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THE DEMONIC CHARACTER TYPE IN ANTON CHEKHOV'S PLAY "IVANOV"

SUMMARY. The play "Ivanov" is a watershed in the creative system of Chekhov. On the one hand, there is an obvious link between the comedy and the tribal tradition of the Russian predecessors of the author, particularly the dramas of Ostrovsky, on the other hand — new significant forms and methods for the experiments of the creator of "The Seagull" are produced in the play. The comedy shows evolution of the characters of the demon-type from uyezd society called by Russian criticism the "dark Kingdom", and the Romantic demon-hero, to a new character substance. It is formed by the creative system of Chekhov's plays and is potentially close to the Dionysian hero in the version of Friedrich Nietzsche. In the text of the play the bearers of the signs of demonism in uyezd society are ordinary people deprived of their individuality, such as Dudkin, Babakina, nameless guests. Demonic heroes of the Romantic type are Shabelsky and Borkin. However, the structure of the play indicates that this type of character substance has been exhausted. The prospect of development will be linked with the figure of Ivanov: he bears the marks of the demon-character, the victim-character and the character of the preparatory Dionysus type. Only the building of the mythological and poetic layer in most of the components of the dramatic whole will allow the potency of the characters of this type to organically manifest and bring the reader the quality of the author's individual myth about Russia and its fate. But it will be the experience of the mid 1890s.

KEY WORDS. Chekhov, Nietzsche, "Ivanov", drama, character of demonic type, tradition.

With the emergence of Director's Theatre (in the 1880s in Russia) the author's word became brighter and more attention was concentrated on elements not directly connected with the plot. An actor could no more change the text of a play in order to please the audience or his taste. K. L. Rudnitsky wrote: "Chekhov gave to the theatre not only new plot motives, but also a new form of drama which imperiously dictated absolutely new understanding of the nature of a stage action" [1; 13]. Drama before Chekhov was characterized by "preoccupation with events in comparison with details of everyday life": "The whole play in its dialogic cloth deepens with the action; everyday life retreats into the background and is only implied and occasionally mentioned" [2; 453]. With the establishment of Director's Theatre, elements which are not connected directly with the plot gain significance that is not less functional than action and dialogue. The rejection of role specialization in the new theatre

happened due to the fact that a character of a play finally departs from typicality and moves towards individuality and more complex organization.

The first version of Chekhov's comedy "Ivanov" was finished in October 1887. In November of that same year, the play was staged in Korsh Theatre in Moscow. From the very first theatre performances, the play "Ivanov" aroused heated debates. The reason for that was "lack of understanding of the main character of the play — Ivanov". A.P. Skaftymov notes that "the new and more complex description of the main character confused the critics. The reviewers, who has got used to simple moral estimates, were reproaching the author for the ambiguity of Ivanov's character. Is he a positive or negative character?" [2; 440]. The author himself wrote about the play: "Modern playwrights fill their plays solely with angels, villains and jesters. How on earth it is possible to find such characters in Russia? Well, of course, you can find them, but not in such extreme forms as these playwrights need... I wanted to be original: there is no one angel in my play (although I could not refrain from jesters), no one was accused and no one justified" [2, 439]. Such seemingly non-judgemental building of character structure divided opinions about the characters of the play. Some said that Ivanov is a "villain", others labeled him as "not a bad, but a weak person", and others still correlated the character with the personality of the author. We will discuss the formation of the character in terms of elements of demonic poetics present in the character. Let us consider the interpretation of the concept "demonism" given in the "Lermontov Encyclopedia": "Demonism is a symbol that goes back to biblical mythology and symbolizes the attitude to the world, the ultimate purpose of which is the destruction of existing material and spiritual values, and even turning the world into nothing" [3; 137-138]. We can point out several key points in this definition. The first is that originally the tradition in which the demonic is interpreted is a religious, Christian tradition. The second is that the inward moral revolt of a character is directed outwards. People around him can feel the consequences of his destructive will. A story of a conventional demonic-type character begins with the belief in the future which is full of the meaning of life. Then come disappointment and loss of illusions which make the character embittered: "the demonic character constantly refers to his best years"; "The deceased past" for him was the time full of life and belief in the possibility of knowing the world, which was not poisoned with doubts [3; 138]. In these terms as a demonic-type character Ivanov is a more complex figure due to the structure of the play. The destructive power of his disappointment, life-fatigue and boredom is aimed in the first place at himself. Each new day does not differ from the previous one; it just begins the hopeless existence of the main character. There is gossip, even the closest people do not understand him. These are key factors influencing Ivanov's condition. They just supplement an already gloomy picture of life: "In "Ivanov" the source of the dramatic condition of the character is not some particular circumstances or individuals, but reality as a whole. His "disease" is killing him. This "disease" is caused by the complication of his conditions that has stupefied his desires, broken his will and settled in his soul lack of faith and a sense of hopelessness" [2; 437]. We can't call Ivanov a demon-character or a victim-character. But he is a victim of his

own demonism that destroys him from within. Mentioned by A.P. Skaftymov, the word "disease" is very important for the understanding of this phenomenon. The internal state of the character is really akin to a disease which he would be happy to get rid of, but he cannot find any means or effort in himself: "IVANOV. [...] I feel neither love nor pity, only a sort of loneliness and weariness. To all appearances this must seem horrible, and I cannot understand myself what is happening to me" [4; 42]. Feeling weariness and a lack of desire to fight and even to exist, Ivanov tries to escape trivial everyday existence. So he seeks salvation from the oppressive reality in books: "IVANOV. (*to Borkin*)... And what do you mean by this irritating way you have of pestering me whenever I am trying to read or write or ..." [4; 37]. He is constantly obsessed with contemplation of his "disease". His attempts to understand himself make him unable to handle the estate. "BORKIN. [...] With your two thousand acres and your empty pockets you are like a man who has a cellar full of wine and no corkscrew..." [4; 37]. Comparing the features of the Russian demonic-type character and Nietzsche's Dionysus, Edith W. Clowes wrote that the main difference between the two types is an attitude to life. Whereas the Dionysus-type character, despite all his suffering and searching for himself, is connected with life, the Russian rebel is constantly escaping it. The character thinks that in this escape he can find his salvation. But according to the German philosopher that is wrong: "While Nietzsche's characters have a free spirit and are on the highest level of human consciousness, which is eventually transformed into a more productive, life-affirming sense of identity, in the Russian tradition, they are openly hostile to the fundamental instinctive attachment to life" [5]. This shows that from the beginning of the play, Ivanov appears before the reader as a traditional rebel-character of Russian literature of the second half of the 19th century. His condition is destructive to himself and others (mainly to Anna). And it is static as well because its own energy is not enough to overcome the spiritual "disease". Nevertheless, Chekhov finds a way to get his character out of his static self-destruction. This way is a connection between Ivanov and Sasha Lebedeva. The playwright did not accidentally choose such a method. It demonstrates the transitional borderline condition between the two types of thinking, which will be developed in Chekhov's later plays. This is the borderline between the traditional Christian type and a more viable type, largely corresponding to the Dionysian outlook according to Nietzsche [6-9]. Due to the fact that all the versions of the play were finished in November 1888, the attempts by Ivanov to overcome his spiritual "disease" cannot be characterized as a conversion from the system of Christian values to the world of Dionysus and Apollo of Nietzsche. However, it is obvious that the playwright in his own creative system purposefully moved towards a new life-affirming philosophy. A common feature of the philosophical systems of Chekhov and Nietzsche is a rejection of "life overcoming", of detachment, and energy that accompanies a man going through all the sufferings to his "own paradise". Another common feature is the understanding of the nature of a rebel-character's condition. It is remarkable that the thing which Skaftymov calls a "disease", speaking about Ivanov, later E. Clows will call a "disease of nihilism". Both for Chekhov and Nietzsche this "disease" is just a borderline

condition, the escape from which is the “emergence of a new life-affirming consciousness” [5]. The spiritual convulsions of Chekhov’s characters are akin to a “pathologically intermediate state” [10, 41], which is the “ghost of the metaphysical nihilism” of European society, which later Nietzsche will face.

Sasha Lebedeva’s love for Ivanov has become that very link to life. His affection for Sasha moves him from confusion and guilt to an acceptance of life and thoughts of revival. The feeling of guilt is rapidly mentioned in the play (Ivanov is blamed for the tragic fate of Anna, he himself insists on the fact that he is guilty of everything) and is destroying the will and personality of the character. The feeling of guilt by its nature is much more destructive than disappointment or boredom, which are the characteristics of a Romantic demonic character. A sense of guilt is imposed by other people and fetters the character who is ready to overcome his spiritual “disease”. But other people’s condemnation will over and over again bring him back into a state of guilt. In order to relieve the burden of false guilt, the character needs Herculean efforts and a change of ideological paradigm. In the first version of the play, the fourth act shows the reader that the main character has overcome his feeling of guilt and has taken the order of things as it is: “IVANOV. (*about Anna*) She sleeps now in the grave; and we are alive, the music is playing. But the time shall come and we will die too: somebody will say about us that we sleep in the grave. I like the way things go in nature and I like nature itself” [4; 97]. The last phrase shows the culmination of the triumph of life over anguish, boredom and the feeling of guilt.

In Chekhov’s play, the female images are full of the meaning of these changes; they are the embodiment of this idea. Anna (Sarrah) who dies because of consumption is a personification of self-sacrificing Christian love. This explains the choice of her nationality. Anna’s sacrifices are overwhelming. For the sake of Ivanov she repudiated her family, motherland and name. Before her death she forgives Ivanov everything: that he was rude to her, that he did not love her, and his affection for Sasha. But Ivanov’s affection for Anna didn’t last long. It turned out that her sacrifice, no matter how great, was not enough for the creation of a lasting relationship. It is no coincidence that Anna is slowly and painfully dying from consumption. To pine, to become weaker, and as a result to die is the fate of anybody who cannot find the way out of a crisis and disease, whether spiritual or physical. Anna has the capacity only to reject herself for the sake of love. But it is a mistake. In this way a person escapes from life, with the result that the responsibility for his own decisions is passed on to people for whom was made the sacrifice. At some point Anna gives way to this delusion and blames Ivanov for contracting a marriage of convenience: “It is all clear to me now. You married me because you expected my mother and father to forgive me and give you my money; that is what you expected [...] When you found that I wasn’t bringing you any money, you tried another game. Now I remember and understand everything [...] You were always lying to me... You dishonest, degraded man!” [4; 82]. Anna’s delusion shows that this approach to love cannot last long. It contradicts the laws of life. Initially it is more destructive than constructive. By its nature sacrifice is one of the ways of escaping life. In this regard, Sasha Lebedeva is opposed to Anna. Her

approach to love is based on another principle — harmony. Like Anna she has to go against the opinions of others, but this confrontation is not very important. Sasha focuses her and Ivanov's attention not on the fact that they confront someone, but rather that everything runs its course, and that their marriage is not unnatural: "Kolya, you are talking like a child... Calm down... Your soul is ill and pines... It prevails over your healthy and strong mind, but do not give it a way, strain your mind. Just think: where are the clouds? What is your fault? And what do you want?" [4, 89]. The main appeal here is "strain your mind". The mind, as a more earthly and physiological phenomenon than the soul, is adapted and directed to life. There are two elements in Sasha's love — emotional and rational. The first gives rise to feeling, the second gives it a way in life, and helps it to exist and fight. It is very active and energetic. Sasha's lively energy gives hope to Ivanov for a successful outcome to their relationship: "IVANOV. [...] What is this? Is it the beginning for me of a new life? Is it, Sasha? Oh, my happiness, my joy! [...] Oh, then I shall live once more? And work?" [4; 66-67]. Such a pragmatic attitude to love also makes Chekhov's and Nietzsche's philosophical systems alike: "Nietzsche respects human feelings. [...] Moreover, he appreciates "love" as a rare and powerful encouraging force" [5]. The main force that returns Ivanov from the state of active euphoria is public opinion in the guise of doctor Lvov. On the wedding day he bombards Ivanov with the public opinion that has long surrounded him as gossip. In the play the main character has not found the strength to fight this insult, it has broken him and destroyed him.

The third element depicted by Chekhov is society. The construction of the system of characters in "Ivanov" is different from that in Chekhov's later plays and is close to the dramatic tradition of Ostrovsky. The world of the play is filled with Dudkins, Babakins, "nameless" guests and old women. The matchmaker Avdotya Nazarovna and a rogue Borkin look as if they are characters of Ostrovsky's plays. While in the main characters the reader can feel the development of the philosophical ideas of the author, the depth and heterogeneity of a personality, the uyezd society that surrounds the main characters is the embodiment of literary types typical of theatre before Chekhov. The typicality of the characters intensifies the feeling of the hopelessness of existence in the uyezd. Slander of Ivanov just by one person inevitably echoes in the mouths of Dudkins and Babakins, filling all the space of the play, making the atmosphere for the main characters suffocating. Everyone in this society has contributed to the demonization of Ivanov through the gossip about him. And everyone said about Ivanov something that in fact was true for the character from the society himself. Their main topic for discussion is money. Some are busy with efforts to save what they have; the others are greedy to gain something. All their relationships are based on greediness and covetousness, and so they claim that Ivanov is greedy and acts for mercenary motives: "ZINAIDA. (*about Ivanov and Sasha's wedding*) [...] Is there any reason to be happy? He marries her because of her dowry and in order to not to pay me the debt ..." [4, 88]. Anna's illness and death following her engagement to Sasha is interpreted by the whole uyezd as Ivanov's clever machination: "DUDKIN. [...] Ivanov thinks that he will get it easy... No way... He burned his fingers with

that Jew, ate a mushroom, and so it will happen this time..." [4; 84]. Demonizing the image of Ivanov, blaming him for Anna's death, the society itself acts as a demonic component of the play. The peculiarity of the demonism of the minor characters is that this is not a revolt by one hero. But there are many of them, and it makes them strong. They are the embodiment of small demonism, their voices drown the voice of truth, and the characters believe the gossip of each other about Ivanov.

Despite the construction of the system of characters, traditional for that time, a new model is already outlined in "Ivanov", which is typical for the more mature period of Chekhov's plays, the period of "plot-constructive play multilinearity". A.P. Skaftymov notes that "the central event in Chekhov's plays has not an exclusive place, but it is accompanied by a number of parallel dramatic lines that are similar in content and that are the variants of the main dramatic action" [2; 449]. This feature must intensify the perception of what is happening as an ordinary daily routine. These parallel lines for example are the lines of Shabelsky and Borkin. As one of the main themes in "Ivanov", Skaftymov singles out the theme of the incompatibility of "semblance and the true character". While the duality of perception of Ivanov is created by the people around him, Shabelsky and Borkin "put on a mask" deliberately. It means that they are characters of the demonic type, but the way they are depicted in the play is fundamentally different from the depiction of the central character. The image of Shabelsky is depicted by Chekhov in greater detail than the image of Borkin. In the gradation of the demonic characters of the play, Shabelsky takes a middle position between the public "small demons" and Ivanov with his new perception of the world. Shabelsky fits the traditional definition of a demonic character even more than Ivanov. His voice confronts the voice of the society. He, like Ivanov, is lonely and recalls the past as the time when the value of the world and existence was not in doubt. The only thing valuable for him in the present is the memory of his wife, buried in Paris. Shabelsky's moral riot turns out to be traditional for the demonic character's ethical experiment, an attempt to "turn the world into nothing" through his engagement to Babakina. He realizes all the absurdity and the foulness of this deed. But the more foul he finds it, the more passionately he talks about it: "SHABELSKY. (*snapping his fingers*) Well, why not play on her this shabby trick, after all? Eh? Just out of spite? I shall certainly do it, upon my word I shall! What a joke it will be!" [4; 70]. Everybody considers Shabelsky a grumbler. And only the conversation with an old friend, Lebedev, reveals his nature as complex, disappointed in life: "Everybody is foul, petty, mean, useless... I'm a grumbler; like a coquette I had assumed God knows what, I do not believe a word of mine. But, Pasha, cannot you agree that everything is petty, insignificant, foul? I am ready to love people before death, but they are not people, but they are little people, microcephals, dirt, soot ..." [4, 99]. The Count's age shows that the traditional demonic character is a phenomenon of the literature of the past. He is replaced by a more complex type of demonic character.

In the creative system of A.P. Chekhov, the play "Ivanov" is a watershed. Despite the connection of the play with the dramatic tradition of the author's predecessors,

new forms and techniques are produced that will become significant for later plays of the playwright. The comedy shows the evolution of demonic-type characters of the uyezd society, once called "the dark Kingdom", through the hero demon-character of the Romantic type to a new figure, formed in the creative system of Chekhov. And this figure is potentially close in terms of content to the hero of the Dionysian type in the version of Friedrich Nietzsche.

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