

### **Critical Analysis of “The Lady with the Dog”**

Anton Chekhov wrote a short story called “The Lady with the Dog” in order to provoke a question within his readers: can Dmitri truly love Anna? He characterizes Dmitri as insecure and thrill-seeking, portrays his perception of his surroundings, and describes his interactions with Anna to allow his readers to interpret the nature of Dmitri’s feelings for her. The story insinuates that Dmitri believes himself to be in love, but the ephemeral nature of the relationship disagrees.

“The Lady with the Dog” begins by introducing the main character, Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov. It’s immediately clear that Dmitri is a deeply insecure man. In order to feel better about himself, Dmitri prefers the company of women, whom he refers to as “the lower race” (72). He enters into affair after affair, describing every relationship as “a charming, light adventure” which eventually becomes “an intolerably irksome situation” (72). When Dmitri spots a lady with a dog in Yalta, he’s somewhat taken by her. He can tell that she’s upper class, married, and alone. He’s intrigued by the notion of having an affair with her, taken by the idea of “an affair with a woman whose very name he did not know” (72). This is the first glimpse the readers get at Dmitri’s desire for thrill and entertainment. He uses women for his amusement and satiate his need to feel superior. Chekhov provides his readers with an inside look to how Dmitri views and takes advantage of women, setting up the reader to assume how this story is going to go. It’s expected of Dmitri to seduce this lady with a dog and then discard her, like he has in the past.

When Dmitri interacts with the lady with a dog, Anna Sergeyevna, her submissiveness is that first clue to her character. She “lowered her eyes” shyly, almost as though she were proving her inferiority to Dmitri (72). The two sit in silence by each other, but end up leaving the restaurant together. This is when the reader gets their first scenic description. Dmitri himself isn’t commenting on his surroundings, but shortly describes how he and Anna discussed “the strange

light over the sea” (73). A change can be tracked as Dmitri’s environment becomes more thoroughly and poetically described as his relationship grows with Anna. Later that night, Dmitri imagines how recently Anna was a schoolgirl and compares her to his own young daughter. He admires her “shyness and constraint”, saying aloud to himself that “there’s something pathetic about her” (73). In her he finds the submissiveness that he desires, in order to make himself feel more masculine. She satisfies his need to be superior, as well as the adventure he seeks, almost challenging him to conquest her. Chekhov wants his readers to see how desirable Anna is to Dmitri and predict the obvious trajectory of his story. Currently, it seems impossible for Dmitri to fall in love with Anna, seeing as she is just the most recent woman in a series of affairs. However, the reader is going to see a change in Dmitri and will have to decide whether they believe Dmitri’s biased point of view is capable of differentiating love and infatuation.

A week later, Dmitri describes the intense heat in Yalta. This is a direct opposite to how cold it will later be in Moscow, when he and Anna are separated. Dmitri has grown bold and kisses out in public. Dmitri’s exhibitionism is another sign of his desire for adventure and thrill. He is not only having an affair with a married woman while married, but is kissing her out in public. The escalation is extreme but he knows he can get away with this while away in Yalta. Dmitri and Anna head to her room where the readers get a more in depth look at her character. She’s described as displaying “timidity and awkwardness of youth”, but something more interesting is revealed (75). Anna seems distraught that she has entered into an affair, displaying some regret to being involved with Dmitri. She calls herself “a wicked, fallen woman”, telling Dmitri that he won’t respect her anymore (75). She is not only a naïve, young woman, but has a very low self-image. This allows for her to become even more dependent and submissive to Dmitri, relying on him for her self-esteem. Dmitri, however, is “bored to death” as he listens to

her panic about being an awful wife and immoral person (75). This portrays how little Dmitri cares about her at this moment, despite her being the current object of his desires. He haphazardly consoles her, doing what he can to get her to give in to the affair.

The next landscape description is given after he successfully calms her down. Dmitri delves deeper this time, poetically describing what he sees through the morning mist. He described how the silent scenery reminded him of the “eternal sleep lying in wait for us all” (76). He puts this lack of motion in direct contrast to the “the monotonous hollow roar of the sea” of which will “go on roaring, just as indifferently and hollowly, when [they have] passed away” (76). This is an allusion for the epiphany that Dmitri is having. He’s realizing that what he does is unimportant and that the universe will keep on turning after he has died. Dmitri’s affairs and relations make no difference and are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. And then his attention shifts to Anna, who is “enchanted by the sight of all this magical beauty” (76). Her naïve point of view interprets the landscape much differently than Dmitri, postulating a distinct divergence in age and philosophy. But watching her fascination prompts Dmitri to realize that “everything in the world is beautiful really” (76). This is the reader’s first inkling of a change within Dmitri. It’s difficult to hope that he will suddenly change his ephemeral ways, but this diverges from the trajectory Chekhov has been setting up thus far.

Dmitri and Anna’s relationship continued to progress in a similar manner. He would kiss her in broad daylight and make love to her, while she repeatedly tried to get him to confess that he doesn’t respect or love her. This consistent fear reveals Anna’s regret at having an affair with Dmitri, because she truly believes they are doing something wrong and somewhat knows he doesn’t love her. However, as a naïve, young girl, she can’t help but fall for Dmitri and continue the affair. When she finally has to return to her husband, she says, “It’s a good thing I’m going”

and “we ought never to have met” (77). Anna’s persistent remorse for partaking in the affair creating another element of thrill for Dmitri. It created a chase for him to partake in, having to repeatedly convince her to remain in the relationship. Dmitri even thinks that “she had not been really happy with him”, as this detail lingers in his thoughts after she leaves Yalta (77). Never fully conquering her may lead the reader to believe any persistent thoughts of Anna are because he hadn’t completed the affair. It didn’t wither into an annoying complication, like Dmitri’s past relationships, but was ended by Anna’s departure.

Dmitri returns to Moscow, where the weather is distinctly colder than Yalta, an allusion to Anna’s absence from Dmitri’s life. He describes Moscow’s winter beautifully, poetically describing the falling snow, sleigh rides, and memories of one’s youth. He goes on to explain that he had “always lived in Moscow”, but suddenly “his recent journey and the places he had visited lost their charm” (78). The enchanting scenery transports Dmitri back to his childhood, when he was able to admire winter with a naïve sense of wonder. This is a clear connection to Anna, who isn’t a child but is described to perceive the world differently because she is half Dmitri’s age. As he integrates back into his life in Moscow, seeing the world differently than he once did, Dmitri is haunted by memories of Anna. His memories “mingled in his imagination”, and suddenly “she accompanied him everywhere” (79). This is when Dmitri claims a distinct difference between her and his other lovers, postulating that he may love her. His days grow empty without her to share them with and decided she was necessary for him to be happy. Dmitri seeks her out and they decide to continue their affair. He begins leading a double life, of which he can never reconcile, as he does not love her enough to make their relationship official or public.

Chekhov wants his readers to believe that Dmitri believes that he loves Anna, as she plagues his thoughts and he can’t seem to let her go. As the reader sees Dmitri’s growing

admiration for the world around him, they can interpret this as his love for Anna growing as well. However, Anna is simply the most exciting affair for Dmitri to have, which leads readers to believe that he might be mistaking his infatuation for love. Anna's virtuous nature creates a thrilling game for Dmitri to play, having to seduce a naïve, young woman over and over again. In the beginning, Chekhov explained how all of Dmitri's affairs ended to set an expectation for their affair. Despite Anna being different than all the other women, Dmitri's so-called love is clearly rooted in adventure and won't pass the test of time. The detailed scenic descriptions could also have been used by Chekhov to describe how Anna's much younger perspective opened up Dmitri's eyes. It can be insinuated that as soon as Anna outgrows her naivety, Dmitri will become insecure and bored of her.