

## Disillusionment in Love and Marriage: An Analysis of Anton Chekhov's Selected Short Stories

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### Abstract:

This paper explores the recurring themes of love, marriage and interpersonal relationships in the works of Anton Chekhov. Through a detailed examination of selected short stories, including *Love, A Trifle from Life, The Husband and Not Wanted* the analysis delves into Chekhov's portrayal of romantic and marital relationships as complex and often fraught with psychological tension. Chekhov's narratives, characterized by a distinctive blend of dry wit and stark realism, focus on the emotional experiences of individuals within these relationships rather than the external circumstances that strain them. By highlighting the inner lives of his characters, Chekhov offers insights into the emotional and cognitive landscapes of individuals navigating the challenges of love and commitment. This study underscores Chekhov's nuanced approach to character development and his profound understanding of human emotions, which have made his stories a critical focus for discussions on the nature of personal relationships in modern literature.

**Keywords:** Emotional, Experiences, Cognitive, Landscapes

A reader intrigued by Anton Chekhov would surely value his selection of themes that most naturally showcase human expression. The imagery, symbolism, language and characterization in Chekhov's work engage readers actively, prompting them to delve deeper into the ethos of the writer beyond mere words on a page. Chekhov's short stories are vibrant vignettes of intense sensibility, offering insights into the emotional landscape of contemporary individuals. With his keen vision, Chekhov delves into the personas of his characters, unveiling their deepest emotions and cognitive insights. Chekhov transformed the technique of character development, shifting from a romantic approach to what is now recognized as modern character portrayal. Rather than explicitly describing the thoughts of his characters, Chekhov lets their moods and feelings reveal their internal states.

Many of Anton Chekhov's short stories explore the complexities of marital and romantic relationships, departing from traditional romantic narratives. This paper examines a selection of Chekhov's stories where this theme is prevalent. *Love*, the first story discussed, depicts love as the most fundamental human emotion, stripped of its usual romantic embellishments. In this narrative, love lacks its typical emotional depth and splendor. The protagonist grapples with his feelings as both a fervent lover and a pragmatic husband, illustrating the evolution of love from initial passion and excitement to eventual monotony and discontent.

Chekhov's distinctive dry wit and sharp realism shine through in his storytelling. The first-person narrator reflects on his own surprising emotions. Despite his romantic gestures, such as sending scented cards and arranging secret rendezvous, he is met with indifference from his beloved, Sasha. His nights are restless as he fantasizes about their future together, but Sasha seems more concerned with the formalities of their impending wedding than the emotions at stake. In typical Chekhovian style, the youthful zeal of the narrator contrasts starkly with Sasha's cool, detached demeanor. Ultimately, the concept of love is called into question as the narrator wonders if he has truly ever experienced it, with Sasha transforming from a figure of romantic dreams to a symbol of pragmatic matrimony.

I recall the days when I was a less forgiving lover. I used to dismiss women for the slightest imperfections—a stain on their stockings, a foolish word, or unbrushed teeth. But now, I overlook all these flaws. This newfound tolerance stems from my love for Sasha. However, the true nature of love itself—why and how it alters our perceptions and reactions—I truly cannot explain. (World's Great 65)

In his short story *A Trifle from Life*, Anton Chekhov deftly integrates child psychology into a narrative about strained relationships. Marital discord and separation are recurrent themes in his work. A distinctive aspect of Chekhov's writing is his tendency to bypass the specifics of what caused the issues in relationships, focusing instead on the emotions experienced by those in troubled marriages or romantic entanglements.

In this narrative, Olga Ivanovna, separated from her husband, is involved with another man, Belyaev, who describes their affair as "a long, wearisome romance" devoid of attraction, reflecting a loss of the initial excitement typically found in new relationships. Chekhov's portrayal is marked by a stark realism about the dwindling significance between

the lovers. A revealing moment occurs when Belyaev, left alone with Olga's son Alyosha while she is away, inquires about the boy's father. Alyosha hesitantly confesses to secretly meeting his father but makes Belyaev promise to keep this a secret. The story highlights Belyaev's manipulation of young Alyosha to cope with his own frustrations. Alyosha is profoundly disturbed to discover that adults can easily break promises, hinting at Belyaev's desire to escape the relationship by exploiting Alyosha's confidences for his own gain.

Anton Chekhov's works often present a rather bleak view of love and marriage, suggesting personal disillusionment with these institutions. Scholars have speculated about autobiographical elements in his cynicism, particularly reflecting his troubled marriage to Olga Knipper:

The experience of marriage is a recurring theme in Chekhov's writing, yet from the earliest reviews, it has been observed that Chekhov consistently held a pessimistic perspective on this institution (Purves 14).

In the story *Not Wanted*, Chekhov depicts the dreary existence of the protagonist, Zaikin. This narrative explores the challenges Zaikin faces in trying to meet his family's expectations while grappling with his own physical, psychological and financial burdens. The title itself sets the tone of exclusion and neglect he feels within his own marriage. Zaikin's wife, preoccupied with her own interests, remains indifferent to his struggles, leaving him feeling isolated and marginalized. This detachment is a common motif in Chekhov's stories, where Zaikin is portrayed as stifled in his relationship with an indifferent wife who shows little concern for him or their son. At her insistence, he rents an expensive summer villa on the outskirts of the city, a financial strain for Zaikin, who must also commute between the villa and the city for work. Meanwhile, his wife is so engrossed with her circle of artist friends that she scarcely acknowledges his presence at home. This dynamic paints a vivid picture of Zaikin's alienation and emotional distress:

Suddenly, Zaikin felt a heavy sensation pressing down on his liver, as if it were being gnawed from within. Overcome with vexation, grievance and bitterness, he found himself trembling and nearly choking with emotion. He had the urge to leap up, slam something onto the floor and unleash a torrent of loud, angry words. (World's Great 82)

Zaikin was compelled to remain silent and suppress his anger, turning the relationship into a form of psychological torment for him. This scenario is similar for many individuals who continue in such relationships for the sake of family or societal expectations.

In another of Chekhov's renowned stories, *The Husband*, he explores another facet of marital dissatisfaction. Chekhov often writes from a male perspective, presenting men as the sufferers in relationships, with women depicted as the cause of their distress. This portrayal suggests a less sympathetic view toward his female characters. In *The Husband*, Anna Pavlovna, an attractive and lively woman, is married to Shaiklov, a dull and mundane tax collector. Their mismatched union, often seen in marriages arranged for social benefits, leads to inevitable complications. Over time, such relationships can deteriorate, becoming increasingly frustrating. *The Husband* carefully portrays Shaiklov's mindset, an unattractive man trying to fit in among more appealing individuals who pose a threat to his marital stability. Jealous of the attention his wife receives from handsome military men at a party, Shaiklov, fueled by petty feelings of envy and wounded vanity typical of his station, demands that she leave with him, exerting control over her in an attempt to assert his dominance. Chekhov's narratives resonate deeply with readers due to the emotional depth he conveys, often leaving significant impacts through the unsaid and the spaces between his words. The power of Chekhov's storytelling lies in these omissions, which invite readers to find new meanings each time they engage with his work.

### Conclusion:

Anton Chekhov's short stories provide a profound commentary on the complexities of love and marriage. His narratives reveal a deep skepticism about the romantic ideals and societal expectations that often govern personal relationships. Chekhov's characters, trapped in unfulfilling or deteriorating relationships, exemplify the emotional and psychological toll of such entanglements. Through *Love, A Trifle from Life, The Husband* and *Not Wanted*, Chekhov portrays the gradual disillusionment with romantic and marital bonds, emphasizing the internal conflicts and emotional turmoil faced by his characters. His subtle yet powerful storytelling captures the nuanced dynamics of human relationships, leaving a lasting impact on the reader and inviting continual reevaluation of the narratives. Chekhov's work remains a vital part of literary discussions, offering timeless insights into the human condition and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships.

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