

Main ideas of lady with the dog by anton chekhov

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The Misogynistic Themes Presented in The Lady with the Dog by Anton Chekhov

The way women are viewed in society is ever changing. For example, women can now vote and hold higher positions in their job field. Do not let this fool you, there is still much more to be done in terms of gender equality. These rights and freedoms that are considered normal in 2015 heavily contrast the way that women were treated just a century ago. While some are aware of the dehumanizing treatment of women many years ago, to live it is an entirely different experience. In 1899, in the city of Yalta, which is part of what is now the Crimea Republic, the short story *The Lady with the Dog* written by Anton Chekhov takes place. While being totally unacceptable, this treatment was considered normal back then. The misogynistic undertones of this story are nothing short of obvious, the sexualisation of Anna Sergeyevna's youthfulness, the objectification of her as a woman, and the treatment of women as if they were inferior to men express this quite strongly. Viewing *The Lady with the Dog* through a feminist lens allows readers to realize how the protagonist, Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov, is a misogynist.

Repeatedly throughout the early portion of this short story, Dmitri sexualizes Anna's youthful appearance and demeanour. Her obedient nature and small build are especially attractive to him, seemingly because this would almost automatically put Dmitri in the dominant position, which he says that he feels more confident in. This is stated early on:

He was bored and ill-at-ease in the company of men, with whom he was always cold and reserved, but felt quite at home among women, and knew exactly what to say to them, and how to behave; he could even be silent in their company without feeling the slightest awkwardness. There was an elusive charm in his appearance and disposition which attracted women and caught their sympathies. (Chekhov 66)

This elusive charm he speaks of is normal for any man to feel like he does in that time period, because women were expected to treat men with the utmost respect, no matter the circumstance. After meeting Anna, and of course feeling as if he had won her over, he reflects on Anna's youthful nature. He recalls, ". . . [O]nly a very short time ago she had been a schoolgirl, like his own daughter, learning her lessons, he remembers how much there was of a shyness and constraint in her laughter, in her way of conversing with a stranger . . . He recalled her slender, delicate neck, her fine grey eyes" (Chekhov 68). The fact that Dmitri compares Anna to his daughter is not only mildly disturbing, but indicates how old Anna is in comparison to Dmitri; a married man with three children: a twelve-year-old daughter and two school-aged sons. Clearly, Dmitri likes his mistresses young and innocent looking. Sexualizing youthful characteristics is a classic misogynistic trait, ranging from shaming school-aged girls for showing their shoulders at school to fetishizing younger looking girls. Dmitri possesses the latter part of the trait.

Throughout the passage, woman are spoken of, mainly by physical attributes, as if the protagonist were describing furniture or food. For both of

those objects, age presents wear and deterioration, Dmitri believes that the same goes for older women. This objectification demonstrates how women were valued in his life. When describing his current wife, whom he is frequently disloyal to, he focuses mainly on her physical aspects. Due to how dull he thinks that she is, the way he describes her personality sounds just as dull. Since his wife has matured, grown as a person since their marriage, and is no longer young and “pretty” according to Dmitri’s standards, he has lost interest. His wife is introduced in the beginning of the story. Dmitri describes her as:

. . . [A] tall, black browed woman, erect, dignified, imposing, and, as she said of herself, a “thinker” . . . and though he secretly considered her shallow, narrow-minded, and dowdy . . . It was long since he had first begun deceiving her and he was now constantly unfaithful to her, (Chekhov 66)

As stated before, Dmitri was constantly cheating on his wife, meaning that he had many one night stands. He refers to these women that he involves himself with as “the lower race” (Chekhov 66) and says “. . . [T]he ample lessons he had received from bitter experience entitled him to call them whatever he liked.” (Chekhov 66) Dmitri also talks about his sexual relationships, and how once they begin evolving into something more, he becomes annoyed, implying that women are nothing more than sexual objects. He tells the reader:

“Repeated and bitter experience had taught him that every fresh new intimacy, while at first introducing such pleasant variety into everyday life, and offering itself as a charming, light adventure, inevitably developed,

among decent people . . . into a problem of excessive complication leading to an intolerably irksome situation. But every time he encountered an attractive woman he forgot all about this experience, the desire for life surged up in him, and everything suddenly seemed simple and amusing. (Chekhov 66)

Basically, he likes being involved with women until they express some sort of emotion.

Dmitri sees women as purely sexual objects, and if any other emotion is expressed, other than lust, he is annoyed by her. He also mentions other occurrences where feelings have developed, calling “ talk” unnecessary. To Dmitri, women serve no other purpose but to satisfy him sexually, yet another common belief amongst misogynists.

Overall, women are seen as inferior to men in this passage, not just demonstrated by Dmitri’s actions towards them, but his thoughts about them express this conceived classification as well. As previously stated, Dmitri has cheated on his wife countless times, prefers to associate himself with women because he feels superior to them and knows that they are obligated to respect him regardless of his behaviour, and refers to women as the lower race. Before Dmitri and Anna had sex, Anna breaks down, afraid that if they go through with the planned activity, that he will no longer respect her. She insulted herself a few times, “. . . 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 70) While Anna is not wrong about how immoral it is

to cheat on your spouse, a man would not have thrown this same fit. Dmitri, for example, feels no shame for being unfaithful to his wife, he goes about his life as if he were never married. This is learned behaviour; women, back in the time of this short story, were taught to please their husband, and that was their sole purpose. Men, on the other hand, were taught that women were meant to serve them, and that their wife is their property. For all that the reader knows, Dmitri's wife could have been fully aware that he was being disloyal, but she probably felt that she was in no place to speak up on the subject. The underlying misogynistic themes in this passage really are not so underlying after all, and Dmitri does not fail to express how inferior women appear to him.

Using feminist criticism, one can clearly see that the protagonist of *The Lady with the Dog* is a misogynist. The misogynistic undertones in this story are very prominent; the sexualisation of Anna Sergeyevna's youthfulness, objectification of the female characters, and treating women as inferior express these themes in very pronounced way. The year that this story was written in does not excuse Dmitri's actions in any way, therefore 2015 should not excuse any misogynistic treatment either.