

[Untitled: On Chekhov's "The Lady with the Little Dog"]

Anton Chekhov is said to “ [to be] extremely modest about his extraordinary ability to empathize with the characters” that he wrote about in his stories (Charters, 134). He was careful not to stereotype any of the characters he portrayed nor did he over dramatize the story’s plot. The characters’ emotions and reactions to those emotions were the vehicle for the stories’ plot. Chekhov’s only desire was to write about real people with real feelings which allowed his writings such as “The Lady with the Little Dog”, the seriousness and sympathy it deserves. Chekhov emphasized on the man and the woman always being “ the two poles [of every story] (p. 949). Just as there are pulls toward poles of the earth so are the pulls on the characters in his stories; these pulls being forces of life and life circumstance. “The Lady with the Little Dog” demonstrates how reality forces undesired role play between a man and woman in love which is one of the definitive of literary realism established by Professor Agatucci; “[The Lady with the Little Dog] is an example of “A slice of life” such as ordinary people of contemporary times live in society caught up by social forces” (p. 3). The story’s main characters, Anna and Dimitri, their desire to be together are conflicted with the duties they have in common which are husband and wife to two different people. However, the love that Dimitri and Anna share represents the struggle of duties just as the desire for most people in society to want to break from reality.

Dimitri, unlike Anna, was not upset or regretful of their love affair because “he had begun to be unfaithful to [his wife] long ago, was unfaithful often, and, probably for that reason, almost always spoke ill of women, and when they were discussed in his presence, he would say of them: ‘An inferior race!’”(p.144). Dimitri was introduced in the story as taking on an egotistical and selfish role knowing very well that not only was he beyond so many years to Anna but also, “in his tone and caresses, there has been a slight shade of mockery, the somewhat coarse arrogance of a happy man” (p. 149). He seemed to have had his way with Anna and did not want to fall short of this good thing. In contrast, Anna responded in a way that she was new to being unfaithful to her husband and maybe even realized that she was not Dimitri’s

first mistress. She admits, “ I love an honest man, pure life, sin is vile to me, I myself don’t know what I’m doing”(p. 147). Anna knew right from the first day she met Dimitri that she loved him but those feelings over powered her judgment and duty to her husband. She could only try to justify that this was not real love that they shared but a scandalous and un-righteous thing to be apart of.

Anna and Dimitri are considered to be dynamic characters because not only to do they change the way they feel about each other but they also change the way they feel about their life circumstances. Moreover, are also considered to be well-rounded characters encompassing the substance of the story Chekov intended. Dimitir’s wife is only mentioned a few times and is considered to be a flat character because we do not get a sense for how she reacts to Dimitri’s scandalous love affairs. However, we do have Dimitri’s point of view of her to be a woman “who loved without sincerity, with superfluous talk, affectedly, with hysteria, with an expression as if it were not passion” (p. 146). He obviously had a very superficial relationship with his wife that only made him compare his happiness and love with Anna. Anna followed Dimitri everywhere, he could hear her breathing and saw resemblances of her in the oddest of places (p.150). His life back home was boring and uninteresting to him. He only became so appreciative by Anna’s beauty and the excitement that he gave him when she was away. Meanwhile, Chekov did not explain to us the process by which she changed in her character however, Anna admitted that she adored him and he was all that she could think about. She realized her triteness before when she tried thought that she was just a “trashy woman”(p.147).

Dimitri’s desire to find Anna after many years of being in Moscow is considered to be an important turning point in the story. Dimitri forfeits his strength that he could live without her because his emotions were too high strung and he

valued being with her too intensely. After meeting up with Anna at *the Geisha*, he was able to test Anna and wait for her to reveal her true feeling so that he was not just imagining she was in love with him. And so the climax begins, Anna reveals, “ I think only of you all the time, I’ve lived with only thoughts of you.” Furthermore, the falling action of the story is the plan of continued rendezvous’ in Moscow secretly. He and Anna “loved each other like very close dear people, like husband and wife, like tender friends; it seemed to them that fate itself had destined them for each other, and they could not understand why he had a wife and she a husband” (p. 155). They were bound like soul mates and did want to live the false lives they had with people they were not in love with. So they knew that their problems were far from few and “ the most complicated and difficult part was just beginning” (p. 155). The conclusion of a “happy ending” is left by the reader to implore because Chekov left it open with a purpose. The purpose was to leave it less dramatic and predictable.

The love that these two people shared simplified the term “ love is pain” but more importantly they finally found each other and they did not have to live in falsity. This true love was a new and treacherous territory that they did not want to avoid. The willingness they had caused them to want to break away from the roles that bound them for such a long time. Chekov showed transformation and humbleness of the characters in “The Lady with the Little Dog” and is a story that many could appeal to because of its deepest emotional level between the characters of Anna and Dimitri.

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