CULTURALISTICS: Journal of Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Studies, **10(2), 2026, [160-169]**

Available online at: http://ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/culturalistics

Research Article

Received: 10/10/2025; Accepted: 21/10/2026; Published: 21/10/2026

A Critical Study of Humorous Mechanisms in Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal*

Sabbir Ahamed Sumon[a*]

[a]English Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna, Bangladesh

*Email corresponding author(s): sabbir20engku@gmail.com

Abstract

Anton Chekhov's one-act play The Proposal is widely appreciated for its farcical humour, but the mechanisms behind its comedy and its deeper social critique remain underexplored. The play illustrates that the comedy arises from the heightened personalities of Lomov, Natalya, and Chubukov, whose stubbornness and pride turn a marriage proposal into a series of absurd quarrels over property and social status. The article examines the comic elements of the play through descriptive textual analysis. Using the lenses of incongruity theory and situational irony, the article explores characters' contradictions, linguistic miscommunication, and satirical style. Through its dialogues marked by miscommunication and triviality, along with its farcical structure, the play conveys humour to the audience. This study attempts to explore that the play's humour is not merely for entertainment but exposes the materialism and emotional emptiness of its characters. This study provides a clear understanding of Chekhov's artistic methods and the role of comedy in social satire.

Keywords: Anton Chekhov; comedy; internal contradiction; social critique; *The Proposal*

Copyright © 2026 by Authors,
Published by Universitas Diponegoro Publishing Group.
This open-access article is distributed under a
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license

DOI: https://doi.org/10.14710/ca.v10i2.29680

1. Introduction

Anton Chekhov's one-act play *The Proposal* (also called *A Marriage Proposal*) was written in 1888–89 and first staged in 1890 (Octavia et al., 2023). It is set in Russia in the late 19th century, a time when the landowning class lived in comfort while much of the country faced poverty and famine (Autant-Mathieu, 2012). Chekhov creates humour from this world (Tsimbaeva, 2022). He shows the small weaknesses and habits of his characters. The play is a farce that revolves around a marriage proposal. What seems simple soon turns into silly quarrels about land and dogs. In the story, the three stubborn characters create a chaotic and humorous series of disagreements. Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov is a nervous landowner who worries constantly about his health. He visits his neighbour, Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov, to propose to the man's daughter, Natalya Stepanovna. Chubukov becomes pleased by the marriage proposal. He reacts with great excitement and shows Lomov affection. He agrees to the match, indeed (Ferguson, 2013).

Before asking Natalya's consent, Lomov falls into a fierce quarrel with Natalya over who owns a piece of land called Oxen Meadows. The quarrel escalates into shouting and personal insults about each other's families, and causes Lomov to feel physically unwell, as he was suffering from palpitations.

Lomov leaves in a hurry after the insults become intolerable. When Natalya learns he had come to propose to her for marriage, she insists her father bring him back. Upon his return, they apologise, but then start a second argument about which of their hunting dogs is better. Their conversation about the dogs' family history does not last long, and soon they start shouting angrily at each other just like before. The stress causes Lomov to collapse. Chubukov becomes worried and quickly looks for a way to end the trouble. He takes the couple's hands and blesses their marriage. Everyone agrees in a rush: Chubukov finds peace, Natalya feels relieved, and Lomov, though confused, accepts. They kiss, but they immediately begin arguing again about the dogs, which shows their future will still be full of quarrels.

This study analyses the comic elements in Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal* to see how they shape the reader's experience, act as a tool for social criticism, and give the play its unique style (Frédéric-Gaël, 2023). By focusing on key events, character interactions, and dialogue, this study aims to show how the play's humour works and why it matters, both in Chekhov's time and today. The significance of this study is that it helps us better understand the play, its historical setting, and its characters. The discussion shows how comedy is central to Chekhov's satire of Russian society, especially its focus on property, status, and fragile pride. In the end, this analysis will provide a clear way to appreciate the play's comic structure and make it easier for modern readers to connect with the text. It will also support future research on Chekhov's one-act plays and the role of comedy in social criticism.

Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal* is often celebrated as a masterful farce, a short play known for its fast pace and memorable characters. However, many studies focus only on its entertainment value and ignore how the comedy works and what it criticises. This leaves a gap in understanding. This review synthesises existing literature to explore three key areas: the unique nature of the play's comic elements, Chekhov's distinctive writing style that facilitates this comedy, and the sharp social critique that bears the humour. The prevailing opinion in the play is simply a funny situation about a marriage proposal that goes absurdly wrong. Gottlieb (2000) concisely puts it, *The Proposal* is "about everything except a proposal" (p. 60), highlighting that the central action is constantly concerned with trivialities.

Zubarev (2011) argues that Chekhov created a new kind of comedy. This perspective is crucial for moving beyond a simple "farce" label. Zubarev suggests that his innovation was to "switch the focus in comedy from the external features (laughter, survival, and chance) to the internal (the characters' potentials)" (p. 2). This means the humour comes from the characters' personalities, not the plot. We laugh because Lomov's anxiety and Natalya's pride clash absurdly over petty issues. Thus, it reveals their true selves. Rayfield (2000) supports Zubarev's view by explaining that Chekhov used a storyteller's techniques in his plays. A key example is the "non-proposal," where "when a couple are left alone in a garden or a room and fail to agree" (p. 203). This is the core of play's comedy. The humour comes not from a plot, but from the characters' internal flaws. Lomov's anxiety and Natalya's pride prevent the proposal from happening. This shows the comedy is driven by Chekhov's art of characterisation, not external action.

Uddin & Alam (2019) argue that Chekhov's universal appeal lies in a style that uses "subtle comedy and precise detail" to expose human flaws (p. 52). They observe that his "short stories are stuffed with comical scenes" which are used to present the "absurdity of life and bleak attitude of human beings" (Uddin & Alam, 2019, p. 52). This observation applies to the play. The play uses fast, silly arguments about trivial things, such as dogs' names, to show how petty the characters are. Nevertheless, this style does not provide easy answers. (Uddin & Alam, 2019) note, "Chekhovian short stories do not let the reader a solid message rather it caters to the readers to give room to extract the themes of the stories from abyss of twist and turn" (p. 42). The play doesn't tell us what to think. In its place, we figure out the social criticism from the funny chaos ourselves. (Klimenko, 2001), in her article "Anton Chekhov and English Nostalgia," explains that Chekhov's unique style creates a "powerful sense of longing" in English translations (p. 121). Chekhov became hugely popular in Britain because his writing style

creates a deep feeling of nostalgia. She explains his deep popularity in Britain by connecting to universal nostalgia.

Beneath the comic elements, *The Proposal* offers a sharp criticism of the social values of the Russian upper-class conflict. Chekhov indicates the institution of marriage within this class. Sumarsono et al. (2023) argue that Chekhov directly "criticised this class who tend to marry for economic reasons rather than for love and affection" (p. 111). They state that in the play, "economic security is more important than romance and love" (p. 113). So, the characters' comical arguments about property are not just silly distractions; they are the real foundation of the proposed marriage. The play highlights that "marriage, especially for the upper-middle class, had become a means of acquiring economic and social stability" (Sumarsono et al., 2023, p. 115). These social values are amplified by the comic elements. The characters' "quasi-strong potential" (Zubarev, 2011, p. 7) leads toward defending a piece of land or the genealogy of a dog. It reveals their moral and emotional emptiness. Their energy is spent on maintaining social status and material possessions instead of genuine human connections.

The literature shows that the Proposal is more than just a simple farce. The real humour comes from the characters' own flawed personalities (Zubarev, 2011). Chekhov's clever use of language highlights the absurdity of their lives (Uddin & Alam, 2019). Ultimately, the play uses comedy to criticise a society that values money and property over love and human connection (Sumarsono et al., 2023). Therefore, the play's comedy, its form, and its critical message are inseparable. It creates a unified whole where laughter reinforces the play's serious underlying themes.

2. Methods

Chekhov's one-act play, *The Proposal*. The method of study is close reading and descriptive textual analysis, which means the research is focused on the text of the play itself. The primary source of data is the play, *The Proposal* by Anton Chekhov, specifically the translation by Julius West. This text is examined line by line to identify comic techniques in the dialogue, character interactions, and situations. To support this analysis, secondary data from published academic articles and scholarly books are used. These sources provide critical perspectives on Chekhov's style, the nature of farce, and the social context of the play. By combining a detailed examination of the primary text with insights from existing scholarship, this method aims to build a comprehensive understanding of how comedy functions in the play. This study applies the incongruity theory lenses with the mechanisms of Verbal and Situational Irony to analyse the comic elements in the play.

> The term "incongruity theory" refers to a group of philosophical accounts of humor that posit the perception of incongruity as the source of amusement…that people feel amused when they have an experience that violates the normal order of things according to their own subjective understanding of what the normal order of things is (Straus, 2014, p. 6).

This set of ideas provides the viewpoint through which the play's fundamental comedy, such as the mere contrast between the socially solemn expectation of a marriage proposal and the absurd, trivial reality of the ensuing quarrels, is understood. The analysis examines the specific techniques Chekhov employs to generate this incongruity. Verbal irony (saying one thing while meaning another) and situational irony (a situation where the outcome is contrary to what is intended) serve as precise analytical tools. These forms of irony are not merely for laughs; they are the vehicles for Chekhov's social satire and highlight the hypocrisy, pettiness, and transactional nature of the landowning class. Thus, this perspective explains why the play is funny and reveals how Chekhov constructs this humour to deliver a critical message.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Comedy of Character: Clashing Personalities and Internal Contradictions

The play's comic elements are basically generated by the internal contradictions and personality clashes of its characters. Throughout the play, the characters clash to create a pointless cycle of humour. To understand the contradictions, we need to look at Lomov, Natalya, and Chubukov's personalities. Their constant arguing and stubbornness keep them away from getting what they all want.

3.1.1 Lomov: An anxious suitor

Lomov's hypochondria, which is excessive chronic anxiety about one's health, plays as the primary source of the play's comedy. It creates a contradiction between his desires and his actions. His anxiety consistently damages his central goal, which is to secure a marriage that would provide him with economic and social stability. Here comes the incongruity between his goal of a regular life and his hyper-excitable, conflicting behaviour. His desire for peace is constantly prevented by his actions, which create chaos. (Uddin & Alam, 2019) observe, "The stories of Chekhov are teemed with the ideas of nerves, psychology and mental disorder (p. 43)." Lomov is a perfect example of a character led by his nerves. This is evident from the moment he arrives at the Chubukov house. Despite his need to show confidence, his speech is mostly marked by nervous agitation, as he stammers, "You see, Honour Stepanitch... I mean, Stepan Honouritch...pardon me, I'm shaking with nerves, as you can see…" (Chekhov, p. 2). This inability to even say his neighbour's name correctly predicts his failure to present his proposal accurately in time.

His soliloquy reveals that his decision to marry does not come from his affection. He is a calculated person and tries to manage his failing health and ageing condition. He rationalises, "I need to marry. It's a simple as that. I'm already 35— I ought to lead a quiet and regular life with no upsets" (Chekhov, p. 2). However, his hypochondriac nature shows the exact opposite outcome. Instead of calmly proposing, he intuitively provokes arguments about the Oxen Meadows and hunting dogs. During the first quarrel, his physical condition escalates the level of conflict. Lomov say, "My left foot is paralyzed! You're a snake and a.... Oh, my heart... my eyes are gone blurry…" (Chubukov, p. 7). Here, his illness directly contributes to the escalation of the conflict and turns a marriage proposal into a lot of trouble and insults. Ultimately, Lomov's hypochondria leads to a complete physical collapse at the very moment the marriage is secured. His final words before fainting, "There, there, there it is... my heart's burst! My shoulder's come off.... Where's my shoulder? I'm dying"(Chubukov p.12). These words are evidence that his condition determines his efforts. He manages to get engaged, but not because of charm or determination. Instead, it happens in spite of his weak and conflicting behaviour. This makes the audience question the stability of a marriage built on such foolish grounds.

3.1.2 Natalya: A castle of pride

Everyone is stubborn, but Natalya's pride is a major source of comedy in the play. Her feelings change funnily and exaggeratedly, especially when she switches from being upset about missing a marriage proposal to starting aggressive arguments. The comedy is played when Natalya finds out the reason for Lomov's visit. She becomes desperate, crying out, "Bring him back! Oh my God! Get him back. Oh my God! Please make him come back!!" (Chekhov, p. 8). It seems like getting married is all she wants.

This desperation establishes a clear expectation for the audience that Natalya understands the high stakes; she will set aside her pride to secure the proposal. However, Chekhov immediately introduces a sharp incongruity. In spite of behaving agreeably, Natalya's ingrained pride overwhelms her goal. The comedy arises from this stark conflict between the expected behaviour and the absurd reality. As the play proceeds, as soon as Lomov returns, her stubborn pride takes over. She pretends to make peace by saying, "Forgive us... Oxen Meadows really are yours" (Chekhov, p. 9). But this doesn't end. She quickly starts a new argument about whose dog is better. She states with absolute confidence, "Of course he's better! ... there is no comparison" (Chekhov, p. 10). It shows that she must always be right.

Her stubbornness leads her to insult Lomov personally, saying he is "a useless hunter" (Chekhov, p. 11).

This behaviour is funny and paradoxical because her pride is stronger than her goal of getting married. She would rather win a silly argument than be engaged. The play ends with a perfect example. Her last words are, "So... now you can admit that Messer is better than Guesser" (Chekhov, p. 13). This proves that her stubbornness is unstoppable and is the key to the play's humour. Her father and Lomov are stubborn too, but Natalya's sudden shifts from sadness to arguing make the play so comical.

3.1.3 Chubukov: A volatile father

Chubukov is a very inconsistent father. He says he wants his daughter, Natalya, to get married, but his hot temper constantly ruins the proposal. His character embodies a fundamental incongruity. As a father, he should calmly facilitate his daughter's marriage proposal, but his hot-headed nature repeatedly subverts this role and makes him the primary source of chaos. In fact, His character drives the play's comedy, as the action comes directly from his unpredictable personality.

At first, Chubukov is thrilled when Lomov proposes. He calls it "such joy!" and embraces Lomov (Chekhov, p. 2). But as soon as an argument starts, he stops being supportive. Instead of calming things down, he joins the arguments and makes everything worse. This rapid shift creates a comic incongruity. The audience expects a father to de-escalate the conflict, but Chubukov's pride overrides his duty. The humour arises from the absurd gap between his initial support and his immediate. He immediately shouts, "The Meadows are ours!" and starts insulting Lomov's whole family, yelling, "You Lomovs are crazy, all of you!" (Chekhov, p. 7). This shows a "conglomeration" of traits (Uddin & Alam, 2019, p. 53). He is both a loving father and a hot-headed neighbour at the same time. In the end, Chubukov doesn't care about love or solving their problems. When Lomov faints, Chubukov just wants the fighting to stop. He quickly forces the engagement, telling them to "hurry up and get married" just so they will "leave me in peace!" (Chekhov, p. 13). This proves that his support is not steady. He creates chaos and then forces a marriage to escape it, making the audience question if this marriage will be happy at all.

Chekhov builds the play's humour by setting the characters' weaknesses against each other. Lomov wants marriage for security, but his poor health ruins his efforts. Natalya also wants marriage, but her pride and competitiveness push her into constant fights. Chubukov claims he wants his daughter happily married, yet his quick temper makes things worse. Because of these clashing personalities, every normal conversation soon becomes chaos. The play repeats the same pattern: Lomov tries to propose, a quarrel begins, a sudden reconciliation happens, and then another new fight starts. Lomov's collapse and Chubukov's rush to marry off are the final solution to the chaos. As Gottlieb (2000) notes, Chekhov's innovation is that "the action emanates from character" rather than from plot (p. 63). From the very start, character flaws drive the action. Lomov's nervousness makes him bring up the Oxen Meadows instead of his proposal, which sparks in Natalya's pride:

> ***LOMOV****: Oxen Meadows are mine!*
> ***NATALYA****: Ours!*
> ***LOMOV****: Mine!*
> ***NATALYA****: Ours!*
> ***LOMOV****: Mine! (Chekhov, p. 5)*

The quarrel ends with Lomov leaving, but when Natalya learns of his true intention, she panics and begs him back. Chubukov forces a reconciliation, but it is hollow. Natalya briefly admits, *"Oxen Meadows really are yours"* (Chekov, 1889, p.9), yet soon shifts the quarrel to their hunting dogs. The cycle repeats, showing how their flaws prevent real peace.

The final scene ends with Lomov's breakdown. His desire for calm clashes with his excitability until he collapses. Chubukov then pushes for marriage, declaring, *"Now listen, just hurry up and get married… I give you my blessing but please just leave me in peace!"* (Chekhov, p. 13). The couple

kisses, but instantly returns to arguing about dogs. Their flaws remain unchanged, and the union is built on chaos, not love. At this point, Chekhov's portrayal reveals the triviality of life and the exposure of human pettiness.

3.2 The Comedy of Language: Miscommunication and Absurdity

Anton Chekhov's mastery lies not only in stunning theatrical gestures but also in his meticulous and revolutionary use of everyday language. He understood that the true comedy of human existence is found in particular failure, repetitions, and absurdities of communication. Nag (1970) observes that Chekhov is bound to reach "the very nerve and core in a stagnant but, to be sure, latent dramatic form of existence" (p. 11). In *The Proposal*, this "nerve" is exposed through a linguistic structure that is inherently comical. It reveals the petty preoccupations and profound isolation of his characters.

3.2.1 Language as a Source of Miscommunication

Chekhov's approach to dialogue is a departure from the eloquent, plot-advancing speeches of traditional drama. Rather, he crafts conversations that are fragmented, illogical, and deeply self-absorbed. Chekhov's dialogue is different from the smooth, plot-advancing speech in traditional plays. He writes conversations that are broken, illogical, and focused on the characters themselves. Chekhov's characters often fail to have real conversations, talking past each other most of the time. Uddin & Alam (2019) note that this shows a key problem in his work: "miscommunication and non-communication" (p. 1). In his plays, language doesn't connect people; it shows how they fail to understand themselves and others.

At the beginning of the play, when Lomov arrives, nervous and evening dressed up, Chubukov speaks in empty, repeated phrases like "How are you and so on and all that?" and "Why the evening dress, gloves, and so on and all that?" (Chekhov, p.1). These repeated, meaningless words show a world where talking is more of a habit than real communication. Lomov's speech is also awkward. He is so nervous that he can't even say Chubukov's name correctly, stammering, "Honour Stepanitch… I mean, Stepan Honouritch…" (Chekhov, p.1). This early mistake hints at the acute communication problems in the play. Chubukov's language is filled with empty social impolite language and repetitions: "How are you and so on and all that?" and "Why the evening dress, gloves, and so on and all that." This repetitive, equivocal phrasing ("and so on", "all that") establishes a world where speech is habitual rather than meaningful. Lomov's language is also dysfunctional. He is so nervous that he cannot even pronounce Chubukov's name clearly. These failures and rustic expressions create absurdity and miscommunications in their conversation. These lacks in the characters evoke a comic atmosphere that hides their shortcomings, but continues to give essence to the comedy in the play.

A key comic technique, contrapuntal dialogue, is identified by Gottlieb (2006). He describes this as a "key comic technique, where 'one conversation with one group on stage counterpoints another, with the action overlapping'" (p. 8). As the play features only three characters, this contrapuntal effect is made by their rapid-fire, overlapping arguments, where each character is locked in their own monologue. The central argument over Oxen Meadows is a perfect example. Lomov starts a serious declaration of love, but Natalya quickly focuses on a minor detail:

> ***LOMOV.*** *The Lomovs and the Chubukovs have always had the friendliest... regard for each other... My land boarders yours! My Oxen Meadows touch your birchwoods and….*
> ***NATALYA.*** *One moment, please... You said, m**y** Oxen Meadows.... But are they **yours**? (Chekhov, p. 3)*

From this point, their talk stops being a real conversation and becomes two conflicting bargaining sessions. They speak past each other in a fast, back-and-forth rhythm:

LOMOV. *Mine!*
NATALYA. *Ours!*
LOMOV. *Mine!*
NATALYA. *Ours! (Chekhov, p. 5)*

This creates a funny and chaotic rhythm. The characters care more about winning the argument than the marriage proposal itself. The quarrelling becomes the main action, and the comedy comes from the gaps between the small, trivial topics (the meadows, the dogs, heredity, etc.) and the serious and dramatic way they argue about them.

3.2.2 Argument escalation and absurd insults

The comedy grows as the characters speak in exaggerated and unreasonable ways. When Chubukov joins the argument, it changes from a fight over property into silly and ridiculous personal insults. Their words no longer make sense and just become silly and funny insults:

CHUBUKOV. *Your grandfather was nothing more than a drunk, and your younger aunt, Nastasya Mihailovna, ran away with an architect.... That's right, an architect and so on.*
LOMOV. *And your mother was a hunchback!*
NATALYA. *And your aunt was a gossip and a backbiter! (Chekov, p.7)*

This exchange is hilarious because the insults are so random and extreme. They highlight the characters' triviality and try to establish one's superiority over another. This is a complete breakdown of civilised communication. The language reveals their true, ridiculous selves, far more effectively than any direct authorial description could. Thus, the nature of their unthoughtful dialogues and forgetfulness about the future adds a new dimension of comedy.

3.2.3 The Ironic gap between language and action

Chekhov creates comedy through the ironic gap between what the characters *say* and what they *do*. Lomov constantly complains about his physical problems, "My heart's beating wildly.... My foot's gone to sleep.... There's something keeps pulling in my side (Chekov, p. 9)." He uses hyperbole to describe his nervous condition. His constant worry about being sick is funny in itself, but it becomes even funnier when contrasted with his actions. He claims to be dying, yet he has enough energy to engage in a screaming match. At the climax, when he faints, Chubukov cries, "Why don't I put a bullet into my brain? I deserve to die!" (Chekov, p. 13). As in the stage direction, Lomov moves. At this time, the tragic language ("He is dead!") comically reverses in an instant. The denouement of the play masterfully reproduces this ironic gap. The moment they are officially engaged, Natalya immediately reverts to arguing about the dogs:

NATALYA. *So... now you can admit that Messer is better than Guesser.*
LOMOV. *He's worse! (Chekov, p.13)*

Their language patterns do not change. It signals that marriage will not solve their inability to communicate normally. Chubukov's final, weary aside, "And they lived happily ever after!" (p.13), is deeply ironic. The comedy comes from the fact that the characters keep speaking in the same stubborn and silly way. Their miscommunication continues even after the play ends. Chekhov makes language the story itself. The fast dialogue and rising absurdity create humour. The gap between words and actions adds to the comedy. The play is funny, but it also shows how people fail to understand each other. When language breaks down, comedy appears. It shows both the silly and touching ways humans try to connect bonds.

3.3 The Satirical Mechanism: Farce as Social Critique

The Proposal is much more than an ordinary farse. While the play is hilarious, its true genius lies in using humour as a sharp tool for social criticism. Chekhov, who himself rose from a background of poverty (Whyman, 2011), uses the ridiculous arguments between his characters to hold up a mirror to the problems of nineteenth-century Russian society. The play acts as a satire, using a farcical situation to expose the flaws of the wealthy landowning class. This part of the discussion explores how Chekhov critiques this society by focusing on issues such as the shallow motives for marriage, the petty materialism of the upper class, and the masterful use of farce to deliver this critique.

3.3.1 The critique of marriage as a transaction for stability

The central plot of the play, a marriage proposal, is turned into a satire on how the upper class viewed marriage. According to characters' point of view, marriage is often not about love, but a business deal to gain economic stability and maintain social status (Sumarsono et al., 2023). The play shows situational irony because a marriage proposal, normally a romantic and emotional event, becomes a business-like negotiation. Lomov focuses on Natalya's practical qualities and his own age and health, and turns what should be love into a matter of convenience. Chekhov, using this technique, criticises a society where "people from the upper class could not get married to people who came from the lower class. Love and affection were not so important to them" (Sumarsono et al., 2023).

When Lomov finally states his purpose, he does not talk about love for Natalya. Instead, he gives a list of practical reasons for marrying her: "Natalya Stepanovna is an excellent housekeeper. She's not bad-looking… and she went to school! .... What more do I want?" (p. 2). His main motivation is his own fragile health and coming of age: "I need to marry. It's as simple as that. I'm already 35— I ought to lead a quiet and regular life with no upsets" (p. 2). This is a clear satire on a system where marriage is a practical arrangement, not a romantic one. (Whyman, 2011) notes that Chekhov "exposes the problems of an authoritarian society," and the transactional view of marriage was a key part of that problem (p. 25). The characters' quick shift from the proposal to arguing about land proves that property is more important to them than personal relationships. Therefore, this is the way the characters change their intention from a decent topic to a hidden one. The expertise of Chekhov's characterisation and social criticism remains in these narrations.

3.3.2 The absurdity of petty materialism

The most obvious source of comedy in the play is the relentless argument over a small piece of land called Oxen Meadows. This absurd conflict is Chekhov's main tool for satirising the materialism of the landowners. Their "struggle for survival in harsh social conditions is the key to the understanding of the conflict" (Theuriau, 2019, p.227), but Chekhov shows this struggle as ridiculous and petty.

Natalya herself admits the land is not very valuable ("These Meadows aren't valuable. They only come to about 12 acres."), but she immediately adds, "that's not the point. It's the unfairness! I can't stand unfairness" (p. 4). This highlights that the argument is about pride and principle, not real economic need. The conflict quickly escalates into childish naming arguments and insults about each other's families (p. 7). It shows how superficial their values are. The farcical dispute over the meadows makes the audience see how empty and dreary the lives of these landowners are when they can fight so passionately over something so trivial.

3.3.3 Masterful farce as a vehicle for critique

Chekhov's true mastery lies in how he uses the techniques of farce, a type of comedy with exaggerated and ridiculous situations, not just for laughter, but to make his social criticism more powerful. The play is filled with classic farcical elements. The play comes up with a nervous hero, constant misunderstandings, exaggerated physical comedy (Lomov's heart palpitations and fainting), and characters rushing in and out of rooms. However, Chekhov turns simple farce into satire by adding a steady, critical layer of irony. He efficiently ties these elements directly to the characters' moral fallacies and flaws through ironic contrast.

For instance, Lomov's constant complaints about his health are funny, but they also show the weakness and self-centeredness of his social class. The fast, repeated arguments where the characters keep shouting "Mine!" and "Ours!" (p. 5) sound like a comic performance, yet this repetition shows how stubborn and petty their social interactions are. The most masterful moment is the ending. Just as the conflict seems resolved with the marriage, the couple immediately starts a new, equally absurd argument about their dogs (p. 13). This perfectly structured farcical cycle shows that their underlying problems are never solved. Their materialism and pride are deeply rooted. Uddin & Alam (2019) suggest that Chekhov's "experiential learning with the social maladies" allowed him to present this "decadent, corroding and worked-up society" through the very structure of his comedy (p. 42). The farce does not weaken the critique; it makes it unforgettable by showing that the absurdity on stage is a reflection of the absurdity in real life.

4. Conclusions

Based on the discussion of this research, it is found that the comic elements in Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal* serve as a sophisticated vehicle for social critique, moving beyond mere farce. The study shows that the humour, created through the comedy of character and the comedy of language, exposes the deep flaws and materialism of Russian society at that time. The characters' contradictions, such as Lomov's anxiety, Natalya's pride, and Chubukov's volatility, create absurd comedy. At the same time, they reveal a society where marriage is treated as a transaction for economic stability rather than an emotional bond. This analysis finds that Chekhov's genius lies in using laughter to give serious commentary on human pettiness and social decay. The primary contribution of this study is its clear explanation of the link between comic form and critical content in the play. It provides a structured framework that shows Chekhov's artistic methods and deepens our understanding of how comedy can act as a tool for social analysis. In doing so, it offers a valuable perspective for future research on Chekhov and dramatic satire.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all parties who have supported and contributed to the completion of this study. The author also sincerely appreciates all those whose contributions, both directly and indirectly, have helped make the completion of this study possible.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author(s) Contribution

The corresponding author is the sole contributor to this manuscript, including the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and writing of the study.

References

Autant-Mathieu, M.-C. (2012). Rewriting Chekhov in Russia Today: Questioning a Fragmented Society and Finding New Aesthetic Reference Points (pp. 50–74). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203105221-10

Chekov, A. (1889). *The Proposal* (J. West, Trans.). https://www.balallyplayers.com/productions/2015_The_Proposal/The%20Proposal%20by%20Anton%20Chekhov.pdf

Ferguson, R. A. (2013). Proposals and Performative Utterance in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Professional Man's Plight (pp. 274–285). Oxford University. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199812042.003.0014

Frédéric-Gaël, T. (2023). Mental and Behavioural Disorders in "The Proposal" By Anton Chekhov. Vestnik of Kostroma State University, 28(3), 97–102. https://doi.org/10.34216/1998-0817-2022-28-3-97-102

Gottlieb, V. (2000). Chekhov's one-act plays and the full-length plays. In V. Gottlieb & P. Allain (Eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov* (1st edn, pp. 57–69). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521581176.005

Klimenko, S. O. (2001). Anton Chekhov and English Nostalgia. *Orbis Litterarum*, *56*(2), 121–137. https://doi.org/10.1034/j.1600-0730.2001.d01-38.x

Nag, M. (1970). On the Aspects of Time and Place in Anton Chekhov's Dramaturgy. *Scando-Slavica*, *16*(1), 23–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/00806767008600539

Octavia, S., Kuncara, S. D., & Lubis, I. S. (2023). Stepanovna's Motivation in Marriage Proposal Script by Anton Chekov. Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, Dan Budaya, 7(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v7i1.6628

Rayfield, D. (2000). Chekhov's stories and the plays. In V. Gottlieb & P. Allain (Eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov* (1st edn, pp. 203–215). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521581176.016

Straus, I. J. (2014). Incongruity Theory and the Explanatory Limits of Reason. *UVM Honors College Senior Theses*, *26*. https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/hcoltheses/26

Sumarsono, I., Agusalim, I. D., Kusumawati, E., Muhammad, A. F., & Nurisma, R. A. (2023). Acquiring Economic and Social Stability in Chekhov's A Marriage Proposal. *Lingua Scientia*, *30*(1), 110–119. https://doi.org/10.23887/ls.v30i1.40010

Theuriau, F.-G. (2019). The Social Question in "The Proposal" by Anton Chékhov. *Studia Litterarum*, *4*(3), 226–239. https://doi.org/10.22455/2500-4247-2019-4-3-226-239

Tsimbaeva, E. N. (2022). Behind the stage of a literary text. 'The crown of marriage was projected for them by fathers….' Voprosy Literatury, 4, 130–154. https://doi.org/10.31425/0042-8795-2022-4-130-154

Uddin, K. M. J., & Alam, K. (2019). *An Approach to Reevaluating and Understanding Chekhov in The Perspective of Theme, Motif, Symbol and Writing Style*.

Whyman, R. (2011). *Anton Chekhov*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843550

Zubarev, V. (2011). Chekhov as a Founder of the Comedy of a New Type. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *13*(1). https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1716