

**THE POETICS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD IN ELENA CHIZHOVA'S NOVELS
"THE TIME OF WOMEN" AND "THE LORD OF THINGS"**

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Abstract: This article examines the function and poetics of the world of objects (reism) in Elena Chizhova's prose. By analyzing her novels *The Time of Women* and *The Lord of Things*, the author explores how material objects serve as carriers of historical memory, social identity, and psychological depth. The study highlights that in Chizhova's narratives, things are not merely background elements but active participants in the dialogue between generations and the reconstruction of the Soviet past.

Keywords: Elena Chizhova, material world, poetics of objects, memory studies, *The Time of Women*, *The Lord of Things*, Soviet everyday life.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Russian literature, Elena Chizhova stands out as a master of "psychological reconstruction." Her novels often delve into the Soviet past, not through grand historical events, but through the intimate, everyday lives of individuals. A central element of her artistic method is the poetics of the material world. In Chizhova's prose, things (objects) act as mediators between the past and the present, often possessing more stability and "truth" than human memories or ideological constructs.

1. THE DOMESTIC SACRED: "THE TIME OF WOMEN"

In the novel *The Time of Women*, the setting—a Leningrad communal apartment (kommunalka)—is saturated with objects that define the existence of the three "old women" (Gliceria, Ariadna, and Evdokia).

– **Objects as Anchors of the Past:** Antique furniture, pre-revolutionary remnants, and humble sewing kits represent a lost culture. For the protagonists, these objects are anchors that prevent them from dissolving into the faceless Soviet "new world."

– **The Metaphor of the Spool and Thread:** Sewing and handicrafts in the novel are not just chores; they represent the "weaving" of a child's fate (the girl, Antonina). Here, the material world intersects with mythology, where thread becomes a symbol of the lifeline and the transmission of unspoken wisdom.

– **Sensory Poetics:** Chizhova emphasizes the textures, smells, and "voices" of old things, creating a haptic experience for the reader.

2. THE POWER OF POSSESSION: "THE LORD OF THINGS"

In *The Lord of Things*, the material world takes on a more complex, almost sinister role. The title itself suggests a hierarchy where humans and objects switch places.

– **The Fetishization of Objects:** The novel explores the late-Soviet and post-Soviet obsession with "deficit" goods and luxury items. Objects here become markers of social status and tools of manipulation.

– **The "Living" Museum:** The protagonist's relationship with the material world reflects a desire to control time. If one can possess the "thing," one believes they can possess the era it represents.

– **Decline and Decay:** Chizhova meticulously describes the aging of objects—fading fabrics, cracked wood, and dust. This "aesthetics of decay" serves as a metaphor for the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the moral erosion of the characters.

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: FROM SALVATION TO DOMINATION

While in *The Time of Women* objects serve a protective and nurturing function (helping to preserve the soul and culture), in *The Lord of Things*, the material world often becomes a burden or a trap.

- In the first novel, the "world of things" is a fortress of memory.
- In the second novel, it is a commodity that dictates human behavior.

However, in both works, Chizhova uses the "small" world of objects to reflect the "large" world of history. The meticulous description of a tea set or a heavy wardrobe allows the reader to feel the weight of the 20th century.

CONCLUSION

The poetics of the material world in Elena Chizhova's novels is an essential tool for exploring the human condition. Things in her prose do not just occupy space; they "remember," "suffer," and "witness." In *The Time of Women* and *The Lord of Things*, the material world becomes a language that describes the tragedy and resilience of the Russian people. For Chizhova, to understand a person is to understand the objects they choose to keep, the things they lose, and the "lords" they serve.

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