

To whom shall I tell my grief?

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 29 December 2013

Received in revised form

10 January 2014

Accepted 20 January 2014

Available online 1 February 2014

Keywords

Anton Chekhov,
Lament, Destitute,
Iona Potapov,
Depth of misery

Abstract

Life is what we make it. But some times question arises is it really so! Human life that is called a mixture of ups and downs, which shows different shades, different emotions where some are born with silver spoon but some are destitute to have a single straw of happiness who seems to be born to suffer only. For whom the definition of life is unsolved grief for lifetime. The way to bear this unendurable pain vary from person to person where some want to make other miserable too, some become silent sufferers who without saying or complaining go on to bear this. This research paper is based on Anton Chekov's short story Lament in which the writer has very beautifully and effectively narrated the character of Iona Potapov whose life is a symbol of misery of a common man who has never tasted the happiness. The detached and inhuman behaviour of the world towards his grief depicts a satirical approach to the human society where only a mare is present for him to share his pains. The depth of his misery comes into existence with the help of different elements and characters. The present paper focuses on those elements which help in bringing out the depth of misery.

1. Introduction

Anton Chekhov, a famous Russian short-story writer and playwright who was known for his masterful short stories and lyrical dreams. His works are masterpiece for showing different emotions of human life. As literature is the mirror of the society so is with the writings of Chekhov. The feelings of the heart are beautifully expressed in the diverse works of Anton Chekhov. The mourning of a father on the death of his young son is painfully portrayed in his famous short story **Lament** also known as **Misery** where the protagonist of the story is dying to express his emotions but how unfortunate he is not to have even a single one to share his grief. The writer on the same hand also gives a picturesque description of the cruel world which is not at all concerned with the sufferings of others. The people are too much engrossed in their own world to give a single minute to needy. The various elements of the story successfully conveyed the same

2. Deep Anguish

Lament is a story of distress. Anton Chekhov elucidates it with the help of opening lines **"To whom shall I tell my grief?"** This quandary line quickly penetrates into the

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readers mind and gives a glimpse of grief and mournful story.

Moving ahead in the story a ghost like character Iona Potapov, the protagonist is outlined. Iona is the central character around whom the whole story revolves. The appearance of the protagonist in the beginning paragraph of the story displays his mental agony.

"He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent"

The lazy, inactive and still state of Iona Potapov's body reveals about discontentment and depression. His body is so leaned that it gives a sigh of deep sorrow and it is soon realized that Iona is a victim of misery.

"The pale light of the street lamp changes to vivid colour, and the bustle of the street grow noisier"

The street in the story is in motion. It exhibits liveliness. Where Iona on the other hand seems to be motionless and rigid he is so lost in the depth of despair that he can not give an immediate response to his traveller which forces his fare (the officer) to repeat and ask

"Are you sleep? To Vyborskaya!"

which signifies absence of his mental state though he is physically present. This can also be estimated by the following lines:

"Iona Fidgets on the box as though he were sitting on thorns, jerks his elbows and turns his eyes

about like one possessed as though he did not know where he was or why he was there”

Later in the story Iona is flown away in sadness after getting ignorance and seeing that nobody is keen to listen to him. His heart gets over flooded, the following lines express the expression:

“The misery which has been for brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever”.

His enormous grief is beyond measurement and is still confined in the same pain.

3. Dark side of human nature

As the story flows from beginning to end it reflects about cruel and mean attitude of human beings. At times the story seems to be a satire on men's tight fisted behaviour who is not at all concerned with the happenings of his race. Throughout the story Iona keeps on trying to dispense and express his grief with his different fares and people but can not find people generous enough to listen to him instead he is handed with insolent replies along with disregard.

Iona's first fare in the story says

“Drive on! Drive on!....”. “We shan't get there till to-morrow going on like this. Hurry up!”

These lines indicate about officers least worry on Iona's son's death and is more concentrated to reach his place- Vyborgskaya. Above lines also signify that officer doesn't want to discuss anything with the sledge driver and wants the driver to keep his eye on the road instead of talking to him.

In the later section of the story Iona Potapov meets his next fare this time he deals with three young men. Iona again tries to tell them by saying

“This weeker.....my.....er.....son died!”

And he was supplied with

“We shall all die.....”. “Come, drive on! Drive on!”.

He was also been smacked by them on the back of his neck which reflects exceedingly rude behaviour of men. Yet he again attempts to narrate his sufferings after asking from his one of the passengers that

“Cabman, are you married?”

But the passengers had already reached their point and were no more interested in him they gave money to Iona and vanished. Such unkind treatment overburdened protagonist heart. Still Iona wants to share his misery so he decides to confer about it to a house- porter but is ordered to drive on.

In the last section of the story Iona offers water to a young cabman who is in sleep and wakes up as he falls in need of it. Iona makes effort and says

“May it do you good.... But my son is dead, mate..... Do you hear? This week in the hospital..... It's a queer business....”

But on getting no response to his words Iona realized that the young cabman has already covered his face and slept. In all the above scenes dark side of human nature is portrayed where Iona is tied in pain and endeavours to be released from it by sharing his ache deliberately with others and fails to achieve it.

4. Lament an element to unburden oneself

When we are loaded with grief, pain and seem to hold sorrow in low esteem, lament unlocks the way to hope and confidence and that's what Iona Potapov is find doing in the story 'Lament'. He is in search of someone to whom he can tell and make him listen his inaudible pain and can mourn upon. Iona wants to weep and relieve himself from such pressure. He is in need of some encouraging words which can satisfy him. The following lines reveals about it

“His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament...”

Lament is a cry of agony. Iona is propelled to tell about his sufferings and is deeply embedded in sorrow. His pain initiated the search to find someone and attain relief as lament has the potential to change a heart.

5. Iona Potapov a Pitiful Character

The opening of the story depicts Iona Potapov's state which immediately gathers sympathy. His migration from person to person in order to share his grief of his son's death is sorrowful and pathetic. Protagonist's immobility due to sadness is illustrated in the following lines:

“If a regular snowdrift fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off...”

He was so descended in misery that even a snowdrift could not bother him; he was in a kind of living- dead stage. In the middle segment of the story the writer uses the following lines:

“And Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck”.

These lines demonstrate writer's idea of expressing Iona's position. Iona is solidified and emotionless that he can not even feel the slap which makes him comprehend that he has been smacked. Later in the story writer says:

“With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona's eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street; can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him?”

Which again gains the consideration of the readers and Iona Potapov comes out to be a pitiful character.

6. Women as Poignant Character

Though the writer has not discussed a lot about women in the story yet towards the end of the story the writer has given worth to women. Since women are considered very emotional and touching so that may be considered the reason of adding the following lines

“It would be even better to talk to woman. Though they are silly creatures, they blubber at the first word”.

Here Iona considers women so sensitive that they may snivel after hearing the first word of his desolation yet they would at least manage to listen to him which the men can not.

7. Mare (A Silent Companion)

As the story flows, the hard- core reality of the world comes into vision. Towards the end of the story Iona seems to have lost faith in human beings and moves towards his faithful and silent companion, the mare to express his deep sorrow.

After tolerating the repulsive & ignorant behaviour of men Iona indulges in a one- way conversation with his mare which outlines some sort of relation between them and appears to be trustworthy. Though the mare is just an animal but the opening scene explains a lot more. As the narrator has already added in the beginning:

‘..... His little mare is white and motionless too, her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is probably lost in thought’.

References

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These lines display a weak and stiff body as if the mare was also undergoing the same depression in which the narrator was.

8. Conclusion

“Man is subject to innumerable pains and sorrow by the very condition of humanity, and yet, as if nature had not sown evils enough in life, is continually adding grief to grief and aggravating the common calamity by our cruel treatment of one another” – Joseph Addison

Likewise is seen in the story from the beginning and till the end the writer is seen concerned with human heart and its grief where he runs man to man to unburden himself from the loads of pain and despair.

Though the narrator relieves himself and finds a way to be consoled as no one is there in the world that can not find relief or satisfaction. Howsoever big the misery is but there is always a -hope, hope of relief and hope of satisfaction. Throughout the story readers find Iona in search of a person with whom he can talk and lighten himself and when the search meets with the failure, he confronts someone who is loyal and more concerned than human and that is his little mare, a silent companion. In fact here the writer reveals his satirical approach to materialistic human society. Human who are considered to be full of humanity, full of emotions and sympathy are somewhere proved wrong. Evidently a speechless creature, Mare becomes successful to be the part of Iona’s grief.

- [3] <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/sorrows.html>