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## THOUGHTS ON CHEKHOV

**“‘There’s something pathetic in her all the same,’ he thought and began to fall asleep” (4).**

“Dimitri! If you leave the seat up ... one ... more ... time!” Many readers feel suspicious of the conjugal pipe dream, suspecting Anna Sergeevna of soon getting fed up with housewifing behind Gurov. Others take a moralistic look at the Frenchness of the infidelity declaring it outré.

Personal view informs and contextualizes “The Lady and the Little Dog.” Chekhov takes a stand that he won’t be defined by the narrow morals of the day. **Do value conflicts, which are unique and commensurate with temporal and cultural specifics, change the outcome of the short story according to the readers’ point of view?**

Chekhov uses serial infidelity as a catalyst when introducing Gurov and Anna Sergeevna set against domestic situations which may harden (or soften) a reader’s stance to amorous contrivance. Chronic analepsis combined with stream-of-consciousness narration creates a frisson by layering dynamic punctuation goading the reader into value confrontations with characters. Chekhov interrupts conflict with rising tension. He breaks imaginary barriers as the reader applies value markers vis-à-vis Gurov and Anna Sergeevna’s internal and external conflicts, reflecting lives rooted in strain. Gurov is debonair in courting the delightful, but dull, Anna Sergeevna especially after Chekhov outs the wife as a shrew. Gurov’s comments that “there’s something pathetic in her all the same” (4). It’s a Jerry Springer moment par excellence. Of course Gurov is going to fall asleep. Chekhov taunts the reader with the intricacies of the affair, darting into the lives of the characters.

Do we forgive his foibles? Do we indulge her happiness by leaving her family? The reader is

compelled to contextualize the morality of the characters who are under duress of marriage. Some may see an optimistic outcome because, they hope, people can change. For someone with experience of betrayal, it would be inconceivable that the relationship is viable. As Chekhov conceives plot, narration, and denouement, he also leaves meaning, motives, and outcomes up to the reader. And therein lies Chekhov's brilliance: he provides us with a literary thought-blot test.

**“ ‘It's not good,’ she said. ‘You'll be the first not to respect me now’ ” (6).**

An opening solo flute evokes afternoons of sun and languid summers. Chekhov at his most impressionistic closely resembles art and music of the genre. While it is seductive to visualize his text exclusively as mottled canvasses, **does a tonal adventure await when identifying musical phraseology reflecting Chekhov's subtle inferences and indulgences?**

Claude Debussy composed *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune* during the same decade that Chekhov wrote “The Lady with the Little Dog.” As Debussy interplays phrase with leitmotif so does Chekhov, layering narration touching lightly on the lady with her little dog, before swiftly diverting to Gurov's tempestuous marriage. Diffusive phrases in prose and music in impressionist style frees a work from linear restrictions creating episodic tidal effects. It's not all that. It translates as a verbal Rubik's Cube that resists lining up. Many a wall has a hole in it thanks to Rubik and I suspect a few dents because of Chekhov. But as with the cube, the *raison d'être* is to get one color at least and in Chekhov's case, it is to identify the arc.

He leaves a verbal tone poem palette in favor of dramatic form when Anna Sergeevna is left in a not-uncharacteristic funk. She questions Gurov's respect for her in a plaintive style followed by the watermelon incident: maybe one of art's best passive-aggressive eye rolls. The following quasi-operatic outpouring is irregular in tone and organized by speech patterns that suggest musical phrasing. It resembles the operas of Mussorgsky who used literature instead of nurtured text by librettists

just forty years earlier, allowing mimicked speech in naturalistic patterns at the expense of melody. Translations matter, as Anna Sergeevna's phrasing does not line up as effortlessly in the Constance Garnett translation but fares well in the recent Pevear and Volokhonsky edition.

Chekhov develops the character of Anna Sergeevna in lyrical fashion, wrestling with loneliness, infidelity, and reputation. Grandest of all is her drama-queen-channeling-Manon-Lescaut moment as she says: "I wanted to live! To live and live ..." Truly the stuff of opera.