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Interpretation of Conflict in the Story “The Old Cart” by Shoyim Butayev

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Abstract: This article analyzes the types of artistic conflict in the story “The Old Cart” by the well-known Uzbek writer Shoyim Butayev. It examines the adaptation of Gogol’s characters from “Dead Souls” into a modern Uzbek environment and explores the psychological, social, and interpersonal conflicts that arise in this process. The article highlights the issue of spiritual stagnation and the burden of the past in society through the symbol of the “cart,” as well as the clash between unchanging human vices and new social views through the characters of Chichikov, Selifan, and Petrushka.

Keywords: Conflict, “The Old Cart”, “Dead Souls,” psychological conflict, social conflict, symbolic image, character conflict.

Introduction

In The main driving force behind the plot of a literary work is conflict. This is because the plot consists of events, and events are formed through the interactions, actions, and contradictions between characters. Therefore, the plot can be considered a system of events that generalizes life’s contradictions. This vital contradiction that underlies the plot of every work is conflict.

Conflict (from Latin, meaning “collision”) refers to the struggles among characters, the contradictions between a protagonist and their environment, as well as internal psychological tensions [1].

In the 19th-century literature, as well as in the literary works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the term “collision” was used instead of “conflict.” The word “collision” also means “clash” in Latin [2].

A literary scholar Hotam Umurov defines conflict as follows: “Conflict is the element that determines the impact, interest and scope of the plot. It has several types: 1) psychological (internal) conflict, 2) social conflict, 3) personal-intimate conflict”.

Later, a literary scholar Dilmurod Quronov, in his book “Fundamentals of Literary Theory,” refers to these types as:

1. inter-character conflict;
2. conflict between the protagonist and the environment;
3. internal (psychological) conflict.

without changing their essence. These types of conflict appear in an interconnected and mixed form within literary works [3].

Materials and Methods

This article discusses the types of conflict in Shoyim Butayev's story "The Old Cart." The story is rich in conflicts, portraying the characters' struggles with themselves, with each other, and with society. One of the most distinctive features of this work is that the author transfers characters from Nikolai Gogol's "Dead Souls" (Chichikov, Selifan, Petrushka) into a completely different space and time — a modern or transitional Uzbek environment [4].

In our view, the "cart" in the story has a symbolic meaning. It is not accidentally described as "old." It represents the burden of the past, outdated and rigid views carried by society. Chichikov's wandering within this cart symbolizes spiritual stagnation [5].

Although the work belongs to the genre of a novella, it is relatively short and consists of a limited number of characters. Chichikov is the main character who is in conflict with his environment. His conflict with the environment leads to his conflicts with Selifan and Petrushka. Unlike in Gogol's original work, Selifan and Petrushka are not merely simple servants here. In Butayev's interpretation, they are independent individuals with their own thoughts and will, even capable of morally judging their master [6].

Another symbolic character in the story is Nishonboy Hurzamonovich. He is portrayed in the work as Chichikov's Uzbek "continuator". Even his name reflects a new era ("Nishon" – "symbol", "Hurzamonovich" – "hur zamon"- "symbol of freedom and independence"). He is clever, opportunistic, and places material benefit above everything. For this reason, he sees Chichikov not as a guest but as a tool for achieving his own goals. Through this character, the author exposes the moral shortcomings of society. Although he tries to appear cultured, modern, and patriotic, behind his image lies arrogance and hypocrisy. This character is both symbolic and satirical [7].

In the story, conflict is not limited to external clashes among characters. The author presents internal conflict as the main dramatic force. The struggle between Chichikov's regrets, fears, and dreams ensures the internal movement of the plot [8].

1. Psychological (Internal) Conflict Examples

Psychological conflict – refers to the struggle of emotions and opposing traits within a character. It manifests through inner doubts and dissatisfaction with life.

From the very beginning, Chichikov's conflict between his past and present is evident. He nostalgically recalls his former life, comparing it with his current situation, which creates deep inner suffering. He is especially troubled by the fact that others have families and descendants, while he remains alone [9].

This internal conflict continues as Chichikov compares himself to other characters who have established lives and families. His sense of wasted life and aimless wandering intensifies his inner struggle.

Chichikov also experiences a contradiction between his outward appearance as a "master" and his inner dependence on his servants. While he tries to appear strong, he realizes how much he relies on them, which deepens his psychological conflict.

At times, he feels as if he has ended up in an unfamiliar world as a result of his sins, which creates confusion and existential anxiety [10].

Similarly, Petrushka experiences internal conflict: although he outwardly obeys his master, inwardly he dreams of freedom and silently resists his situation.

Chichikov's memories of his former luxurious life contrast sharply with his current miserable condition, symbolized by his journey in the old cart. This contrast continuously disturbs his inner peace.

His emotions are also contradictory: he both depends on and resents Selifan. This simultaneous feeling of attachment and hatred creates a deep psychological tension within him [11].

2. Inter-character (External) Conflict Examples

Personal-intimate conflict – refers to the struggle between opposing characters or groups.

As mentioned above, this type of conflict manifests as a clash between characters, worldviews, or goals. In this work, such conflict mainly appears in the form of misunderstandings, commands, and disobedience between the master (Chichikov) and the servants (Selifan and Petrushka).

“—Did you shoe the horses or come up with another excuse?

— I did not shoe the horses, Pavel Ivanovich...

—No!.. Find a workshop even if it is underground and carry out the order. Otherwise, do you know what I will do to you!” [12].

Here, a traditional “master–servant” conflict is evident. The clash arises between Selifan’s indifference and Chichikov’s strict demands. Later, this conflict intensifies with Selifan and Petrushka’s decision to “go to Uzbekistan,” since Chichikov cannot imagine his life without them.

“—Pavel Ivanovich, I am leaving you,” said Selifan suddenly. [13].

This is one of the sharpest turning points in the work. The decision to “leave,” replacing years of loyalty and obedience, elevates the relationship between the characters to a new stage—an open external conflict.

“—Where did you get hit on the head so early in the morning, you pig snout...

—Guests have arrived...” [14].

In this dialogue between Chichikov and Selifan, the master’s constant dissatisfaction clashes with the servant’s independence. Although Chichikov insults him, Selifan ignores it and continues acting according to his own will.

“—Are you still sniffing those stinking books again, Petrushka?—said Chichikov angrily.

—Better look around, souls are being sold everywhere!”.

For Chichikov, books are useless objects, whereas for Petrushka, they are a means of escaping reality. While Chichikov measures everything in terms of money, Petrushka lives in his own hopeless inner world. This represents a conflict of worldviews between the characters.

“—What do I have to do with those ‘istons’ you barefoot people invented?

—Not only us, you invented them too, master. We are all going together”.

Chichikov considers new systems such as “istons” (Uzbekistan) as something created for common people, while Petrushka emphasizes that masters are equally responsible. This is another example of a clash of perspectives.

“—If someone doesn’t stand over you cursed peasants, you wouldn’t even bother to relieve yourselves.

—According to you, of course!

—Fool, fool, fool! — Chichikov repeated it exactly three times, but with the force of saying it a thousand times”.

Here, Selifan’s indifference to Chichikov’s insults indicates a shift in social hierarchy, giving rise to external conflict.

3. Conflict between the Character and the Environment

Social conflict—refers to the struggle between characters and the conditions in which they live. This type of conflict emerges when a character’s personal desires do not align with societal demands. The character is often forced to choose between social norms and inner beliefs.

In “The Old Cart,” social conflict arises from the clash between the old system and new realities, as well as between different cultures and worldviews.

“ — I was above you, on the third floor. Because in paradise, it seems, no masters are given a place. All of them... are sent to where you are — hell”.

In this passage, Selifan, who belonged to the “lower class” in earthly life, claims superiority over his master in the afterlife. This reflects a clash of traditional views between social classes.

“When the wheel of the cart heading toward Uzbekistan fell into another pit, Chichikov’s head hit the wooden body hard. Looking around, he grew irritated, not knowing when these endless roads would end”.

Here, a conflict arises between Chichikov’s aristocratic nature and the harsh, directionless environment. The environment refuses to recognize his former status and continuously humiliates him.

“Every time Chichikov got off the cart, he would dust off his coat. The dust seemed to him like a stain on his noble dignity”.

Chichikov tries to preserve his social status through his appearance, but the external environment (dust and dirt) erases these distinctions. The environment reduces him to an “ordinary traveler,” while he resists through outward appearance.

“What a quiet city,” thought Chichikov. However, he did not know that, because of his arrival, movement in the streets had been halted, and guards and officials were barely managing to keep things under control”.

Although the situation in Uzbekistan is not ideal, officials attempt to present the city as peaceful upon Chichikov’s arrival.

“ — Look at the wheel, look at the wheel! They don’t travel by airplane!

— They must be important people, traveling by cart to learn about the condition of the people!

— Modesty.

— Humility”.

In this passage, there is a social conflict between Chichikov’s true aim—accumulating wealth—and how society perceives him. The environment interprets his behavior as modesty and humility, whereas in reality it is driven by selfish motives.

“Recalling his service in customs, Chichikov became anxious about the new rules. In his view, the new laws were dangerous for his ‘dead souls’”.

This represents a conflict between Chichikov and the new legal-social environment. While he once thrived under the old system, the new order restricts his fraudulent activities, causing fear and discomfort.

Results

The analysis of Shoyim Butayev’s story “The Old Cart” reveals that conflict functions as the central structural and semantic element of the narrative. Three main types of conflict were identified: psychological (internal), inter-character (external), and social (environmental).

The psychological conflict is primarily expressed through the character of Chichikov, whose internal struggle between past identity and present reality forms the core of the narrative. His sense of regret, loneliness, and existential anxiety reflects a deep inner contradiction that drives the plot forward. Similar internal tensions are observed in Petrushka, whose silent resistance and desire for freedom illustrate suppressed individuality.

Inter-character conflict emerges through the relationships between Chichikov, Selifan, and Petrushka. Unlike Gogol’s original work, these characters display independence and resistance, transforming traditional hierarchical relationships into

dynamic confrontations. Dialogues reveal tensions based on authority, obedience, and differing worldviews.

Social conflict is manifested through the clash between outdated values and modern realities. The symbolic image of the “old cart” represents the burden of the past, while the new environment challenges traditional social roles and identities. The protagonist’s inability to adapt to changing conditions highlights the tension between individual expectations and societal transformation.

Overall, the results show that conflict in the story operates on multiple levels and serves as a key mechanism for revealing both character psychology and broader social issues [15].

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that conflict in “*The Old Cart*” is not merely a narrative device but a complex artistic tool reflecting deeper philosophical and social meanings. The identified types of conflict correspond with classical literary theory, particularly the classifications proposed by Quronov and Umurov, which emphasize the interconnected nature of psychological, social, and interpersonal conflicts.

The dominance of psychological conflict in the story suggests a shift from external action to internal experience, aligning with modern literary tendencies. Chichikov’s internal crisis illustrates the transformation of the character from a purely functional figure, as in Gogol’s “*Dead Souls*,” into a psychologically complex individual. This reinterpretation reflects contemporary concerns about identity, alienation, and moral instability.

Furthermore, the transformation of servant characters into independent figures highlights a shift in social dynamics. The breakdown of traditional authority relationships indicates a broader critique of hierarchical systems and suggests the emergence of new social consciousness. This aligns with sociocultural changes in post-Soviet literature, where individual agency becomes increasingly important.

The symbolic use of the “cart” as a representation of outdated values reinforces the idea that conflict extends beyond characters to encompass ideological and cultural tensions. The inability of the protagonist to escape the “cart” metaphorically reflects society’s struggle to overcome the constraints of the past.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that the story integrates classical conflict structures with modern thematic concerns, creating a multidimensional narrative that reflects both individual and societal transformation.

Conclusion

Shoyim Butayev’s story “*The Old Cart*” is significant not only for successfully transferring characters of world literature into an Uzbek setting but also for creating a complex system of conflicts. The analysis shows that conflicts in the work are not merely tools for plot development but serve as key elements revealing the moral condition of society.

Through Chichikov’s internal struggles and his external conflicts with his servants, the author masterfully depicts the tragedy of a person being bound to the past and unable to find identity in a new era. The symbol of the “old cart” encourages readers to reflect deeply on outdated views and moral shortcomings within society.

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