics. In the story "The Black Monk", the main character Kovrin meets The Black Monk outside the garden, at the exit, "Letting Tanya go back to her visitors, he went out of the house and, lost in meditation, walked by the flower beds. The sun was already setting. The flowers, having just been watered, gave forth a damp, *irritating fragrance*" (Chekhov, 1977). The garden smells of not the same flavors as the first time, it irritates Kovrin, but the new space where he finds himself gives the character a sense of freedom and elbow-room, and this space is a field, "Before him *lay a wide field* covered with young rye, not yet in blossom<...> "How *open, how free, how still is here!*" Thought Kovrin, walking along the path. "And it feels as though all the whole were watching me, hiding and waiting for me to understand it..." (Chekhov, 1977). It is in this topos where miracles happen to Kovrin, like Yegorushka from the novella "The Steppe" the character enters into a natural-philosophical dialogue, "... all the *whole world were watching me*, hiding and waiting for me to understand it..." (Chekhov, 1977). In addition, let us pay attention to the fact that nature also interacts with Kovrin, "But then waves began running across the rye, and a light evening *breeze softly touched his uncovered head*" (Chekhov, 1977), in "The Steppe", "*Something warm touched Yegorushkina's spine*, the streak of light, stealing up from behind, darted between the chaise and the horses <...>" (Chekhov, 1977). Let us recall that Yegorushka meets mysterious figures in the steppe: Solomon, lady in black, finally, he grows up in the steppe as a cultural character. As for Kovrin, he meets The Black Monk in the field (the structure of the space field model / only steppe). It is characteristic that the image of The Black Monk was at first a sort of blurred, it is not clear, "At once a murmur rose from the grass and last year's dry herbage, the dust curled in spiral eddies over the road, raced over the steppe, and crying with it straws, dragon flies and feathers, rose up in a whirling black column towards the sky and darkened the sun. <...> (Chekhov, 1977), in "The Steppe", a scene in the house of Moses Moiseich, "*In the middle of the room there really was standing an Excellency*, in the form of a young plump and very beautiful woman in a *black dress* and a straw hat. Before Yegorushka had time to examine her features, the image of solitary graceful poplar he had seen the day on the hill for some reason came into his mind" (Chekhov, 1977).

The lady arose quite unexpectedly (as we judge also by the reaction of Moisey Moiseich, who appeared to no longer notice "neither Kuzmichev nor Father Christopher" (Chekhov, 1977) when the countess appeared), she was moving towards the boy to kiss him, "She was standing in the middle of the room and watched him go out, *smiling at him and nodding her head in a friendly way*" (Chekhov, 1977), we note that The Black Monk also moves towards Kovrin, "<...> moving straight to Kovrin, and the nearer it came, the smaller and the more distinct it was" (Chekhov, 1977). The Black Monk, like a lady in black, came just for Kovrin, it was he Kovrin was smiling at, like the Countess, giving kisses and a smile to Yegorushka, "After he had floated twenty feet beyond him, he looked round at Kovrin and *nodded to him with a friendly but sly smile*" (Chekhov, 1977). We can assume that Yegorushka and Kovrin turned to be in one position, as evidenced by the archetypal structure of the plot: the both characters meet with important people in the open space (field / steppe), while being in a "dozing", sick state, enter into dialogues with these people, and, after all, these people are different from all other characters – the lady in black and The Black Monk. In this context, it seems necessary to refer to the unusual landscape of the Steppe in general. L. P. Gromov draws attention to the importance of the Chekhovian steppe image, the essence of which can be understood only by revealing "not only the features of the Chekhovian landscape, but all the ideological and symbolic associations that the Chekhov steppe elicits to the thoughtful reader. The depth of the "inner content" of the novella "The Steppe" consists in the very fact that the pictures of steppe nature are saturated with a great social and philosophical content" (Gromov, 1951).

<sup>2</sup> According to folk beliefs, the souls of ancestors fly inaudibly, invisibly, leave no traces letting know about their appearance only by the creaking of steps or the appearance of a bird in the room". In folklore, this is due to the phenomenon of "fainting", for a time the soul leaves the body and wanders through the other world in order to cognize it, or a person is visited by spirits who want to inform him about something, if it's a ritual, then information from "the other world" is sacred.

### 3. RESULTS

The architectonics of Chekhov's works, both plays, stories and novels, is due in many respects to the rhythm of a special organization. Here researchers, speaking of musicality, associate this, on the one hand, with the writer's biography – the significance of music in Chekhov's life and works (I. Eiges, E.B. Balabanovich), on the other hand, musicality is regarded as a special poetry (N.Ya. Berkovsky, T.K. Shah-Azizov). "Musicality" was in the focus of not only literary works' attention, but, what is especially important, within composers' sight. Thus, D. Shostakovich in his time defined the story "The Black Monk", as a special "sonata form" (Fortunatov, 1974). Finally, the literary critics, comparing the novella "The Steppe" with its adaptation, note that in the film it was possible to recreate the true nature of the musical in Chekhov's poetics, "Thus, the director remarkably found an equivalent for the musical motif of the quiet song" (Mikhailova, 2009). Theater and cinema caught the most characteristic sign of Chekhov's poetics – rhythm, "underwater current", not perceived by symbolists. Is not this the discovery of Chekhov, who predicted many of the poetics principles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and even outstripped his time? It is interesting to regard a thesis stated in the works of A.N. Panamareva on the connection of Chekhov's musicality with the ontological views of the writer himself. Not only Chekhov's dramas which have already been studied in rather intermediate *aspect* are indicative namely from these perspectives but also his novels, especially "The Steppe", around which there have always been philological discussions. "A.M. Linin, who studied Chekhov's work on "The Steppe", came to such a convincing conclusion, "Sincere lyricism, pervasive emotionality of descriptions, "warm" and gentle words and subtle musical tectonics of the phrase make "The Steppe" an artistically harmonious poetic composition. The way Chekhov selected the words, which are more accurate and harmonizing with the general lyric tone of the description is extremely illustrative" (Gromov, 1951). The lyricism of "The Steppe" was expressed in a special musicality, manifested in style. "Apparently, Chekhov meant namely this feature, when he named his "happiness" "a quasi-symphony", and when he said that reading "The Steppe" we find "prose poems" (Gromov, 1951). "The Steppe" is interesting both for its special rhythm and for its "inner plot", according to the remark of the famous folklorist, D.N. Medrish, connected partly with a composition, reminiscent of the lyric song architectonics. In the article "The plot situation in the Russian folk lyric poetry and in the works of Anton Chekhov" Medrish notes the "neo-contour" of composition in the lyric song and the Chekhov's novella (Medrish, 1978), and therefore, with such a statement of the question, it is also possible to talk of Chekhovian folklorism of a special type (internal folklorism) and the ontological views of the author.

### 4. DISCUSSIONS

In view of all the above, we can admit an unexpected, at first glance, parallel with the works of "new peasant poets" and in particular, with S.A. Yesenin – both at figurative and ideological levels. As noted by a number of researchers of "new peasant poetry", the poets of this direction contrasted the "iron" with the onslaught of civilization, an organized cosmos, at the heart of which lies feminine demiurgic principle – these are the Mother Earth, the Great Goddess herself, the Mother of all beings in her various manifestations (Dementiev, 1984). "A bloody connection with the world of nature and oral creativity, adherence to myth, fairy tale, determined the meaning and "sound" of the new peasant lyric poetry and epic", writes L. K. Shvetsova (Shvetsova, 1994). It seems that this involvement in the folk element, in the natural-philosophical language, was expressed by Chekhov, especially in his anthropological notions. The principles of Chekhov's folklorism can be understood through the language of artistic space, which is organized through the collision of two types of locus, closed and open, sacral, magical and common ones, and, accordingly, "The Steppe" characters are also opposed to each other. Chekhovian folklorism appears at the level of poetics implicitly.

Chekhovian folklorism is somewhat different, hidden – cosmism, the unity of man with nature, grows out of artistic space model, the architectonics of which shows the structure of the characters division into "luminal" and initiated into sacred knowledge. Proceeding from the idea of Cosmosophy about Russia and from the model of "plain space" put forward by G.D. Gachev, we can talk about the presence of such a model in Chekhov's "The Steppe". Another problem is the problem of memory, "A Russian person *likes to remember*, but does not like to live ..." (Chekhov, 1977). Memory in this case is sacral, ritual, because it is connected with the "fleeing distance", which characterizes the Cosmos of Russia, for which Egorushka aspires, "Yegorushka floated after the flying *distance*" (Chekhov, 1977). Drawing a parallel to Yesenin's work, we note that the space of his poems is a flat space, ornamental, embodying national *idea* ("Feather-grass sleeps...", "The golden grove" and many others, where the model of the horizontal space is preserved). Chekhov's cosmos is also oriented towards this model. Egorushka is fascinated by distance, he sees a different world. As the researchers note, Yegorushka is "a mediator between the real world, cruel and harsh, and the hidden, bright Chekhovian ideal of life" (Silantieva, 1981). At the time of initiation to the higher, Yesenin's lyric character was "enchanted by the distance":

I see off all the men  
For whom I fell sorry  
Gazing ever onerously  
Into *distance smitten*.

(Yesenin, 1997)

All the symbols in "The Steppe" – mill, water, stars – accompany Egorushka and no one else. I. N. Sukhikh, referring to the chronotope in Chekhov's works, notes, "Usually the Chekhovian characters live side by side, but they cannot break social and psychological partitions, enter into full contact" (Sukhikh, 1987), hence they are also spatially limited. In "The Steppe" works the system of open and closed locus, which in the ritual situation allows some characters "to rise above the reality", as in a lyric song or leaves them in a liminal state. Yegorushka, as a cultural character, "was growing" throughout the journey, comprehending the symbols given to him by nature. From the very beginning, the natural language of the *four elements manifests* itself in the text: <earth>, <water>, <air>, <fire>. Yegorushka feels the natural forces, "something warm touched Yegorushkina's spine, the streak of light, stealing up from behind, darted between the chaise and the horses" <...> (Chekhov, 1977) "the action of "fire", which infects with its energy the air as well, "the air was stagnant and depressing!" (Chekhov, 1977).

The characters of "The Steppe" are in a closed, strictly limited space – the earth, "stretched out", endless, bottomless sky and hills that do not allow people to go beyond this. In the novella there are two chronotopes:

The world of "the living" (there are much less of them) and the world of memories, of the past, the world of "the dead". So all the living things (they always beckon, call Egorushka) is moving in a certain direction

To the *left*, "The chaise drove straight on, while the windmill, for some reason, began retreating to the left" (Chekhov, 1977); water "fell to the ground and <...> flowed swiftly away to the left" (Chekhov, 1977), and when most of the events have already happened, we again notice, "the moon rises to the left" (Chekhov, 1977). The motion vector of this world is at odds with the movement of the chaise, which so far did not "decide" where to go, "as though it (chaise) was going backwards and not forwards" (Chekhov, 1977), although the external goal is set – Kuzmichov and Father Christopher are going to sell wool. Turner calls such a state "liminality", that is, the object that resides in it is "half and halfer", they are neither here, nor there; they are in the gap between the positions" (Turner, 1983). Yegorushka himself is "from the other world" (Chekhov, 1977), as boy Tit regards him. Here we will make a small digression and note that Yegorushka meets Tit when hears a song that comes from the steppe. This is an important detail for understanding the poetics of Chekhov, the detail, which confirms and justifies in many respects the typology Chekhov - Yesenin, moreover, speaks of Chekhov's rootedness in the Russian national tradition. The song that the woman sings is only accessible to Yegorushka's consciousness, it seems to connect him with another reality, "The song was subdued, dreary and melancholy, like a dirge, and hardly audible, and seemed to come first from the right, then from the left, then from above, and then from underground, as though an unseen spirit were hovering over the steppe and singing" (Chekhov, 1977). It reminds of an excerpt from Pushkin's Captain's Daughter, which speaks of the meaning of the song heard by the character, "I cannot describe the impression this popular song of the gibbet made upon me, sung as it was by people who, all of them, were destined, sooner or later, to grace it. Their sombre faces, their sonorous voices, and melancholy expression, which they gave to a text already full of meaning – all this produced in me a sort of poetical shudder" (Pushkin, 1977-1979) (translated by F. Hollinger).

It is no coincidence that we mentioned namely this excerpt from Pushkin, since it is this fragment that shows the true meaning of song as a cultural phenomenon, shows the effect produced on the listener – "poetical shudder". According to the observation of an ethnographer and folklorist P. G. Bogatyrev, it is these songs that strike "poetical shudder" associated with ritualism show us the motif of the death-wedding, common in Slavic lyric-epic and lyric songs (Bogatyrev, 2006). The resurrection, calling of the deceased is possible within the framework of obit, this is interpreted by folklorists in different ways, but the main thing in this sacred act is the ritual situation itself, the participants of which become involved in another reality. The action is accompanied by lamentations aimed at purifying the character through crying, a kind of catharsis. Returning to the Chekhov's situation, Yegorushka as the boy Tit sees him, the association with the "world of the dead", the most important thing in this context is the complete perception of symbols. Yegorushka, as "someone who came from the other world", mournful and resembling crying song, constant turning to the world of the deceased – Egorushka's memories of his grandmother, the symbol of cross, blossoming trees – all this indicates the formation of a ritual situation in the novella that is associated with funerary ritualism. The peculiarity of Chekhov's folklorism consists in the fact that Chekhov enters into a dispute with folklore, as a result Yegorushka acts as a sort of "deceased", hears crying and lamentations, but, apparently, Chekhov did it deliberately. The reader discovers an inverted reality, in which the character grows, rises above himself, "the situation to grow into". The song allows the character to be reborn. Let us also say that some researchers of "The Steppe" note that the main feature of the novella is not a series of events, but lyric intonation, as the main means of "revealing a positive, asserting opening" (Silantieva, 1981). Linguistic researches and N. M. Fortunatov's remarks on the structure of Chekhov's prose, which the scientist defines as a structure "extralinguistic by its nature" are indicative (Fortunatov, 1974). Of course, the reader does not know what was the song of that woman, which Yegorushka heard, but Chekhov emphasizes that it was like crying, "The song was subdued, dreary and melancholy, *like a dirge* ..." (Chekhov, 1977), then the boy "began to fancy that the grass was singing" (Chekhov, 1977) about his death – a death motive; and then he saw that it was a woman who was singing and sowing something, "Near the furthest hut in the hamlet stood a peasant woman in a short petticoat, with long thin legs like a heron. She was sowing something. A white dust floated languidly from her sieve down the hillock. Now it was evident that she was singing" (Chekhov, 1977) – so the motive of birth manifests itself through the agricultural cult (sowing and harvesting was accompanied by the song).

Returning to Yesenin's poetry, let us note that the poet, in addition to using in his verses the model of plain space, national topic, also speaks of "steppe" singing (by the way, it also refers to his biography):

I am nine years.  
 Stove bench, woman, cat...  
 And the woman sang  
 Something steppe, grievous  
 Sometimes yawning  
 Baptizing mouth with her hand. (Yesenin, 1997)

It is through this singing, as a cultural process, the character comprehends primemory and the world.

Yegorushka feels the world, reveals his secrets, though, he goes through challenges. The trials of “four elements” define his spirit, so he “with swiftness floated after the flying distance” (Chekhov, 1977) – the boy breaks out from the circle of events, merges with the movement of nature. Despite this, he continues tempting the realm of “the dead”: Yegorushka is between two crosses, which, as he himself observes, were the same, after a while he again returns to that unresolved fire scene (the omen of the boy’s illness) – in the text acts cyclic time. In light of this, we can speak of doubletness, Yegorushka himself always remains between doublets. This principle extends to almost all the characters of the novella, and only the cultural character can escape from the circle of events. Let us recall that sitting by the river, everyone eats fish, crayfish – it is a manifestation of the motive of eating “red” food. In folklore, in myths, such food (berries, fruits, fish and other red food) is banned; it could be eaten only once a year – at the dead day (Graves, 2007). Everyone eats soup from crayfish, and only the old Pantelei avoids such a meal, since he already belongs to the realm of the “dead”. His symbol is a cypress spoon with a cross – very unusual as everyone notices – it is the symbol of death. Cypress, in accordance with the language of flowers, means “death” (Olenina, 1999).

In the novella Pantelei corresponds to Father Christopher (they are twins), who, let us note, “smelt of cypress” (Chekhov, 1977). At the end of his travel the boy comprehends the other space, as father Christopher and Pantelei leave him. Thus, doubletness principle is violated, leading to closedness. The both characters – both Father Christopher and Pantelei feel approaching death, but hereby, through such a sacrifice, Yegorushka finds a new life. The boy comprehends the forces of nature, the earth. After the quarrel with Dymov (a kind of antipode), the main character faces a terrible storm, which becomes a turning point for the both, especially for the first one. Yegorushka feels the elements, like Vassily (the second character of the novella, belonging to the realm of the living) sees a secret world, “Vassya saw the other world” (Chekhov, 1977), turns his attention to a blooming garden, to cherry trees in blossom, after all, to night, which is a sort of woman, of mother for him (Chekhov, 1977). At last, he himself does not feel death, as if it is not for him, “...for himself personally he could not admit the possibility of death, and felt that he would never die ...” (Chekhov, 1977). In terms of narration, in this case, in terms of poetics only, the object of which, as we see, is the steppe itself, man and cosmos, steppe and life appear here as one and the same when it comes to their destiny, not “torn apart from each other” (Frumkina, 1987). It is no coincidence that the steppe requires a singer, she is waiting for such characters as Yegorushka and Vassya, “And in the triumph of beauty, in the exuberance of happiness you are conscious of yearning and grief, as though the steppe knew that she was solitary, knew that her wealth and her inspiration were wasted for the world, not glorified in song, not wanted by anyone; and through the joyful clamour one hears her mournful, hopeless call for *singers, singers!*” (Chekhov, 1977). Egorushka and Vassya, seeing the “the other world”, joining the forces of mother earth, rise above the reality, like the character of a lyric Yesenin’s song:

Though haven’t learned, I can’t embrace it –  
 Nor silent petting, neither depth.  
 The eyes that ever saw this Planet,  
 They are in love with it to death (Yesenin, 1997).

As E.G. Etkind writes about Chekhov’s characters, “It’s difficult for people to understand each other – in particular because they don’t speak the common language” (Etkind, 1999). From this position, the division of loci and characters, respectively, becomes clear.

All these small remarks are needed to clarify the picture of Chekhov’s artistic space, which affects the “temper” of the characters. The architectonics of these models (open and closed), in its turn, shows how the internal folklore laws work. According to D.N. Medrish, “Chekhovian image, echoing with folklore symbols in general” (Medrish, 1978) allows us to talk about the features of the composition, which is internally close to the lyric song. The lyric song, it should be noted, is characterized by psychological parallelism, but both Yesenin and Chekhov transformed this parallelism into a complex metaphor. Let us recall that in the text of “The Steppe” great importance is placed on the description of the starry sky, which affects the fate of the characters: the moonlight grew mistier, as it were dirtier, the stars were even overcast <...>” (Chekhov, 1977), and before that, that is, before the storm, Yegorushka felt himself *something*, as nature did, “Nature seemed as though languid and weighed down by some foreboding” (Chekhov, 1977). Yegorushka lives in harmony with nature, so the end of the novella remains open, “What would that life be like?” (Chekhov, 1977). Here, the main feature of Chekhovian folklorism consists – (let us recall that Yesenin’s character also speaks of “another way” in the poem “Where the secret is always drowsing...”) – in an *uncontoured* composition, inherent in the lyric song, gives rise to a special form of the novella – Chekhovian.

Chekhov loved “open” finals, raising the question, but not giving an answer to it. The solution of the question lay in

the "subjectivity zone forbidden for the artist" (Polotskaya, 2001). The answer was to be found by the reader himself, rising with the character over reality (as the genres of folklore – lyric song, epic – suggest). Chekhov's Steppe is often compared to Gogol's Dead Souls on the grounds that both artists have shown "an extract of various genres potential" (Silantieva, 1981), but one significant remark should be made, Chekhov is close to Gogol in terms of his own language of artistic space. As M.Yu. Lotman notes, "Gogol discovered all the artistic potential of spatial models for Russian literature" (Lotman, 1997). Indeed, Gogol's artistic system attaches significance to chronotope, intraspecific connections of the worlds, the grounds in which the characters are placed, play a significant role, since they determine these characters' temper. This explanation turns out to be substantial for understanding this spatial model, since Gogol's "functional fields", the places symbolic for characters, are clearly defined and divided into "common" and "magical", "Characters of the fixed, "closed" locus are opposed to the characters of the "open" space" (Lotman, 1997). The fact that Gogol's "steppe" ("The Old-World Landowners", "Taras Bulba") appears as a "multi-layered atmosphere floating above the ground" (Podoroga, 2006). According to some researchers, "All the Gogol's spaces are poeticized, colored by emotion; their spatiality is transmitted through the images passing through the observer's field <...>" (Podoroga, 2006). Chekhovian "steppe", its description is also located in the "artist's ground", which often turns into "Egorushka's ground" and vice versa (Silantieva, 1981). Gogolian "steppe" is yet to become a steppe, moreover, "just those beautiful steppe so beloved by Gogol", and only then it will become *alive* (Podoroga, 2006), whereas in Chekhov's "The Steppe" "everything is clear, visibly spiritualized and flown through "the living soul" (Berdnikov, 1985). Yegorushka, a character familiar with open space, is just such a soul.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Chekhovian folklore is expressed in such *signs*, which E. Polotskaya called "means of extra-verbal persuasiveness", it is these "signs" by which "the reader can judge about the changes in the character's soul" (Polotskaya, 2001). These signs also lie outside "question solution", but within artistic space models. Based on all this, one can speak of enteichiness<sup>3</sup> of Yesenin and Chekhov's styles, about their rootedness into "other epochs", which manifests itself at the level of internal interaction of literature and folklore, in the archetypified text.

Chekhov and Yesenin are also close in that they were not "accepted" by the 20th century in the names of some symbolist poets. The Silver Age, as the researchers note, passed under the auspices of "classical pseudo-antiquity" destruction (Knabe, 2000), but there was also a galaxy of poets with "false" mythopoetic consciousness (Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Sologub). Mythopoetical and historical subjects, which poets-symbolists acted out in their works (Polonsky, 2007), did not correspond to the true sacred knowledge. This is one of the reasons why Chekhov's seemingly "characterless" drama with weak-willed people was rejected. Symbolists did not understand the complex artistic system of Chekhov's literature, did not understand the "popular aesthetics" of Chekhov's *peasant* that in and of itself presupposes the presence of a cultural character, though F. Sologub drew attention to the *predominance of internal action over the external one* in Chekhov's poetics. This main property, noticed but not understood by Sologub and other symbolists in virtue of its complexity and multidimensionality suggests that Chekhovian "fablelessness" or uncontourness of his works is associated with a lyric song, with pre-genre folklore formations, where the character rises above the reality, becoming a cultural character. This is yet contrary to the proposition of the "weak-willed characters" put forward by the Symbolists in relation to Chekhov's work. Thus, the Silver Age (in the names of some symbolists) did not accept Chekhov either because of his artistic thinking, or because of their own misunderstanding of the synthetic nature of his works, which revived the new cultural character (as, for example, Yegorushka). Such a character was "taken" by Esenin and Khlebnikov, whose poetry was based on an appeal to true myth and folklore (Yesenin's article "The Keys of Mary" and "On the Benefits of Studying Fairytales" by Khlebnikov), the fusion of national elements and traditions in their poetics.

Such cultural, folklore parallels make us think about the rootedness of Pushkin, Chekhov, Khlebnikov, and Yesenin in the national tradition, in "the formulas that extend into the distance" (Veselovsky, 1940), in the words of A.N. Veselovsky. For these reasons, we can make a slightly different conclusion both about the nature of the late Chekhov's prose and folklorism forms in his poetics.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The question of folklorism in Chekhov's works enables the researcher not only to take a different look at the art laboratory of the writer, who was often accused of his subject world description, being a portrayer of ordinary life, but also to review the complex history of Chekhov's relationships with the representatives of the Silver Age. Thus, literature experts can build a literary process based on a different coordinate system, not focusing solely on the biographical method and real commentary. Poetics and the aesthetics of literature and culture are more permeated with Chekhovian modernism than it was suggested. The theme "Chekhov and folklore" is still waiting for its researcher.

<sup>3</sup> Absorption by a certain time of the content, character, spirit and style of the past cultural era on the grounds that they were consonant with another later era and capable of satisfying its internal needs and demands". See: Knabe G. S. Russian antiquity. M.: Ros. state. Humanit. un-t, 2000. P. 19.

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