

Title: Metadrama vs. Melodrama: Authors and Heroes in Chekhov's Prose
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The stories from Chekhov's early mature period (1886-1890) tend to be constructed around two perspectives: one metadramatic, the other melodramatic. In other words, a typical story from this period involves one character who views life from an aesthetic distance coming into contact with another character who is blindly involved in a dramatic situation. The resulting clash between metadrama and melodrama is at the heart of Chekhov's existential short story. In the love stories, this structure takes on a Bakhtinian author/hero twist. In "The Little Joke," for example, the male protagonist sees how his love interest, Nadya, acts according to familiar Romantic patterns and, since he is aware of the literary structures at play, he is able to manipulate her from a privileged 'authorial' position. Nadya, for her part, is trapped within the melodramatic genre expectations associated with her role and she does not have the freedom to break out from her garden where she dreams of love. She, in Bakhtinian terms, has been 'finalized' by her counterpart.

This paper will trace the development of this theme (metadramatist vs. melodramatist; author vs. hero) in Chekhov's prose as it deepens in complexity, and will pay particular attention to the rebellion of characters against the 'authors' who try to limit their freedom by forcing them into literary