

Confetti Of Literary Thoughts

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Let Me Not the Marriage of True Minds Admit Impediments: Love and Marriage in Pre Communist and Post Communist Russian Literature: A Study Based in Anton Chekov's Play *The Bear* and Vera Polozkova's *Vespers and You Must Live by Sea Mama*

Mrs. Sahira K.P.

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Let me not the marriage of true minds admit impediments

(Shakespeare

)

Literature has a close relation with life. "Life provides the raw material by which literature interfuses an artistic pleasure, pattern and form. Literature is the representation of social life. The quality of literature is intimately connected with the quality of life it reflects. Literature is always a reflection of life which presupposes a social background (**Goodman 8**). Literary genres usually influence and are, in turn, influenced by the society which produces them. The society of Russia saw an evolution through the Pre Communist agrarian society in the nineteenth century to the communist society in the beginning of twentieth century. After the October revolution in November 1917, the agrarian lands owned by the land lords were confiscated and taken over by the commune. The lands became the sites of communal farming. Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) had a direct role to play in all walks of the average Soviet's life. After the collapse of Soviet Union towards the end of the twentieth century Russia had to struggle to rebuild themselves after Perestroika, the economic restructuring and Glastnost, the opening of the iron curtain. The literature reflected all these changes.

The paper examines *the Bear* one play written by Anton Chekov (1860-1904) written in Pre Communist Russia and two poems written by Vera Polozkova (born 1986) in Post Communist Russia. During the Communist regime, literature was propagandist in nature. The government and the CPSU used literature to present an idealized picture of the communist society. Such literature cannot do justice to truth. So such literature has been avoided in the study. Anton Chekov's play presents love and courtship in the Pre communist Russia where the ownership of a money providing estate was a prerequisite to success in life. For a young man this provided the key to marital bliss whereas for a woman fat inheritance and beauty where the

two factors which made her a pursued dame in the marriage market. After marriage, her inheritance will pass on to her husband. Polozkova's poems give a vivid picture of Russia in the post communist era. They present love in the realistic light of economic crisis and social insecurity where basic commodities of life like food and housing become luxuries for the common man and woman. After the collapse of USSR, Russia went through an era of economic crisis and social insecurity where the sagas of the lost glory increased the pains of the common man

Anton Chekov (1860-1904), Russian dramatist and short story writer was born as the grandson of a serf who had made enough money to purchase the freedom for himself. So Chekov had firsthand experience of the Pre Communist Agrarian Russia. He pictures the world of masters and servants in vast estates and country houses vividly. A doctor by profession, he began writing stories and jokes to support his big family. The play *the Bear* is a hilarious comedy which presents the themes of love, courtship, marriage and money in a comic light. Vera Polozkova was born in 1986 when USSR was about to collapse. She is a poet, singer and actress. She writes poems and sings them. She is a journalist and blog writer too. She is well known for her You Tube videos in which she recites her In her poems to music, She presents the realistic picture of Post Soviet Russia with its economic constraints and lost glory.

In the play *the Bear* Chekov presents the Pre communist agrarian Russia where agriculture formed the economic base. According to Marxist critics everything in our society had an economic base. The play presents a beautiful and young widow Madam Popov grieving for her unfaithful husband and the creditor who comes to claim the money the former's husband owed for him. Through this hilarious comedy, the dramatist presents a society in which the power of the lord was equated with the income he gets from his estates and nothing else. Smirnov tells Popova before proposing to her: "Think and decide at once, for if I go away from here, we shall never meet again... ..I come a good family, I am a gentleman, I have ten thousand rubles a year (**the Bear 89**). Financial security is the first thing a woman needs from a remarriage. Mrs. Popov is badly in need of it since her husband has squandered her wealth on gambling and mistresses. What a woman needs the most is economic security out of marriage as Polozkova's lover tells his lady love:

"What should I do first, please tell

I'll buy us bread and rent a den, our own,
Don't leave me here to grow up alone,
It's worse than hell."

(Vespers 1-4)

In a society where half of the time of men and women are wasted standing in a queue to buy bread and other essential commodities in life this promise is very tempting. In communist Russia, both men and women worked hand in hand to build up USSR as a super power from the rags of revolution and the two world wars. In order to make your marriage legal both the bride and groom had to be member of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU). It was very difficult to get such a license too. So what men and women did was to live together outside marriage ties. Since religion had lost its hold among people, there was no fear of sin either. "Women were in the losing end. They were abused verbally and physically by their husbands and lovers."(Rowbotham)

In the poem *You must Live by the Sea Mama*, mama is advised by the speaker"

"You can nag your beloved about all his inconsequential short comings

Or you can lift him up,

Celebrate his smallest accomplishments and victories

So that he might blossom and take pride in himself."

(You Must Live by Sea Mama 11- 14)

In the second poem the poet stresses the importance of love and tolerance in relationships. Such an element is absent in Chekov's play and the poem *Vespers*. In *the Bear* Smirnov warns Mrs. Popov in the beginning. "You won't touch me with your mourning and the dimples in your cheeks."(78). This sounds similar to what the lady tells her lover in *Vespers*:

"I know how to believe and caress

But I shan't matronize or relieve your stress

I shall not vindicate or clean up your mess.”(37-39)

So marriage becomes a political affair in all the three cases. Even if they happens in different phases in history, All these prove that human nature is essentially unchanging. The same passions, emotions and situations are seen again and again throughout human history. Both man and woman need emotional companionship as well as financial support from the partner. As the lady states clearly:

”When the light grows dark I almost die

I need a husband, not the boy kai.”(Vespers 50-51)

When he first appears in the stage, he approaches Mrs. Popov with a scowl even if he talks to her in a courtly manner. ”Your late husband, whom I had the honour of knowing owed me twelve hundred roubles on two bills. As I have to-morrow to pay my interest to the land bank, I am obliged to ask you to repay me that sum today” (Chekov 75).

He even becomes self conscious of his shabby appearance. “Covered with dust, muddy boots, unwashed, uncombed, straws on my waistcoat. The lady thought I was a highwayman. It is not quite quite polite to come into the drawing room like this...I am not a visitor. I am a creditor and there is no regulation dress for a creditor.”(Chekov 79) This dialogue brings home the truth that he was very much a ladies’ man. He has good knowledge of how to appear in a beautiful lady’s drawing room. The romantic folk tales and fairy tales always presented princes in rags winning the love of beautiful damsels by helping them in the time of distress.

“After the collapse of USSR and the opening of iron curtain Hollywood movies came to the soils of Russia watering the romantic imagination of the young people.”

(Chourasia 390) The lover of the poem *Vespers* pleads his case to the lady like this:

“In seven years of stench and pub

I’ll die into a balding stub

.....

I smell of smoke dampcaver and salt.”(30-35)

The man here appears to be a script writer or a musician who is trying his luck very hard. But now he wants her companionship to share his joys and sorrows.

“I wanted no one for my kin

I’ve got railway and a scene

.....

My guitar case is such a fray

And nightmares in my sleep me slay

But when you look at me this way

My skin runs steams.”(Vespers 9-16)

In the other poem, the speaker advises the addressee not to complicate things by trying to go deep into the grammar of relationships and take things as they are.

“Do what you love, and try not to complicate things.”(You Shall Live By Sea Mama 2).

Towards the end of the poem the statement becomes matter of fact:

“You are still with him, after all and you love him.

So why sabotage a relationship?”(14-15)

After professional success comes physical attributes of the man and woman, In the opening of the play, the servant Luka advises Mrs. Popov”..... Madam, you are young and lovely, blooming like a rose, you have only to live and enjoy yourself. Beauty won’t last all your life. In another ten years you may want to dazzle the officers, but then it will be too late”(Chekov 73). Smirnov got dazzled by her beautiful face and still more beautifying dimples in the first sight itself. Even in the foulest of his moods he cannot take his eyes off her. That is why he warns her. “You won’t touch me with your mourning or your dimples in your cheeks.”(78) Was he warning her or himself? In *You Must Live By Sea* too, the speaker is warning the mama that she has already moved on the second phase of life.

“You can agonize over all the things you haven’t done,

Missed and wasted opportunities,

Or you can decide you still have the rest of your life.

Ahead of you and get to work.” (5-8)

Both the man and woman in *Vespers* are frightened of “.....the times winged chariots hurrying near.”(Marwell)

“You can’t be forever a teenager

When being twenty is your only wager.” (Vespers 47-48)

“Even if you lived in gypsy brood

I can’t save you from time.”(Vespers 35-36)

Smirnov is in a very bad mood. So he makes acrid comments against mankind in general and womankind in particular. “A woman has ever been capable of loving anyone but a lapdog. Tell me honestly, have you ever in your life seen a woman who was sincere, true and constant. It is easier to find a cat with horns than a constant woman.” Later he turns his waspish remarks to Mrs Popov when he tells her: “As though I don’t know why you masquerade in black and shut yourselves up within four walls... It is so mysterious, so romantic. If some unfledged poet passes your estate, he will look up the windows and think, “Here lives the mysterious Tamara who from love of her husband has shut herself up within four walls. I know such tricks.”(83) His comment about not forgetting to powder her face even if you are mourning was too much for her and she challenges him to fight a duel. It is her spirits that make him fall on his knees and propose to her.”She is something like a woman! I like that! A real woman! Not a mush of sentiment, but flame, gunpowder, fireworks!”(87).

Smirnov is full of doubts even when he is about to propose to Mrs. Popov. "How angry I am with myself! I am in love like a schoolboy, I've been on my knees ----- (Rudely) I love you. As though I wanted to fall in love with you! Tomorrow I have to pay my interest, the haymaking has begun, and now you on top of it all." (91) Similar is the condition of the lover when he says:

"I must have not deserved you, look,

But who's to judge the fighter?

A one night stand. I played my game

(and dared to enter your domain.)

(Vespers 19-22)

The lady in the poem has more clear cut ideas about what she wants.

'Like all hapless fatherless kids

We want toys, lollipops and fibs,

To dress up for holiday trips."

(42-44)

This makes the politics behind marriage very clear. The woman wants a man to support her at the time of loneliness and distress. A man, on the other hand wants to get hold of her money and her beautiful body in addition to getting emotional support from her. He wants somebody ".....to lift him up.

Celebrate his accomplishments and victories." (**You must Live By Sea Mama 11-12**) The big bully Smirnov also wants the support and unrelenting love of Mrs. Popov when he is in utter distress. His property is about to be confiscated by the Land Revenue bank. The man in *Vespers* is a failed musician who is nightmarish about his failures. So he needs the support and even advice from the lady. "If you are rebelling does so with more violence." (56)

Even if these works were written before Marxism and after it that this gives us a very good example of the theory that everything has a material basis. Undesirable ideologies, cloth

themselves up, in more presentable forms in order to avoid being treated as repressive. “It takes the form of an ideology which is beneficial, productive and desirable for society.”(Nagarajan 226) What Smirnov wants is the financial and emotional support of Mrs Popov at the time of crisis. The lover of Vespers wants inspiration from the lady at the time of his intellectual winter. Both of them are ready to get romantic love and sex as bonus in this act. They are lucky too because women never want to sabotage their relationships.

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