

Challenging Misogyny: A Critical Examination of Gender Bias in Anton Chekhov's 'The Bear'



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ABSTRACT: "The Bear" by Anton Chekhov is a one-act play that explores the theme of misogyny through the interactions between the characters Smirnov and Mrs. Popova. Smirnov's misogynistic beliefs are revealed as he objectifies and belittles Mrs. Popova based on her gender. The play critiques the societal prejudices and stereotypes imposed on women during Chekhov's time, emphasizing the importance of gender equality and respect. Readers can see that Smirnov treats Popov rudely. The writer aims to analyze Smirnov's negative attitude towards Popov using feminist critical theory. Data is collected qualitatively. Analysis shows that Smirnov verbally intimidates Popov with lots of rude remarks about women. He accuses women of laziness, deception, and unfaithfulness.

KEYWORDS: Feminist Critical Theory, Misogyny, Deception, and Unfaithfulness

1. MISOGYNY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

The term "misogyny" is derived from the Ancient Greek word "mīsogunīā" which means hatred towards women. Misogyny has taken shape in multiple forms such as male privilege, patriarchy, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, belittling of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification. The roots of misogyny can be traced back to ancient Greek mythology. According to Hesiod before women came into existence, men were coexisting peacefully as companions to Gods until Prometheus decided to steal the secret of fire from the God which angered Zeus. Zeus punished mankind with an evil thing for their delight called Pandora, the first woman who carried a box that unleashed all evils such as labor, sickness, old age, and death. (Blum, C. 2010. P 34)

As mythology spilled its vices about women, every religion had its viewpoint. Hinduism presents diverse views about the position of women and some texts place women as the highest goddesses and some restrict them to the role of a mother, daughter, and wife, as described in Manusmriti. Tertullian, the father of Latin Christianity, said that being a female is a curse given by God and they are the Devil's Gateway. In Islam, the holy book Quran has a 4th chapter called An-Nisa meaning Women. The 34th verse is a key verse in feminist criticism of Islam which reads: "Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth." So righteous women are devoutly obedient... But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. (Blum, C. 2010. P 34)

Misogyny over the years has evolved as an ideology that has engulfed the society as a smog that diminishes their site to aurora. Great philosophers, socialists, and thinkers of the golden era were subdued by the roars of male dominant society which narrowed their vision and made them supporters of a patriarchal society. Aristotle who was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist was also a misogynist. He thought of women as a deformity, an incomplete male. He preached those men should always command and women should follow as they are the inferior beings created by God Misogyny at its front had male supporters, but over the years, few females also supported the ideology as stated by Sociologist Michael Flood. (Burgard, Peter J 1994. p. 11)

Over centuries, women have been suppressed, their rights were neglected as human beings, they were treated as a lower part of society, and their roles were restricted to household chores and birthing. Prolonged oppression raised many voices and collectively led to the concept of feminism which started the longest movement in history which continues. (Burgard, Peter J 1994. p. 11)

Feminism is a gamut of socio-political movements and ideologies that share a common goal to delineate, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes. Feminist movements over decades have campaigned for the rights of women, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to promote bodily autonomy and integrity and to protect women and girls from brutal crimes such as rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. (Blum, C. 2010. P 34)

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English and American dictionaries define misogyny as "hatred of women and as "hatred, dislike, or mistrust of women. The American Merriam-Webster Dictionary distinguishes misogyny, "a hatred of women", from sexism, which denotes sex-based discrimination, and "behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex (Blum, C. 2010. P 34)

In 2012, primarily in response to a speech in the Australian Parliament the Macquarie Dictionary (which documents Australian English and New Zealand English) expanded its definition to include not only hatred of women but also "entrenched prejudices against women" Social psychology research[vague] describes overt misogyny as "blatant hostile sexism" that raises resistance in women, as opposed to "manifestations of benevolent sexism" or chivalry that lead women to behave in a manner perpetuating patriarchal arrangements (Burgard, Peter J 1994. p. 11)

Misogyny, hostility towards women, is a prominent theme that goes through the period of Renaissance in British literature. Unveiling the thread of misogyny entails a closer look at satire, the literary form through which hatred was expressed. In this case, we should first establish a distinction between the two faces of satire: the first being satire as a severe exposure of what in public or private morals deserves rebuke, and satire as a weapon of misogyny, which is the writer's own bias accompanied by societal biases. (Burgard, Peter J 1994. p. 11)

It can be seen in the writings of John Donne and Alexander Pope an application of satire to depict the dark side of a woman's nature. This essay will demonstrate that these writers were not using satire just as a weapon against women's negative qualities, but mostly as a tool to degrade the nature of women in general. The essay will present support for the idea that these writers were highly misogynistic. (Burgard, Peter J 1994. p. 11)

Their misogyny is predominantly rooted in the societal discrimination of women in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, according to Christian attitudes towards women, the latter represent a combination of the Virgin Mary's purity and righteousness as well as the wickedness and sinfulness of Eve. Societal stereotypes together with religious ideology, mythological origin, and individual prejudice created the environment for the authors to produce works that would breathe with aggression and biased attitude towards women. (Burgard, Peter J 1994. p. 11)

Renaissance playwrights and audiences enjoyed misogynistic diatribes and Renaissance sonnet sequences regularly included hostile poems; but the period was, mainly characterized by the exaltation of both women and romantic love. Donne's savage attacks on women are greatly outnumbered by poems of passionate praise. However, this does not prove that Donne was not misogynistic. John Donne, the most passionate of the Renaissance love poets, was also the most intensely ambivalent. (Allen 2002, p. 13).

It is commendable to note the progress made by women over centuries and the fight will continue until the roots of misogyny are removed from the world. With the wave of liberalization as a part of globalization, it was expected that religious and conservative societies would become more gender sensitive and provide equal access to education and employment. However, in some places, these hopes have been belied, due to the rise of religious fundamentalism. It is important to note that even "liberal" Christian societies are yet to attain complete gender equality, so one should not despair at tardy progress in our country. Without equal access to education, equal opportunity, and economic emancipation, gender equality will remain a chimera. (Malcolm 2004, p. 87).

2. MISOGYNY IN ANTON CHEKHOV'S THE BEAR

Anton Chekhov's "The Bear" investigates the theme of misogyny. he interactions of its central characters. The play portrays the character Smirnov as a misogynist who belittles and objectifies Mrs. Popova based solely on her gender. Smirnov's attitudes and actions reflect the prevailing societal prejudices and stereotypes imposed on women during Chekhov's time. Through this exploration, Chekhov criticizes the mistreatment of women and highlights the need for equality and respect among genders. Dismissive of Women's Abilities: Smirnov repeatedly expresses his belief that women are intellectually inferior. He scoffs at Mrs. Popova's attempts to engage in a serious conversation about business matters, claiming that women are incapable of comprehending such topics and should stick to trivial concerns.

Insulting Generalizations: Smirnov makes derogatory and sweeping generalizations about women, portraying them as irrational and emotionally unstable. He asserts that women are governed by their feelings rather than reason, reinforcing sexist stereotypes and undermining their capabilities.

Control and Domination: Smirnov attempts to assert control over Mrs. Popova, using his physical presence and forceful demeanor to intimidate her. He invades her personal space, raises his voice, and employs aggressive gestures, illustrating a power dynamic rooted in misogyny. (Styan 1981, p. 84).

Belittling Emotional Expression: Smirnov ridicules Mrs. Popova's grief over her late husband, dismissing her emotions as insignificant and unworthy of attention. He implies that her mourning is exaggerated and mocks her for her sentimental attachment, displaying a lack of empathy and understanding. Objectification and Sexualization: Smirnov consistently objectifies Mrs. Popova, reducing her to her physical appearance and desirability. He openly expresses his attraction to her and makes suggestive comments, treating her as a mere object of his desire rather than a person deserving of respect.

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Some writers have analyzed Anton Chekhov's novel *The Bear* from different points of view. Through analysis, it is noticed that the individual psychological approach states that Anton Chekhov wants to say that the feeling of inferiority affects Smirnov's character in the confrontation of Real facts.

The bear represents Grigory Smirnov who shows the character The value of development to become a good person, starting from the man who has bad The attitude of being a good man after getting a real woman (Rosadi, 2015).

Felix Lee in his paper entitled *Feminist Analysis of Anton Chekhov's Book Bear* states that Smirnov is a man who is completely against feminism. Shows no My respect to Popova, who is still mourning the death of her late husband. Smirnov He continues to yell at her and force her to pay off her late husband's debts even though she has already done so There is no money (Malik, S. (2014)61).

The research on misogyny in the works of Anton Chekhov is embodied in the brutal drama of the play *The Bear*, which has been conducted by many researchers such as: (Joko Subotro (2008), University of Muhammadiyah).

Surakarta titled: *Mrs. Popov's Struggle to Find Her Love in Anton Chekhov's Brute Drama: The Individual Psychological Approach* It was one of the researches on the qualitative method, and it was how Mrs. Popov finds her love in the brute drama of Anton Chekhov: the individualism of the psychological approach. The result of the study was, there are six such points Such as: striving for superiority, feelings of inferiority, the creative self, imaginative finality, And the style of living and social attention. Mrs. Popov wants to show her loyalty to Her husband, who died two years ago. But she knows it Women need love and care from someone, there is a lot to strive for Its associated with her loyalty and needs (ASTARI KIRANA DEWI 2012 p18)

Through what was stated in the research and through the analysis of the authors and what they discussed, it is possible to analyze the bear's play, which means things including emotionality and other human instincts such as love and hate. I can explain it like this.

The idea that a person is a slave to his feelings. He may try to tame his emotions for a while, but he won't succeed for much longer as Smirnov claims to ignore women as much as he can. But everything he claimed fell in front of Popova when he noticed signs of admiration in Popova. On the other hand, the woman in the play was unable to suppress her basic feelings of love, her lover, who claims that her husband died and that she cannot keep up with her new love because of her husband, her late husband, and this is what is represented in the theme of loneliness. The companionship of the bear is that man is a social animal and needs companionship for his emotional and psychological survival. The writer believes that loneliness was what forced Popova to embrace Smirnov at the end of the play and that her mind was forcing her to be alone and loyal to her "traitorous husband," while her inner self and her sexual urges longed for a companion.

Love is one of the basic themes of the play. Both Smirnov and Popova claim that they are tired of what happened and that there is also the issue of betrayal, as Popova's late husband was unfaithful and betrayed her at every step, while Smirnov would not give even an ounce of copper to women for love and that the demand for deep love in the play forces them to unite. Smirnov goes on to

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say that he could "sit on a keg of gunpowder instead of talking to a woman." But he can't deny it and they both challenge each other and call themselves names.

The theme of beauty and physical strength in *Bear*: It would not be wrong to consider that if beauty appeals to men, then physical strength and aggression have a similar and equal effect on the minds of women. Although Popova wants to put a bullet in Smirnov's thick head, she cannot refuse him when he proposes marriage to her. Here, feminine weakness and strength appear in the image of feminism, just as rebels against the patriarchy appear in brutal drama. Hence, we see that the position of women in brutal drama shows that Women's status is completely subordinate to men, especially Mrs. Popova.

Elena Ivanovna Popova is a landowning widow mourning for the death of her husband who had died seven months ago. Her aged footman, Luka, coaxes her to stop being buried inside the four walls and to enjoy life. She refuses firmly as she intends to prove her true love and faithfulness to her husband, despite him being unfaithful to her. Popova refuses to see him but without courtesy, he enters the dining room. As she does not have spare cash, she promises to pay the day after tomorrow. She also says her 'state of mind' prevents giving money matters her concern. Smirnov refuses to leave.

"The Bear" is a satire on gender roles and social expectations. In it, the male protagonist's misogynistic ideas are challenged by a battle of wit with his female counterpart, resulting in a transformation of their relationship. Chekhov's use of humor and irony challenges traditional gender norms, as well as the damaging effects of misogyny on society. This portrayal of misogyny does not mean that Chekhov glorified or endorsed misogynist attitudes. When comparing Chekhov to other works, we can see that he often examines gender dynamics and the restrictions placed on women. He also examines the complexity of human relationships and highlights the struggles and aspirations of both men and women in his works. Many of his female characters are nuanced and multi-dimensional.

3. CONCLUSION

Anton Chekhov's "The Bear" serves as a critical examination of misogyny through the character of Smirnov and his interactions with Mrs. Popova. Smirnov's behavior and attitudes reflect the prevailing societal prejudices and stereotypes imposed on women during Chekhov's time. His belittling, objectifying, and dismissive treatment of Mrs. Popova underscores the theme of misogyny that the play explores. Through the portrayal of Smirnov's misogynistic behavior, Chekhov criticizes the mistreatment of women and challenges the notion of gender inequality. The play highlights the need for equality, respect, and recognition of women's capabilities, advocating for a more equitable society.

By shedding light on the harmful effects of misogyny, "The Bear" prompts reflection and invites the audience to confront and question the prevailing patriarchal norms. It serves as a reminder of the importance of challenging and dismantling gender biases, ultimately advocating for a world where women are treated with dignity, equality, and fairness. Sometimes we see that some people claim to have good morals but they are not Agreeing with what they claim. What they say is different from what they do this is what the bear wants to say to his readers and audience. There are some or many We are hypocrites in our lives Popova and Smirnov are good examples of hypocrites.

Their hypocrisy is caused by their psychological needs. They need love and Affection they never had before. But they cannot show it to Society because society will have its own rules based on moral values From the community. Both Popova and Smirnov want to get good moral values from Society, on the other hand, need something they have never had before, which is love, Affection, and social and financial security. Therefore, it is noted that the noble human goal is far from materialistic matters, fanaticism, and hatred. Rather, there are better and more beautiful things in life.

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