

Title: From Mute Mare to Male Author: The Listener in Chekhov's Frame Narratives
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Chekhov frequently employs the frame narrative technique in his short stories. Many critics have argued that his juxtaposition of insert and frame focuses on the figure of the storyteller and serves to reveal some truth about the teller's character. Such, for instance, are the claims of Charles Isenberg and John Freedman, who in their respective analyses of "The Man in a Case" (1898) identify the storyteller Burkin as the true subject and enigma of the story, the real "man in a case." Burkin's own "psychic shell," according to Isenberg, is encoded in the way he tells the story and becomes apparent to the reader through Chekhov's reliance on frame narration (Isenberg 135).

The figure of the storyteller undoubtedly sheds an important light on the functions and operation of Chekhov's frame narratives. I would like to expand this line of inquiry and to suggest that the figure of the listener is no less important to Chekhov's exploration of storytelling. Chekhov's listeners often motivate or otherwise influence the telling of a story. Thus the listener's status in his stories, although seemingly passive, may translate into a position of authority or even authorship.

In this paper, I will analyze Chekhov's 1886 story "Misery" (*Toska*) and show it to be a precursor to his later, fully embodied frame narratives, such as "Peasant Women" (1891), "Ariadna" (1895), and the stories in "Little Trilogy" (1898). I will compare the role of Iona Potapov's mare in "Toska" to Chekhov's later listeners, tracing the evolution of the listener function in these stories and questioning all along the passive status of the listener in the production of stories and narratives. I will argue that the listeners become progressively more empowered, eventually coming to the point of near coincidence with the figure of the author, even with Chekhov himself.

Bibliography

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