

Chekhov vs. feminism

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Chekhov vs. Feminism In *The Lady with a Pet Dog*, Chekhov presents a chauvinistic tale of a chance encounter. While the short story is told from a passive third person perspective, upon close examination it is apparent that Gurov and Anna fell in love for different reasons. These reasons reflect the mentality that defined Chekhov's world; Russia at the turn of the century. This is a time, like most in humanity's historical past, in which pro-feminist mentalities were lacking and society was run by men. Readers are presented with a classic transformation of the main character, Dmitri Gurov. The transformation reflects a male-dominant society, and the phases of the transformation focus on Gurov and are thus chauvinistic. Gurov and Anna met in Yalta. They were both on vacation. But from the start, the chance encounter was a bit of a 'hunt' for Gurov. He had been in Yalta for two weeks, and had just started taking an interest in new arrivals to the scenic tourist destination. That is when he spotted young Anna, and his masculine lust began. Anna was always walking alone, wearing a white beret with a matching white Pomeranian. Gurov reflected: "If she is here alone without husband or friends, it wouldn't be a bad thing to make her acquaintance." This is the first spoken dialogue in the story, and it alludes to the pursuit that shortly followed. Leon 2 Dmitry Gurov pursued Anna in a stereotypical chauvinistic manner. At the beginning of the story, it was going to be a standard affair. Older man sees young girl, older man lusts after young girl, old man reels in young girl with intellect and charm. His mentality was reflected early on in his mindset regarding his wife. He didn't believe that his wife was that intelligent, and for that matter referred to all women as "an inferior race". This mentality was not unique to Mr. Gurov. Around the turn of

the century, it was common for marriages to be arranged by parents and set up as a sort of business deal. (Bredeson) This tradition led to the detached mentality with which Dmitry viewed his marriage. What he wanted Anna for was nothing new; he had multiple affairs prior to his chance encounter in Yalta. And he knew quite well what the end result of such affairs to decent people—problematic in complexity and in the end painful. Inevitable outcomes aside, Dmitry is not the least bit swayed and in an ultra-masculine approach he provoked Anna's Pomeranian to initiate their first conversation. They were both married, but out in the world alone. Yalta was too enticing a setting, and Dmitri could not help but try to escape the boredom that was his life without his outlet of seduction. It was not until Gurov was in Moscow that he finally started to view Anna as a person, instead of as a prized possession. As time went on, Dmitri could not forget about Anna. It wasn't a stereotypical fling, as her image kept coming back to him vividly, "...more than a month went by...and everything was still clear in his memory as though he had parted from Anna Sergeyevna only yesterday. " He began to get frustrated with his life in Moscow, and his lust put him on edge. He finally snapped and traveled to her home town. This step is significant, as he knew very well that she was married and that Leon 3 traveling to her home town was not a logical idea. The longing of love had become more than just an obsession; indeed, Gurov needed to see Anna again. He had resumed the hunt that began in Yalta, his obsession was climaxing in his mind. When he found her at Geisha, his reaction was one of pure chauvinism. "...when Gurov looked at her his heart contracted, and he understood clearly that in the whole world there was no human being so near, so precious, and so important to him..."

This dramatic reaction to finding Anna, whom he had lusted over for so long, can only be defined as chauvinistic. It is biased in its sexist connotation, as Gurov assumes that Anna will be receptive to his surprise visit. Feminists, however, may argue that Gurov is exhibiting behavior that is comparable to a dog returning to its master. (Duberman, 106) This is a great example of the schism that exists in interpretation of fiction. In this particular case, it is nonetheless sexist as Gurov's success seems to be the narrator's prime objective. In the fourth part of *The Lady with the Pet Dog*, a mutual decision is reached. Dmitri and Anna are slowly realizing that they cannot be apart from one another any more. Thus, change is sure to follow. They melancholy lives that they were tired of were going to be replaced by a life of passion together. While this is the suggested future between the two, it is presented in a sexist manner. The story really follows Dmitri on a transformation that rejuvenates him through sexual desire. Anna is his chance to do everything all over again. This is a bit derogatory, as Gurov is simply reliving his youth, thus using Anna as an outlet. Feminists protest this masculine rejuvenation, as it appears to be pulled off at the expense of sweet young Anna. Gurov's 'Peter Panning' is acceptable by the standards of the time. (Storkey 266)

Leon 4 Anton Chekhov, a Russian author and doctor, published many works around the turn of the twentieth century. His most notable works were his short stories, such as *The Lady with the Pet Dog*. In fact, this story was his most well known work. (Chekhov, 256) Chekhov really portrayed the transformation of Gurov through the story. The initial meeting of Gurov and Anna was in Yalta, and in this seductive setting readers see the chauvinistic side of Gurov. He is there to do nothing more than meander into a young

girl's heart, and he made that perfectly clear while there. This is the type of man that feminists have always been up against. He is classy and poised, matured through his roughly forty years of living including marriage and children. Thus, he is undeniably a man, and he thinks and acts in a very sexist manner. Gurov initially wanted Anna in Yalta only out of lust, short-lived and passionate. Feminists take offense to this inferior role that women are often classified into. (Wekesser, 114) Women have been fighting for equality, not just politically, but socially, for centuries. While true love was the pleasant outcome of the story, it is a love that is more beneficial to Gurov. His transformation was narrated to build up sympathy. Gurov was going to experience 'young love' in an old man's body. This is a desirable experience for men and thus the entire story can be labeled as chauvinistic.