

ABSTRACT

Increased interest in the psychology of women has resulted as a response to several views concerning woman and her role and function in society and in the home. Since Aristotle, it has often been asserted that woman is a stunted or inferior man who has had an arrested development. Another version asserts that she is a grown-up child belonging to the child type and thus must be treated as one.

Such views concerning woman's inferiority have led men through the ages to see the role of woman as a secondary one. Her domain was seen to be the home as she did not have the ability to survive in what was termed a man's world. Very few male writers have succeeded in empathizing with or portraying the female condition with any amount of accuracy or sensitivity.

Chekhov is one of the few male writers who has succeeded in presenting the female perspective in a very sensitive way. Even in the early stories where the women are not fully developed or individualized but are rather symbols of their sex, Chekhov is always aware of the potential that these women have for realizing their talents and developing their social, emotional and psychological selves into rounded human beings. His understanding of women is something that grows and this development can be seen in the movement from stereotypical figures to the fully-realized feminine personalities of the sisters in The Three Sisters.

This paper explores selected works of Chekhov, with a view to analysing his treatment of stereotypical images of women and tracing the development of his sympathy for and understanding of the plight of his female characters, who have been reduced to a state of passivity and subjection, to his empathy with the psychology of women.