The Bear by Anton Chekhov Summary | Characters | Questions Answers

One-Act Plays | The Bear

Author's Introduction | Anton Chekhov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904) is regarded as one of Russia's most cherished storytellers. He has written some funny and hilarious one-acts, but his tragic stories have brought him the name of being one of the major dramatists.

He is one of the playwrights and masters of the modern short story. While he was doing medicine at the University of Moscow, he began writing short stories. At the start of his career, he mastered the art of one-act and produced some fine pieces.

His well-known literary contributions include The Seagull, The Cherry Orchard, The Bear, The Steppe, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters, Easter Eve, The Bet, The Black Monk, and so on. Most of his works centered upon the themes of serfdom, the rise of the middle class, the downfall of the feudal system, etc.

In 1888, Chekhov was given the Pushkin Prize, and after that, he was elected a member of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature. Chekhov finally married an actress, Olga Knipper, who had performed in his plays in 1901. He died in Germany from tuberculosis.

Summary | The Bear By Anton Chekhov

Anton Chekhov's classic play The Bear revolves around two protagonists, Popova and Grigory Stepanovtch Smirnov. Popova is a widow. Her husband has died seven months ago, but she is still mourning. She has decided to cut off herself from the outside world.

She has strictly ordered her servant, Luka, not to allow anybody to see her. Luka is an old and faithful servant of Popova. He dislikes the mourning condition of his mistress. He advises his mistress that she should not shut herself in the four walls.

He says it isn't right madam.... you’re just destroying yourself. He says to Popova to change her decision of mourning throughout her life. She declares her determination not to forget her husband till she breaths her last. She says I shall never go out.... why should I? why life is already at an end.

Again, she says, I shall be true till death, and show him how I can love? Luka quotes his own example and tells her that his wife had also died. He mourned her for a month and that was enough. He could not grieve for her throughout his life.

He advises her to visit the neighborhood and should meet the young army officers as she is still young and can attract many young people. But Popova does not accept any advice. After some time, Smirnov enters Popova's house.

He is a landowner who has lent 1200 roubles to Mr. Nikolai (Popova’s late husband) before he dies. He demands the debt be paid at once because his creditors are searching for him. Popova tells him that at this moment she has no money as her steward is out of the city.

She tells him that when her steward comes, she will pay his money. Smirnov insists and makes fun of Popova's mourning. He refuses to leave her house until she pays money. Both Popova and Smirnov were stubborn.

Popova tells him that she cannot pay money as she is in a state of mind. Smirnov insists that he wants his money at the same time. Popova requests him not to disturb her. Popova calls him coarse-bear. Smirnov criticizes all the women and calls them insincere, cruel, and vain.

Popova calls men cruel and faithless. She gives the example of her own late husband who had illegal relations with many women. He was also insincere with Popova. Smirnov behaves rudely and she tells him that decent people do not behave with women in this rough manner.

Popova and Smirnov angrily fight with each other. Popova challenges Smirnov to a gunfight. Popova brings out her husband's pistols. But she does not know how to shoot. Smirnov teaches her how to fire with a pistol.

During this, Smirnov falls in love with Popova. He kneels before her and says, I love you as I've never loved before! I've refused twelve women, nine have refused me, but I never loved one of them as I love you. He also says, I'm in love like a student, I've been on my knees. I want to fall in love with you.

Firstly, Popova refuses him but later when he describes his property and wealth, she accepts his proposal of marriage. When the servants of Popova arrive to beat Smirnov, they are amused and surprised to see that Popova and Smirnov are embracing each other.

The play comes to a dramatic end. At the end of the play, Popova orders Luka, tell them in stables that Toby isn't to have any oats at all today. This sentence shows that Popova has completely forgotten her late husband and she has accepted Smirnov as her husband.

Major Characters of the Play

Smirnov

Smirnov is the main character of the play. He is a creditor who comes to Popova's house to take back the credit that her husband had taken him. Popova's husband has borrowed 1200 rubbles for buying the food for his horses. Popova refuses him to return her husband's loan. Her steward is out of the city.

When her steward comes back, she will return his loan. But Smirnov is stubborn and wants to take back his money at once. Both Smirnov and Popova get entangled and start fighting. In the end, the story takes a U-turn. Smirnov offers Popova for marriage and she accepts the proposal.

Popova

Popova is the Heroine of the play. She is a beautiful woman but a widow because her husband had died seven months ago. She left meeting people after her husband's demise. When Smirnov comes to her house to take back his credit, she denies meeting him.

She pretends that she loves her husband much and is loyal to him. Her servant compels him to come out of this situation and meet people but she refuses him not to move out. Smirnov demands his money but she is not ready to give him money.

Luka

Luka is the servant of Popova. He is an expert. When Popova weeps for her husband, she consoles her and motivates her to meet people. He advises her to leave the mourning and participate in the activities of life. In the end, he is taken aback when he sees Popova in Smirnov's arms.

Nicolai Mehalowich

Nicolai Mehalowich is Popova's husband. When the play starts, we come to know that he had died seven months ago. He is shown unfaithful and cheater with his wife. When he was alive, he had many girlfriends and illicit relations with women. He wrote letters to women and deceived his wife

Important Questions/Answers of The Bear

Question 1

Discuss the play The Bear as a farcical comedy.

How far would you agree that the Bear is an absurd play?

Discuss the element of humor and absurdity in The Bear.

Answer

Comedy is a play in which the writer exposes, The social evils of the people like, pretension and hypocrisy. They have variety in their moods. The Bear is a farce rather than an absurd play because it is full of fun, fury, and boisterous noisy laughter.

The behavior of the characters is ridiculous, funny, emotional, and sentimental. Popova is a beautiful young widow. Her husband has died seven months ago. After the death of her husband, she has decided not to see anybody.

She outwardly shows her grief to others by wearing a black dress and remaining on the four walls of her house. She lives in darkness even, during the daytime. When Luka advises her to give up her mourning. She says,

My life is already at an end. He is in his grave, and I have buried myself between four walls, we are both dead.

This is however all affectation, pretension, and hypocrisy. One day, Smirnov, a moneylender comes and insists on seeing her. She meets him contrary to her wishes. He tells Popova that he has come to get back the 1200 roubles that he has lent to her late husband.

Popova agrees to give him the debt but requests him to come back till her steward comes. Smirnov insists on getting back the money immediately. Both criticize each other with unpleasant words. Then Popova calls Smirnov in a bad and uneducated manner.

You're a boor! A coarse bear! Bourbon! A monster

She explains that he knows nothing that how to treat women. He ridicules all the women. He accuses the women by saying they are insincere, selfish, and hypocritical. Both start to fight with pistols in a duel. At that Smirnov falls in love with Popova and says.

Her eyes, her eyes! What an inspiring woman.

The reader laughs to see the different moods of Popova and Smirnov in different situations. The play The Bear takes its start in a tragic situation where we see a quarrel at the outset and the end is in a comic way. The writer has a keen observation of three unities of time, place, and action.

Question 2

Discuss the title of the Play The Bear.

Why does Popova call Smirnov The Bear?

The title of the play The Bear is ironic.

Answer

As an animal, the bear stands for stubborn nature, sore-headedness, ill-tempered, and quarrelsome. A bear remains untidy, dirty, and filthy all the time, so, same is the physical condition of Smirnov in the play.

It becomes evident and clear as to when Popova leaves the drawing-room, he looks at his own self and utters his physical condition in words. Dirty, unwashed, unkept, straw on my waistcoat. Like a bear, he is also obstinate, aggressive, and quarrelsome.

His ill-mannered nature becomes clear when he enters Popova's drawing-room without permission. Similarly, his obstinacy becomes evident when he insists on staying in the presence of Popova while she implores him to go out.

Being irrational, sentimental, and aggressive, he does not speak and behave Popova softly and gently. He not only calls Popova disobedient, faithless and insincere but also all other women. He speaks to her so rudely that she is even compelled or bound to speak with him roughly and harshly.

He castigates rebukes and taunts in so harsh and quarrelsome manner that Popova is bound to call him: You are a rude, ill-bred man! He becomes even more aggressive and angry when Popova orders her servant Luka to send him out.

Here, he starts yelling and condemning Luka. As a result, Popova calls him: You are a boor, a coarse bear, bourbon, a monster. This situation becomes even more thrilling and exciting when he says to Popova to fight a duel with pistols. Upon which, Popova calls him Bear, bear, bear.

In short, we can say that the title aptly and superbly suits the action as well as the subject matter of the play. Not only Smirnov is physically termed so but also behavior-wise. The title of the play is ironic. Apparently, Popova has announced Smirnov, a bear, while at the end of the play she accepts him as her future husband.

Question 3

Discuss the play The Bear as a light social comedy.

The play The Bear starts in a tragic situation passes through a quarrel and ends in a comedy.

Answer

Apparently, the play is a farce, yet it produces laughter through the rude, contradictory, and opposite behavior of Popova and Smirnov. Both are very rash and sentimental. At one time they make decisions but at the next moment, they change them.

Comedy is a story in which the writer exposes the shortcomings and follies of the people like pretension and hypocrisy. The characters of a comedy also not serious. They have variety in their moods. Popova is a beautiful young widow. Her husband has died seven months ago.

She outwardly shows her sufferings to others by wearing black attire and confining in the four walls of her house. She creates darkness in her house all the time even during the daytime. Luka her faithful attendant advises her to give up her mourning.

You know when Nicolai Mihailovitch, life lost all its meaning for me. I vowed never to the end of my days to cease to wear the mourning or to see light... Let his ghost see how well I love him

She expresses her so-called love for her husband and says that wants to die with her husband. This is however all her affectation, pretension, and hypocrisy. when Smirnov comes, she starts hating him. She does not like his way of talking and calls him a bear.

At the end of the play, we find a sudden change in her attitude when she responds to Smirnov's love. She lets him kiss and embrace. The reader bursts into laughter to see her different moods in different situations. Smirnov the hero of the play also becomes a laughing stock because of his variety of moods.

At the start of the play, he is very aggressive and in an angry mood. Even he criticizes Popova's mourning. He even did not stop criticizing all the women. He creates a lot of noise, jumps up and down, and speaks in a loud aggressive, and angry voice.

I'd rather sit on a barrel of gunpowder than talk to a woman.

In the end, Smirnov starts liking Popova. All his rude behavior and ill-mannerism blew in the air. The man who was aggressive and loud, now the same man begging for a hand. The play starts in a tragic situation but ends in comedy.

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

Question 4

Write a character sketch of Popova in the play The Bear.

How does Popova been ridiculed in the play?

Discuss Popova as unreal, fake, and proud.

Popova makes a mere show off a mourner, Elaborate.

Answer

The Bear is a classic one-act play written in 1900. It is one of the greatest works of Anton Chekhov which is very much about a woman. It is regarded as a comedy since it is to give the audience entertainment and amusement.

Popova is the heroine of the play. When the play opens, she is presented as a beautiful and young widow. She is seen in a gloomy and sad condition. Although outwardly she tries her best to spend the rest of her life in the memories of her husband, inwardly she is mourning over her unfulfilled and unbridled desires.

At the beginning of the play, she pledges to remain alone her whole life. She says to Luka that she will remain loyal to her husband till the time of her death. She promises that she will not see anybody, but when Smirnov comes, she firstly annoys him to meet her but later she is ready to talk with him.

I know it's no secret to you that he was often unfair to me, cruel, and even unfaithful, but I shall be true till death

Popova is a very bold and proud woman. She fights with Smirnov with the pistol. She instigates Smirnov to teach her how to shoot a man with a pistol. At the end of the play, Popova proves selfish as she fights with Smirnov and when Smirnov tells her about his property and status, she accepts his proposal of marriage.

Popova is highly talkative and violent. She repeats her words, talks fast, long, and sometimes uses insulting words. So she calls Smirnov a boor, a coarse bear, a monster, Devil take you. but her talk endears her to Smirnov. She is ready to fight a duel with him when she can not even fir a pistol

In short, Popova is a double-minded personality in the play. She says something different but acts according to her own will and benefit. Actually, she has been ridiculed in the play and she reflects the real face of a woman with her pretension of love.

Question 5

What is the theme of the Play The Bear?

Answer

The play The Bear by Anton Chekhov is written in the setting of farce and comedy in which an emotional and pretentious woman Popova and a misogynist Smirnov meet and expressed their views about women and men respectively.

Popova is a young, beautiful, and rich widowed Russian landlady's needs a rich landowner to have a healthy rich husband. And so is the need of a rich landowner to have a fine young and rich wife.

In a rural society under the control of landowners, the agreement between the status of husband and wife is very significant. The play ends with the rich oldish bachelor Smirnov's marriage with the richer Popova.

They want to enjoy the power of money and property together in each other's company. Money and property are the upper classes' best means of enjoyment of life. Chekhov presents this richest segment of society in the best possible manner.

The glamour of this segment hides the wretchedness of the lower classes. These classes revolted against the upper-class economic exploitation. Injustice to the oppressed is the distasteful aspect of Russian life, that gave rise to the Russian revolution of 1917.

We in our country are closing our eyes to this distasteful theme of our society as some other nations are doing in their countries. The play has unusual situations. It has unexpected happenings. Thus the play has universal relevance.

Question 6

Write a character sketch of Smirnov

Answer

Smirnov is a middle-aged and retired army lieutenant of the Russian army. He is forceful, energetic, and smart. he looks like a fine shot., as he himself says, I can put a bullet through a coin tossed into the air as it comes down. He gives the expression an outspoken man.

Everything he says or does proves his aggressive nature. Firstly we see that Smirnov is very active and sharp, bold, but is unmannerly. When Luka tells him that Popova does not see any visitor in her sad condition, he pushes himself right in.

He comes into the dining room without permission. Secondly, Smirnov is a bright and brilliant talker. He always has ready and witty replies at hand. It makes the play lively. Thirdly, Smirnov is passionate and indecent in his behavior. His point of view for women can be seen in these words:

I've seen more women than you've seen sparrows! Three times I've fought duels on account of women.

He humorously describes his all past secrets and love affairs with women. He boasts before Popova and says that he has met many women in his life than she has seen sparrows. He blames her that is merely overacting st the death of her husband. He insists to stay at her house till his money is paid.

I'll stay for a year. I'm going to get my own, my dear! You don't get at me with your widow's weeds and your dimpled cheeks!

He tells Luka that he does not care about Popova's black clothes and dimples in her cheeks., and only needs his money. He asks Luka to bring wine without letting Popova offer it to him. Fourthly, Smirnov presents himself as a clever psychologist in his long talk with Popova after calling her dear lady. He gets to know her views.

Thus, he lays a solid foundation for their marriage. We feel that Smirnov is lucky in getting a beautiful, faithful, and childless wife, fit for him in terms of age and status. He increases his property by joining it with hers, gets mental peace, companionship, and happiness for all time.

Explanation with Reference to the context

Passage 1

What grace there was in his strength! Do you remember? Toby, Toby! Tell them to give him an extra feed of oats

Reference

This extract has been taken from the play, The Bear by Anton Chekhov

Context

Popova is a young widow. After the death of her husband, she has decided not to see anybody. Smirnov, a moneylender comes and insists on seeing her. She meets him contrary to her wishes.

He demands the money which he has lent to her husband, Smirnov insists on getting back the money immediately. When the situation takes a sudden turn, both decide to marry contrary to the expectations of the readers.

Explanation

These lines are spoken by Popova. Popova is a very young and beautiful lady. Her husband has died seven months ago. She is very upset after the death of her husband and has worn a black dress.

In these lines, Popova shows her love for her late husband. As she knows that her late husband liked to ride on Toby. So she orders her servants to give him an extra feed to oats. Actually, she wants to show her true and constant love for her husband

Passage 2

You won't get around me like that now! I've had enough black eyes, passionate eyes, ruby lips, dimpled cheeks, the moon, whispers, timid breathing.........

Reference and Context

Same as for the first passage.

Explanation

This is actually a part of the paragraph which is spoken by Smirnov. Smirnov is a humourous and loveable character in the play. Smirnov is very rough and rude in his behavior. When Popova refuses to give him money, he becomes ruder.

He rebukes her solitude and mourning condition. He blames her that is merely overacting at the death of her husband. He humorously describes his all past secrets and love affairs with women. He boasts before Popova and says that he has met many women in his life.

He also describes that he will never be impressed with her black and passionate eyes, ruby lips, dimpled cheeks, and whispers. In simple, Smirnov is a jolly character in the play and he makes the play funny and readable

Passage 3

It isn't right madam... you're just destroying yourself. The maid and the cook have gone off for fruit picking, every living being is rejoicing...

Reference and context

Same as for the first passage.

Explanation

In these lines, Luka, an old sincere servant advises his mistress; Popova about her future life. He tells her that it is not right that she is destroying herself by constantly mourning the death of her husband.

He tells her that maid and the cook have gone out for picking the fruit. He also adds that everything is enjoying life and its pleasure. Actually, Luka does not like the mourning condition of his mistress. He thinks that she must enjoy herself like other normal people.

Passage 4

Excuse me, Sir, I am not accustomed to listening to such expressions or not to such tone of voice. I want to hear no more.

Reference and Context

The same for the first passage.

Explanation

These lines are spoken by Popova. Popova is a very young and beautiful lady. She belongs to a very rich Russian family. She is very upset after the death of her husband and has worn a black dress. She decides to remain in a black dress till the end of her life.

Although her husband has died seven-month ago, yet she is still dressed in black clothes. One day, Smirnov, a rich moneylender comes there and insists on seeing her. She meets him contrary to her desires. He tells Popova that he has come to get back the 1200 roubles that he has lent to her husband.

Popova agrees to give him the debt but requests him to wait till her steward comes. Smirnov insists on getting it back immediately. At this moment Popova expresses her views that she is a very gentle lady and does not like to listen to the harsh tone of Smirnov. She warns him not to speak in this manner.

Passage 5

But I shall be true till death and how him how I can love. There, beyond the grave, he will see me as I was before his death.

Reference and Context

The same for the first passage.

Explanation

The Bear is an interesting and light comedy. In this play, the writer describes the nature of human beings. In these lines, Popova, who is looking at the portrait of her late husband, tells her old servant that she will be true in her love for her dead husband till her own death.

She adds that she wants to show his ghost her love and sincerity. Beyond his grave, he will see her as she was before his death. Actually, these are hypocritical remarks. We analyze at the end of the play that she acts opposite to her words as she accepts the proposal of Smirnov to marry him.

Passage 6

Are you afraid? Yes? You don't get out of it. You come with me! I shan't have any peace until I've made a hole in your forehead...that forehead which I hate so much! Are you afraid?

Reference and Context

The same as for the first passage.

Explanation

Popova speaks out this dialogue, addressing Smirnov when they are ready for fighting a duel. She rebukes Smirnov and asks him sternly to go away. Smirnov is a retired army officer and a rich landowner. He has come to take his credit taken by Popova's late husband.

Popova refuses to pay that day as she has no cash. They exchange harsh words and come to the point of staging and fighting a duel. Popova brings out two pistols and asks him to teach her to shoot. That is quite ridiculous.

In the meanwhile, Smirnov is deeply enamored of her because of her beauty, courage, and bravery. He offers Popova for marriage which surprises her greatly. The paragraph is a dialogue spoken by her it is full of many farces, questions, and exclamations.

She is in a furious mood and tells him that she will not be satisfied until she has shot him dead. She expresses so much hate for him and intends to make a hole in his forehead. She throws him a challenge and asks, Are you afraid? She gets surprised to see a revolutionary change that how Smirnov has changed his mind.

Passage 7

Moreover, it's exactly seven months today since the death of my husband, and I'm in a state of mind that absolutely prevents one from giving money matters my attention.

Reference and Context

The same for the first passage.

Explanation

These lines occur in the initial part of the play and are spoken by Popova. Popova tries to convince Smirnov that she is unable to pay off the debt to her late husband, at the moment. It is because of the fact that she is still mourning the death of her husband.

She is seriously disturbed, upset, and sorrowful at her heavy loss. Her mental condition is not in a proper, stable, and right position to think over other matters, monetary or worldly matters. In other words, she means to convey that her mind is disturbed and not in a sound condition to ponder over things.

She is still preoccupied with the sad memories of her dead husband since his death. She is in a perturbed, depressed condition to consider and devote attention to her worldly matters like money or business, etc.

Passage 8

Instead of talking like that, you ought to go and have a walk in the garden, or else order Toby or Giant to be harnessed and then drive out to see some of the neighbors.

Reference and Context

The same is explained in the first passage.

Explanation

In these lines, we find that Popova's servant Luka is advising her to spend a happy life. Popova's husband has died seven months ago and she is in a state of mourning because she claims to be in love with her husband and is determined to show her husband even after death that she is really a faithful lady and will remain faithful till death.

Luka on the other hand is telling Popova that life is not meant just for one person and that life must not be ruined on one grief. Popova should go to the garden to have a change or should order some horse, Toby or Giant to be prepared to go to some neighbor.

In this way she would be able to overcome her grief, buying herself in something; she has actually buried in her four walls which is quite devastating for her. She is quite young with roses in her cheeks so she should take care of herself and think about marrying again.

However, instead of listening to this sound advice she remembers her husband's love for Toby and asks Luka to give some extra feed of oats to Toby and Giant which were the favorite horses of her husband. Popova's husband actually used to buy food for these horses.