

PSYCHOANALYSIS OF ANTON CHEKHOV'S "THE LADY WITH THE DOG"

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Abstract

Anton Chekhov, a renowned Russian playwright and short story writer, uses the stream-of-consciousness technique in his stories, such as "The Lady with the Dog," to explore themes of love, guilt, and the pursuit of happiness. The story follows two men, Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna, who have grown weary of their spouses. Gurov, a chauvinistic male with a high misogynistic tendency, indulges in multiple affairs and switches between relationships until he meets Anna, who is tormented by guilt for cheating on her husband. Anna's inner turmoil is presented through her intense self-humiliation, expressing her strong sense of wrongdoing. Gurov consoles his grief-stricken heart by viewing it as one of many adventures in his life, but later realizes he has fallen in love head over heart. The story highlights the futility of aimless relationships resulting from social institutions like marriage, as love and marriage are distinct concepts. Chekhov presents a metaphor for these crestfallen lovers, comparing them to two migrating birds caught in separate cages. Both Anna and Gurov struggle to find a way out, but with no success.

Key Words: *Anton Chekhov, Russian,*

EXPLANATION

Anton Chekhov (1860 -1904) is one of the most celebrated Russian playwrights and short story writers. Along with Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, Chekhov is considered as one of the pioneering figures of early modernism in the theatre. As a dramatist, Chekhov has produced four classics: *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Also, critics hold his short-stories in high esteem. Chekhov's use the stream-of-consciousness technique, later adopted by other modernists, breaks away from the overarching morality of traditional story telling. His short-story collection *At Dusk* won Chekhov the Pushkin Prize for the best literary production. Although Chekhov is considered one of the greatest playwrights, some critics believe that his short stories are true representation his literary genius. Vladimir Nabokov declares that "The Lady with the Dog" is one of the greatest stories ever written and characterizes Chekhov's writing as the finest way of story-telling. This paper will analyse Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" is a tale of extramarital union of two people who have been struggling to escape the complexities of society. Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov is a philanderer with a cool, carefree attitude towards life. A father of three kids, Gurov is least interested in his matrimony and roams around in Yalta where he happens to meet Anna Sergeyevna. Anna is also a married woman with similarly dissatisfied conjugal life. She interacts with Gurov and they quickly get involved in a relationship. This story has much room for psychological excavation especially in these two major characters. Chekhov

explores the flow of thoughts of Gurov and Anna throughout the story which facilitates the researcher to analyse these characters. By a beautiful presentation of the graph of their relationship, the author has dealt with various concepts of human psychology through the characters of these two lovers. It would be apt to explore psychology of these characters based on their dialogues, acts and workings of mind from the first to the last statement of the story.

By nature, they both are diametrically opposite. Gurov is a typical, chauvinistic male with a high misogynist tendency whereas Anna is a lady of heightened Morality Principle. Gurov considers women as the lower race and always looks at them with some sort of scorn and triviality. Not unexpectedly, he has long been unfaithful to his wife. A sensible reader would immediately realize that for Gurov, a woman is nothing but an object of need gratification. Largely driven by carnal desires, he goes on having multiple affairs and switches over from one relationship to the other until he meets Anna. As he has undergone pangs of complications arising out of affairs with women, he believes in the theory of once bitten twice shy but ultimately fails to resist temptation of tantalizing relationships. Thanks to his hunting tendency, he targets Anna and successfully entices her. After making love with him, Anna is agonized by a nagging guilt of illicit union. Fed up of her barren matrimony, she understandably succumbs to her Id, her desire for both carnal and emotional satisfaction but her Superego, her guilt of cheating on her husband torments her. It is evident that disappointment of marital life leads to extramarital relationships but there is usually an undercurrent of guilt for breaking the socio-cultural taboo and for cheating on her husband. The author has made a charming presentation of Anna's inner turmoil by her expressions of intense self-humiliation. Her tears and sobs convey a strong sense of wrongdoing and she laments: - "How can I justify myself? I am a wicked, fallen woman. I despise myself and have not the least thought of self-justification. It is not my husband I have deceived; it is myself. And not only now, I have been deceiving myself for ever so long. My husband is no doubt an honest, worthy man, but he is a flunkey. I do not know what it is he does at his office, but I know he is a flunkey. I was only twenty when I married him, and I was devoured by curiosity, wanted something higher, I told myself that there must be a different kind of life. I wanted to live, to live... I was burning with curiosity... you will never understand that, but I swear to God, I could no longer control myself, nothing could hold me back. I told my husband I was ill, and I came here... and I started going about like one possessed, like a madwoman... and now I have become an ordinary, worthless woman, and everyone has the right to despise me" (Chekhov "Short Stories" 160).

Even though there is a lot in common between them, there are some distinct differences as well. Even though both have grown weary of their spouses, Gurov quite casually and comfortably indulges in affairs with women. There had been many women in his life but he

has never been emotionally tied to any of those bonds. He does not seem to be guilt-ridden by his infidelity to his wife. On the other hand, Anna is incessantly tormented by crushing guilt leading her to the point of self-humiliation, calling herself a madwoman, an ordinary, worthless woman etc. "... there was a feeling of embarrassment in the atmosphere, as if someone had just knocked at the door. Anna Sergeyevna, 'the lady with the dog', seemed to regard the affair as something very special, very serious, as if she had become a fallen woman, an attitude he found odd and disconcerting" (159). Anna is a classic case of heightened Superego leading to constant self-humiliation. She represents countless women who feel frustrated by monotonous matrimony, insatiate erotic and emotional desires and are thus compelled to cross threshold of socio-cultural norms. Quite contradictory to Anna, Gurov fails to identify with this conflict and he feels bored listening to her sorrow. He finds her remorse unexpected and out of place. Just as many men, he is unable to unravel the intricacies of a woman's heart. He takes this relation for granted and feels that soon even the memories of it would fade away but life proves him wrong. Notably, not many of such thoughts are expressed through dialogues and larger segment is revealed through the narration of their thought patterns. Due to this quality, the story has a rich potential for psychological study because the author prefers to depict the flow of thoughts by both Anna and Gurov. For instance, after Anna's departure Gurov tries to console his grief-stricken heart by considering it as one of the many adventures in his life and presumes that it would soon be nothing but a memory. It is this memory that haunts him later and makes him realize that he has fallen in love head over heart. Chekhov portrays fragile feelings of this love-sick man. On the exterior, he involves himself, although mechanically, into the routine activities of his daily life, he is engrossed in Anna's thoughts each moment.

Naturally, he is overwhelmed by an irrepressible urge to share his delicate emotions but he cannot as it is not a socially sanctioned love relationship. After their intense yet abrupt encounter, they both depart and believe that there is an end to it but life proves them wrong. Gurov took it for granted that very soon he will be able to bury this chapter into the depths of his unconscious but by and large, he gets caught in the whirlpool of Anna's memories. "He had believed that in a month's time Anna Sergeyevna would be nothing but a vague memory, and that hereafter, with her wistful smile, she would only occasionally appear to him in dreams, like others before her. But the month was now well over and winter was in full swing, and all was as clear in his memory as if he had only parted with Anna Sergeyevna the day before. And his recollections grew ever more insistent" (163-164). Similarly, Anna forces herself to forget the moments with Gurov and endeavours to immerse herself into the mundane activities of life. However, she fails to do so. Possessed by Anna's thoughts and feelings, Gurov cannot resist reuniting with her and visits her town. Repeated mention of the grey fence at Anna's house, 'this accursed fence' as the story reads, appears to be a metaphor for the smothering prison of her matrimony. Gurov catches her in a theatrical performance.

On the very sight of the lady, his heart skips a beat or two. He realizes that Anna is his world; she means everything to him and that he cannot breathe in relief even once without loving this lady. When they are again face to face, Anna is startled to see him. She is so stupefied as well as terrified that she rushes from the place and pleads Gurov to leave this place. Their reunion at the theatre is not confined to just an abrupt exchange of intimate words but it represents psychological struggle of the poor lovebirds. Anna feels divided between her husband and her love. The story contains a fascinating depiction of her agonized and sandwiched state of mind. Dread of being caught makes Anna impel Gurov to go away. She promises to return to Moscow to meet him.

If Anna feels divided between her husband and Gurov, Gurov also leads a double life. In public, he pretends to live the same life with his friend, family and acquaintances. He continues all his habitual activities of chatting with friends, discussions at the club, his derogatory remark on women as 'lower race', enjoying daily life with his wife etc but all these things remain only on the surface or exterior of his existence. In the heart of his hearts, he pines for Anna. However, there is a remarkable change in his perspective now. He begins to judge people by his own self. He realizes that everyone is like a moon, having a darker side which they never show to others. Just as he must wear a mask of fake smile and warm greetings, he believes that others also generally conceal the secrets of life under the camouflage of normal social life. He thus realizes that 'every individual existence revolves around mystery'. When they meet again, they feel helpless in the shackles of their individual commitments and familial responsibilities. Their secret meetings and lurking fear of people make their life not just gloomy but fragmented. The story is an acute observation of the prevalent patterns of relationships in the society. Initially, the story runs as a usual tale of illicit union but later, the writer arouses sympathy in a reader's mind for these star-crossed lovers. Moreover, it also points to the futility of such aimless, hopeless relationships which result from social institution called marriage. At one juncture, both Anna and Gurov feel remorse for being already married. Love and marriage are two distinct ideas. Love is a natural, instinctual process of Nature whereas marriage is a social institution which may exist with or without the presence of love. In such cases, when there is no love left in a marriage, it remains nothing more than a lifelong burden and chances for such extramarital relations invariably arise. The author presents a beautiful metaphor for such crestfallen lovers: "He and Anna Sergeyevna loved one another as people who are very close and intimate, as husband and wife, as dear friends love one another.

It seemed to them that fate had intended them for one another, and they could not understand why she should have a husband and he a wife. They were like two migrating birds, the male and the female, who had been caught and put into separate cages" (170). This feeling of being in a cage is an outcome of an important metamorphosis that both these characters undergo.

Anna has initially been a law-abiding woman but dissatisfaction of marriage makes her cross the boundaries and her meeting with Gurov intensifies the realization of the same. Standing in stark contrast to the love of Gurov, her husband's relationship seems to her far more futile than ever before. On the other hand, Gurov no longer remains a carefree womanizer but finds himself completely transformed. Sadly, they both are powerlessly caught in the trap of social obligation and they strive to find a way out, but with no success. Chekhov sums up the story with an unresolved riddle of relationship. That is precisely where the charm of this story lies and that places it above all other romantic stories or stories of illicit union. Chekhov's craft of characterization is one of the multiple reasons why "The Lady with the Dog" is one of his most celebrated stories throughout the world. Note must take of the fact that a stalwart like Vladimir Nabokov declared this literary work to be one of the greatest short stories ever written. Chekhov is such a literary craftsman who is well versed with presenting workings of human mind. His pen is enough to draw out idiosyncrasies and intricacies of the psyche in a metaphoric and artistic manner.

CONCLUSION

Anton Chekhov, a celebrated Russian playwright and short story writer, is known for his work in early modernism theatre. His stories, such as "The Lady with the Dog," use the stream-of-consciousness technique to explore the themes of love, guilt, and the pursuit of happiness. The story revolves around two men, Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna, who have grown weary of their spouses. Gurov, a typical chauvinistic male with a high misogynist tendency, indulges in multiple affairs and switches between relationships until he meets Anna, who is tormented by guilt of cheating on her husband.

Anna's inner turmoil is presented through her intense self-humiliation, conveying a strong sense of wrongdoing. She laments, "How can I justify myself? I am a wicked, fallen woman. I despise myself and have not the least thought of self-justification. It is not my husband I have deceived; it is myself. And not only now, I have become an ordinary, worthless woman, and everyone has the right to despise me." After Anna's departure, Gurov tries to console his grief-stricken heart by considering it as one of the many adventures in his life but later realizes that he has fallen in love head over heart. He realizes that every individual existence revolves around mystery and feels helpless in their individual commitments and familial responsibilities.

The story highlights the futility of aimless, hopeless relationships resulting from social institutions like marriage. Both Anna and Gurov feel remorse for being already married, as love and marriage are distinct concepts. The author presents a beautiful metaphor for these crestfallen lovers, comparing them to two migrating birds caught in separate cages. Both Anna and Gurov struggle to find a way out, but with no success.

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