



The Bear
By Anton Chekhov

REFERENCE

These lines have been taken from the play “The Bear” written by “Anton Chekhov”.

CONTEXT

The play is powerful farce. The writer has exposed the feudal mentality through a delightful comedy. Popova, the heroine, is a beautiful young widow. She is in deep mourning for her husband who died seven months ago. She wants to show the world how faithful a wife she is. She has shut herself up in her bower refuses to see visitors.

Smirnov, a middle-aged landlord, calls on her for recovery of a loan taken by her husband. She tries to put him off. He insists to see her. So she has to see him. He asks for his money. She tells him to come day after tomorrow. Bitter quarrels follow. During the quarrel Smirnov suggests that she should marry instead of wasting her life away for her disloyal husband. Popova gives in because she does not like to lose such a good offer.

QUESTIONS

Prove the play a farcical comedy portraying the behaviour of the feudal?

Anton Chekhov was not only a dramatist but also a great short story writer. The present play “The Bear” is a farce, full of fun, fury and boisterous noisy laughter. The play revolves around two main characters and the behaviour of the characters is ridiculous, funny, and sentimental.

Popova’s husband has died and she has cut herself off from society. She has closed herself in the four walls of her house and is leading a completely secluded life when the play opens, Luka, her servant, is seen advising her to take part in the activities of life. She announces that since the death of her husband, life has lost all its meaning for her. Through their conversation, we come to know that Popova’s late husband had not been

a nice fellow. He had not treated Popova well. Still Popova is bent upon showing the soul of the dead husband how faithful she is. So she rebukes Luka for advising her to take full interest in life, as it's a saying:

"There are women who love their husbands as blindly, as enthusiastically and as enigmatically as nuns their cloister."

The writer has exposed the feudal mentality through a delightful comedy. Smirnov, a middle aged landlord, calls on Popova for the recovery of a loan taken by her husband.

The servant, Luka, brings the message. She refuses to admit Smirnov. But he insists on seeing her. So she has to see him. Smirnov asks for his money. She tells him to come day after tomorrow. Smirnov says he will not leave the house without money. He would rather stay in the house till the day after tomorrow. A bitter quarrel follows. During the quarrel Smirnov suggests that she should marry instead of wasting her life away for her cruel, disloyal husband. He presses this point home and succeeds in persuading her to marry him. Popova gives in because she does not like to lose such a good offer.

The play is a delightful satire on utilitarian morality as well. Smirnov marries Popova for her wealth and status. She too sees her own advantage. Smirnov is not only a jovial fellow but also a landlord. It is thus an equal bargain for both of them. Apart from this serious theme the play is remarkable for its superb humour of dialogue and situation. So the play is a good farce and has farcical situation.

Draw woman nature discussing Popova's character.

Popova is a rich young widow of feudal class. She is true representative of her class. She is foolish, frivolous and selfish. She loves to show off even in sorrow. She wishes to be honoured as a faithful wife. That is why she seems to take her husband's death seriously. She is hypocrite because she does not love her husband so much as she pretends. She is a very talkative lady and it is through her continuous talk that we are able to guess that most of the time she is telling lies and is, in fact quite unfaithful and insincere. She says:

"I shall be true till death and show him how I can love."

Smirnov, a friend of her husband, has come to collect his bill but she refuses and says that she will pay the bill, the day after tomorrow. Smirnov asks her to pay immediately.

So they decide to fight a duel with each other. But she does not know how to fire a shot, and says to Smirnov:

“Before we fight you must know to fire. I have never held a pistol in my hands before.”

Smirnov who is as perfect a shot as one who, “Can put a bullet through a coin tossed into the air as it comes down”

Smirnov begins to tell her and on the other hand he himself declares that he is “going to fire in the air” because “its” my affair”. Meanwhile the moody Smirnov falls in love with Popova. He kneels before her and says:

“I love you as I have never loved before! I have refused twelve women, nine have refused me, but I never loved one of them as I love you.”

At first she shows hatred towards him. He gets up and quickly goes to the door but she stops him. “No, stop ... No ... go away, go away I hate you”, “yes, yes go away”. All of a sudden we see popova lowering her eyes and they embrace each other most passionately.

Through the character of Popova, the writer has described and shown the nature of woman. Like ladies of her class Popova is very emotional. She flies into a rage whenever something happens against her desire. She cannot stand defiance. Popova has no character. She is often in conflict with herself. For instance she vows never to forget her husband, but at the same time she admits that he was not good husband.

Popova easily falls for temptation. So she accepts Smirnov’s offer readily. She is a complex character because she is not what she seems. All in all she is a truly feudal character showing the woman’s nature.

CHARACTER SKETCH OF SMIRNOV

Smirnov is a middle-aged landlord. He is a very intelligent and clever man. He knows how to make his way in the world. He knows the psychology of a woman. That is why he is not disturbed by the hostile attitude of popova. He knows how to handle her.

Smirnov has no respect for others. He openly condemns Popova's husband. He does not mind speaking indecently about the dead man. His conversation with Popova is not polite. He seems to have no manners. But actually he is very clever. He wants to

achieve his object. And he knows that is the best way to achieve it. Woman likes a bold and outspoken man. So Smirnov deals with her, as Smirnov is a man of the world and a businessman. He is very much like the heroes of Bernard Shaw.

The delightful humour of speech and action in the play owes its origin to the odd speech and manners of Smirnov. Even in a furious mood, his speech carries a note of humour, because his fury is the fury of a foolish man. We cannot help smiling at his irritation.

Smirnov behaves like a fool but he is not really a fool. He is rather a shrewd businessman who pretends to be a rude intruding fool. Popova is really taken in by his trick. He knows that she will fall for it. She pretends to be angry but in fact she likes the bold manner of Smirnov. So we see that Smirnov succeeds in his purpose.

