

CHAPTER – 9

THE PROPOSAL

- Anton Chekov

2 MARK QUESTIONS

1. Who is the protagonist in "The Proposal," and why does he visit Chubukov's home?

Answer:

Lomov is the protagonist who visits Chubukov's home to propose to Chubukov's daughter, Natalya. He is motivated by a desire to acquire more land for his estate.

2. Describe Lomov's character traits in the play.

Answer:

Lomov is portrayed as anxious, hypochondriacal, and overly concerned about his health. Despite his nervous disposition, he is determined to propose to Natalya for the sake of acquiring additional land.

3. What is the central conflict in "The Proposal," and how does it unfold?

Answer:

The central conflict arises when Lomov attempts to propose but engages in trivial arguments with Natalya over land boundaries and hunting dogs. The situation becomes increasingly chaotic as the characters get entangled in heated disputes.

4. What ironic twist occurs when Lomov collapses during the play?

Answer:

The ironic twist is that Lomov, who initially arrives to propose, collapses due to a supposed heart attack caused by the stress of the arguments, creating a humorous and unexpected turn of events.

5. How do the two families react when Lomov collapses?

Answer:

The two families, initially engaged in disputes, set aside their differences and express deep concern for Lomov's health when he collapses. They temporarily unite to tend to him.

6. What is the outcome of Lomov's collapse, and how does he respond?

Answer:

Lomov revives after the collapse, only to resume the arguments with even greater fervor. The outcome is ironic, as the characters seem oblivious to the absurdity of their interactions.

7. Why is Lomov determined to marry Natalya?

Answer:

Lomov is determined to marry Natalya because he believes it will be advantageous for his estate, as her family possesses valuable land that he wishes to add to his own property.

8. How does Chekhov use humor in "The Proposal" to highlight the absurdity of the characters' behavior?

Answer:

Chekhov uses humor to exaggerate the trivial arguments and misunderstandings between the characters, emphasizing the absurdity of their behavior in matters of love and marriage.

9. In what way does the play satirize societal norms and human folly?

Answer:

"The Proposal" satirizes societal norms by highlighting the superficial and materialistic motives behind marriage proposals. The characters' exaggerated behavior satirizes the folly inherent in societal expectations surrounding love and marriage.

10. How does "The Proposal" conclude, and what is the characters' reaction to the resolution of the conflict?

Answer:

The play concludes with Natalya and Lomov agreeing to get married despite the ongoing disputes. Chubukov expresses relief at the resolution of the conflict, and the characters seem oblivious to the underlying absurdity of their interactions.

4 MARK QUESTIONS

1. Describe Lomov's personality traits and how they contribute to the comedic elements in the play.

Answer:

Lomov is depicted as anxious and hypochondriacal, obsessively concerned about his health. His neurotic behavior adds humor as he engages in trivial arguments. This contributes to the comedic elements by highlighting the absurdity of his disposition in the context of proposing marriage.

2. Explain the significance of the ongoing disputes and trivialities during Lomov's proposal.

Answer:

The ongoing disputes, such as arguments about land boundaries and hunting dogs, highlight the absurdity of the characters' priorities. This serves as a satirical commentary on the trivialities that often accompany discussions about love and marriage, adding depth to the comedic nature of the play.

3. Analyze the ironic twist involving Lomov's collapse and its impact on the overall tone of the play.

Answer:

Lomov's collapse due to a supposed heart attack introduces irony, adding a unexpected turn to the narrative. This ironic twist contributes to the overall comedic tone by emphasizing the absurdity of the characters' behavior and the trivial nature of their disputes.

4. Discuss the role of Chubukov and Natalya in the resolution of conflicts and the decision to marry Lomov.

Answer:

Chubukov and Natalya momentarily set aside their differences when Lomov collapses. Their concern for his health leads to a temporary resolution of conflicts. However, the decision to marry Lomov is ironic, underscoring the play's satirical commentary on societal expectations and the superficial nature of marriage.

5. How does Chekhov use humor and exaggeration to satirize societal norms in "The Proposal"?

Answer:

Chekhov employs humor through exaggerated arguments and absurd situations, satirizing societal norms associated with love and marriage. The characters' superficial motives and the trivial nature of their disputes highlight the playwright's critique of societal expectations, revealing the folly inherent in conventional attitudes towards romantic relationships.

8 MARK QUESTIONS

1. (i) Find all the words and expressions in the play that the characters use to speak about each other and the accusations and insults they hurl at each other. (For example, Lomov, in the end, calls Chubukov an intriguer; but earlier, Chubukov has himself called Lomov a “malicious, doublefaced intriguer.” Again, Lomov begins by describing Natalya as “an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated.”)

Answer:

(i) The words and expressions that have been used in the play by various characters to describe each other are listed below:

Chubukov: intriguer, grabber, old rat, Jesuit

Natalya: a lovesick cat, an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated.

Lomov: a good neighbour, impudent, pettifogger, malicious, double-faced intriguer, rascal, blind hen, turnip-ghost, a villain, a scarecrow, the stuffed sausage, a monster, the wizen-faced frump, pup, fool, milksop, etc.

2. What does Chubukov at first suspect that Lomov has come for? Is he sincere when he later says, “And I’ve always loved you, my angel, as if you were my own son”? Find reasons for your answer from the play.

Answer:

Initially, Chubukov suspected that Lomov had come to borrow money from him as he was wearing an evening dress. Chubukov was not sincere at all when he told Lomov that he had always loved him and that he treated the young man like his own son. He had made up his mind that he would not give a single penny to Lomov, if he tried to borrow money from him. He also used all kinds of insults to ridicule Lomov during the argument by calling him ‘pettifogger’, ‘old rat’, ‘Jesuit’, etc. However, when Lomov asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage, his attitude changed immediately, and he rushed out and called his daughter, Natalya Stepanovna.

3. Chubukov says of Natalya: “... as if she won’t consent! She’s in love; egad, she’s like a lovesick cat...” Would you agree? Find reasons for your answer.

Answer:

Chubukov believes that Lomov is an ideal marriage prospect for his daughter, Natalya. He was indeed waiting for this proposal. However, when Lomov expresses his doubt about Natalya’s consent to the marriage proposal, Chubukov immediately affirms him, saying that his daughter is in love with him. In the play, we notice that Natalya constantly argues and disagrees with Lomov in every respect. When Lomov leaves after the argument, Chubukov tells her that he has actually come with a marriage proposal for her. On hearing this, Natalya started weeping and asked her father to bring back Lomov at once. The statements that show she was actually in love with him are,

“Ah! she said, Bring him back! Back Ah! Bring him here. Quick, quick! Fetch him!”

4. Anger Management: As adults, one important thing to learn is how to manage our temper. Some of us tend to get angry quickly, while others remain calm.

Can you think of three ill effects that result from anger? Note them down. Suggest ways to avoid losing your temper in such situations. Are there any benefits from anger?

Answer:

There are various ill-effects of anger. Three ill-effects that result from anger are listed below:

1. It causes headaches and health problems.
2. It gives rise to anxiety and blood pressure.
3. It ruins relationships with people.

You can avoid losing your temper by trying to stay calm in difficult situations. Take a step back and think carefully before you speak, and avoid taking things too personally.

Although it is advisable to stay calm and not get angry often. But here are some benefits of anger:

1. It makes us aware of injustice and helps us voice our opinion against it.
2. It motivates us to stay focused and helps in solving disputes and facilitating negotiations among people.

5. Analyze the role of Lomov's hypochondriacal nature in the comedic elements of the play. How does his character contribute to the satire of societal expectations in love and marriage?

Answer:

Lomov's hypochondriacal nature adds a layer of comedy to the play as his constant worry about his health creates absurd situations. His neurotic tendencies contribute to the farcical tone during the proposal scene. Moreover, Lomov's character satirizes societal expectations by revealing the absurdity of pursuing marriage for material gain rather than genuine affection. Through humor and exaggeration, Chekhov critiques the superficial motives that often underlie traditional views on love and marriage.

6. Explore the significance of the play's ironic twists, including Lomov's collapse and the ultimate decision to marry. How do these twists contribute to the overall theme of absurdity and the playwright's commentary on human folly?

Answer:

The ironic twists in "The Proposal" play a crucial role in highlighting the absurdity of human behavior. Lomov's collapse, initially a serious event, becomes comical when it leads to a temporary resolution of conflicts. The ultimate decision to marry, despite ongoing disputes, adds another layer of irony, emphasizing the superficial nature of societal expectations. These twists contribute to Chekhov's larger commentary on human folly, illustrating how individuals can be blind

to the ridiculousness of their actions and decisions, especially in matters as significant as love and marriage.

GRAMMAR

1. This play has been translated into English from the Russian original. Are there any expressions or ways of speaking that strike you as more Russian than English? For example, would an adult man be addressed by an older man as *my darling* or *my treasure* in an English play?

Read through the play carefully, and find expressions that you think are not used in contemporary English, and contrast these with idiomatic modern English expressions that also occur in the play.

Answer:

1. The expressions that are not used in contemporary English include:

- (i) “my darling”, “my angel”, “my beloved”, “my beauty”, “my treasure” – All these expressions were used for an adult man by an older man.
- (ii) “...and all that sort of thing” – This expression does not explain anything and is used for a comic effect.
- (iii) “...and all that” – This expression is also used for comic effect and has no meaning.
- (iv) “how may you be getting on?” – In this expression, Lomov is asking Chubukov about his well-being.
- (v) “the scarecrow”, “the stuffed sausage”, “the wizen-faced frump” – These expressions were used by Chubukov to hurl abuses to Lomov.

Some of the modern English expressions used in the play were:

Lomov addressing Natalya: “Madam”, “my heart”, “honoured Natalya Stepanovna”.

Lomov addressing Chubukov: “Honoured Stepan Stepanovitch”, “I beg pardon Stepan Honouritch”.

Chubukov addressing Lomov: “My dear fellow”.

Chubukov insulting Lomov: “malicious, double-faced intriguer”, “fool”, “guzzling gambler”.

Natalya to Lomov: “shout yourself hoarse”

2. Look up the following phrases in a dictionary to find out their meaning, and then use each in a sentence of your own.

(i) You may take it that

(ii) He seems to be coming round

(iii) My foot's gone to sleep

Answer:

(i) You may take it that I'm lying, but I'm actually not feeling well.

(ii) He seems to be coming round after he fell down, hit his head and fainted.

(iii) My foot's gone to sleep after exercising in the gym for two hours.

3. Reported Speech

You must have noticed that when we report someone's exact words, we have to make some changes in the sentence structure. In the following sentences, fill in the blanks to list the changes that have occurred in the above pairs of sentences. One has been done for you.

1. To report a question, we use the reporting verb **asked** (as in Sentence Set 1).

2. To report a statement, we use the reporting verb

_____.

3. The adverb of place *here* changes to

_____.

4. When the verb in direct speech is in the present tense, the verb in reported speech is in the

_____ tense (as in Sentence Set 3).

5. If the verb in direct speech is in the present continuous tense, the verb in reported speech changes to _____ tense. For example, _____ changes to *was getting*.

6. When the sentence in direct speech contains a word denoting respect, we add the adverb _____ in the reporting clause (as in Sentence Set 1).

7. The pronouns I, me, our and mine, which are used in the first person in direct speech, change according to the subject or object of the reporting verb such as , _____, _____, _____ or _____ in reported speech.

Answer:

2. To report a statement, we use the reporting verb **said/declared**.

3. The adverb of place *here* changes to **there**.

4. When the verb in direct speech is in the present tense, the verb in reported speech is in the **past** tense.

5. If the verb in direct speech is in the present continuous tense, the verb in reported speech changes to **past continuous** tense. For example, **am getting** changes to *was getting*.

6. When the sentence in direct speech contains a word denoting respect, we add the adverb **respectfully** in the reporting clause.

7. The pronouns I, me, our and mine, which are used in the first person in direct speech, change according to the subject or object of the reporting verb such as **he/she, him/her, their** or **his/her's** in reported speech.

4. Here is an excerpt from an article from the Times of India dated 27 August 2006. Rewrite it, changing the sentences in direct speech into reported speech. Leave the other sentences unchanged.

“Why do you want to know my age? If people know I am so old, I won’t get work!” laughs 90-year-old A. K. Hangal, one of Hindi cinema’s most famous character actors. For his age, he is rather energetic. “What’s the secret?” we ask. “My intake of everything is in small quantities. And I walk a lot,” he replies. “I joined the industry when people retire. I was in my 40s. So I don’t miss being called a star. I am still respected and given work, when actors of my age are living in poverty and without work. I don’t have any complaints,” he says, adding, “but yes, I have always been underpaid.” Recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Hangal never hankered after money or materialistic gains. “No doubt I am content today, but money is important. I was a fool not to understand the value of money earlier,” he regrets.

Answer:

90-year-old A.K. Hangal, one of Hindi cinema’s most famous character actors, asked, laughing, why we wanted to know his age. He said that if people knew he was that old, he would not get work. For his age, he is rather energetic. We asked him about the secret. He replied that his intake of everything in small quantities was the secret and added that he walked a lot. He said that he had joined the industry

when people usually retired. He was in his 40s, so he did not miss being called a star. He was still respected and given work, when actors of his age were living in poverty and without work. He said he had no complaints and added that he had always been underpaid. Being the recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Hangal never hankered after money or materialistic gains. He said that there was no doubt that he was content at present, but money was an important aspect. He said regretfully that he was a fool not to understand the value of money before.

SUMMARY

"The Proposal" is a satirical play written by Anton Chekhov. It revolves around the comical and absurd nature of human relationships and the trivialities that often surround matters of love and marriage.

The story is set in the home of Stepan Stepanovich Chubukov, a landowner, and opens with Lomov, a neighbor, arriving to propose to Chubukov's daughter, Natalya. Lomov is an anxious and somewhat hypochondriacal character who is overly concerned about his health. Despite his nervous disposition, he is determined to propose to Natalya because of her family's land, which he believes would complement his own property.

The central conflict arises when Lomov attempts to propose, but instead of expressing his feelings directly, he engages in a series of trivial arguments with Natalya over matters such as land boundaries and hunting dogs. The scene becomes increasingly chaotic as the characters get entangled in heated disputes about the pedigree of their respective hunting dogs and the demarcation of their properties.

In a twist of irony, Lomov, who initially arrives to propose, collapses due to a supposed heart attack caused by the stress of the arguments. The two families, deeply concerned about Lomov's health, temporarily set aside their differences to tend to him. However, Lomov revives only to resume the arguments with even greater fervor.

The absurdity of the situation reaches its peak when, despite the ongoing disputes, Natalya and Lomov agree to get married. The play concludes with Chubukov expressing his relief at the resolution of the conflict, and the characters seem oblivious to the underlying absurdity of their interactions.

"The Proposal" is a satirical exploration of the trivialities and misunderstandings that often accompany romantic relationships and marriage proposals. Chekhov uses humor and exaggeration to highlight the absurdity of the characters' behavior, satirizing societal norms and human folly in matters of love and marriage.