



DOI: 10.22363/2312-9220-2023-28-3-437-450
EDN: SAOAJQ
UDC 82.01

Research article / Научная статья

Anna Karenina's hypertexts in Chekhov's works

Sergey A. Kibalnik

*Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences,
4 Naberezhnaya Makarova, St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation*
✉ kibalnik007@mail.ru

Abstract. The author begins by referencing to his previous demonstration of the hypertextual polemicalness shown by him earlier in relation to Leo Tolstoy's novel "Anna Karenina", as well as Chekhov's stories "The Duel" and the "The Grasshopper". Similar phenomena is identified in Chekhov's stories "His Wife", "Concerning Love" and "The Lady with the Dog". Additionally, the author perceives a sarcastic crypto-parody of Tolstoy's novel, in the first of these stories, while in the second and third – Chekhov's own variations on this plot, played out in the perspective of a lover. Chekhov conducts an artistic experiment in the story "Concerning Love" exploring what would have occurred to the characters in "Anna Karenina" had Alyokhin possessed more similarities to Tolstoy's Levin than to Vronsky. In the "The Lady with the Dog", Chekhov outlines the possibility of the lovers overcoming the numerous obstacles that have arisen before them and achieve happiness. It is demonstrated that in writing this story, Chekhov relied heavily on the aesthetics of the "transformation of a person", present in all Russian classics, from Pushkin to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (however, the author notes that Chekhov drew from Konstantine Levin's storyline in Tolstoy's work, rather than that of Anna Karenina).

Keywords: Leo Tolstoy, short stories, His Wife, Concerning Love, The Lady with the Dog, polemic interpretation

Conflicts of interest. The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Article history: submitted June 1, 2023; revised July 5, 2023; accepted July 13, 2023.

For citation: Kibalnik, S.A. (2023). Anna Karenina's hypertexts in Chekhov's works. *RUDN Journal of Studies in Literature and Journalism*, 28(3), 437–450. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2023-28-3-437-450>

Гипертексты «Анны Карениной» у Чехова

С.А. Кибальник

*Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский Дом) Российской академии наук,
Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, наб. Макарова, д. 4*
✉ kibalnik007@mail.ru

Аннотация. Отталкиваясь от показанной в предыдущих исследованиях гипертекстуальной полемичности по отношению к роману Льва Толстого «Анна Каренина» повести Чехова «Дуэль» и рассказа «Попрыгунья», автор рассматривает аналогичные явления

© Kibalnik S.A., 2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

в чеховских рассказах «Супруга», «О любви» и «Дама с собачкой». При этом в первом из них он видит своего рода саркастическую криптопародию на роман Толстого, а во втором и третьем – собственные вариации Чехова на этот сюжет, разыгрываемые в перспективе любовника. В рассказе «О любви» Чехов ставит своего рода художественный эксперимент: он показывает, что случилось бы с героями «Анны Карениной», если бы Алехин был больше похож на толстовского Левина, чем на Вронского. Что же касается «Дамы с собачкой», то в нем Чехов намечает возможность счастливого преодоления «любовниками» возникших перед ними многочисленных препятствий. Показано, что этот рассказ написан с отчетливой опорой на эстетику «преображения человека», общую для всей русской классики, – от Пушкина до Достоевского и Толстого (но только опять же сюжетной линии не Анны Карениной, а Константина Левина).

Ключевые слова: Лев Толстой, рассказ, Супруга, О любви, Дама с собачкой, роман, полемическая интерпретация

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

История статьи: поступила в редакцию 1 июня 2023 г.; отрецензирована 5 июля 2023 г.; принята к публикации 13 июля 2023 г.

Для цитирования: Кибальник С.А. Гипертексты «Анны Карениной» у Чехова // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Литературоведение. Журналистика. 2023. Т. 28. № 3. С. 437–450. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2312-9220-2023-28-3-437-450>

Introduction

It is a commonly held belief that Chekhov was greatly impacted by Tolstoy's work (as noted in: Lakshin, 2011). However, in actuality, throughout his mature works, Chekhov often critiques rather than aligns with Tolstoy, despite maintaining interest in him until the end of his life.

It was not accidental that on March 27, 1894, Chekhov wrote to A.S. Suvorin: “But there was a time when I was strongly affected by Tolstoy's philosophy; it possessed me for six or seven years and I was affected not so much by his fundamental ideas – with which I was already familiar – than by the way in which he expressed them, his very reasonableness, and no doubt a species of hypnotism peculiar to him. But now something inside me protests against it: reason and justice tell me there is more love for mankind in electricity and steam than there is in chastity and abstaining from meat. It is true that war is evil and courts of law are evil, but that does not mean I have to go about in bast shoes and sleep on top of the stove beside the labourer and his wife, and so on and so forth. But all this is really beside the point; it is not the matter of being for or against, what it amounts to is that whichever way I look at it *Tolstoy has simply passed on, he is no longer in my heart*, and when he departed he said, behold, your house is left unto you desolate. I've been granted, so to say, an exemption from billeting” (Chekhov, 2004, pp. 324–325).

We've already demonstrated, using Chekhov's works from the late 1880s and early 1890s as an example, that stories like “The Grasshopper” (1892) and “The Duel” (1891)¹ aren't just hybrid hypertexts, but also serve as polemical interpretations of “Anna Karenina” (as well as Gustave Flaubert's “Madame Bova-

¹ Chekhov demonstrates in “The Duel” that a protagonist who appears to have suffered a moral death can undergo a significant transformation due to certain dramatic life circumstances. Unexpectedly, this transformation can “restore” a seemingly “lost person”, if we might use F.M. Dostoevsky's wording (Dostoevsky, vol. 20, p. 28).

ry”) (Kibalnik, 2021a, 2021b). In these stories Chekhov openly rebuts the central idea conveyed in Tolstoy’s novel.

In his later works, this polemic takes on even sharper forms. Therefore, in the story “His Wife” (1895), Chekhov even writes a thinly veiled parody of “Anna Karenina”.

Discussion

Chekhov’s story “His Wife” as a cryptic parody to “Anna Karenina”

The story begins with an initial exposition that lays out the plot. Dr. Nikolai Evgrafovich stumbles upon a telegram from his wife Olga Dmitrievna’s paramour, Michel, who resides in Monte Carlo, resting on her desk.

Due to the numerous hysterical outbursts, arguments, accusations, threats and deceitful lies that took place in the hero’s, who also happens to be a doctor, married life, Nikolai Evgrafovich decides to dissolve their marriage. Like Alexei Aleksandrovich Karenin after Anna’s childbirth, he is willing to make a sacrifice: “I will have it out with her. Let her go off with her lover – *I’ll give her a divorce and take the blame...*” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 3).

Thus, in the same plot involving adultery that Tolstoy portrayed, Chekhov’s husband shows the same generosity as Alexei Karenin. In Karenin’s own words: “*I will bear the shame, even give away my son...*” (Tolstoy, vol. 19, p. 453). However, the heroine misunderstands his intentions and perceives his offer as a desire to “rid” himself of her.

Anna, according to Tolstoy, could not accept “*his generosity*” and departs with Vronsky to Italy without procuring a divorce, effectively making herself an outlaw. In contrast, Chekhovian Olga Dmitrievna declines a divorce for entirely different reasons:

“ ‘You can stay with Rees for good. I’m giving you a divorce and taking the blame, so Rees can marry you.’

Olga looked astonished. ‘But I don’t *want* a divorce!’ she said forcefully. ‘*I am not asking for one. Just give me the passport, that’s all*’ ” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 5).

In other words, she decides to spend a month with her lover Rees before returning to her husband. As the characters converse, Nikolai Evgrafovich is consumed by a sense of conflicting emotions between him and his wife: “Once again he asked himself in utter bafflement how he – son of a village priest and *brought up at church school, a plain, straightforward, blunt man* – could have surrendered so abjectly to this *contemptible, lying, vulgar, mean-spirited, wholly alien creature*” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 6).

It is apparent that “His Wife” contradicts the commonly held notion of Chekhov’s ambiguity, as there are no subtle nuances found within the work. However, it is important to note that the final statement is a blatant imitation of the misogynistic views expressed by characters in Tolstoy’s novels, such as Pierre Bezukhov’s objectification of Helen Kuragina and Vasily Pozdnyshv’s intense loathing for his spouse in “The Kreutzer Sonata”.

In contrast, the plot situation in Chekhov’s “His Wife” develops in an anecdotal manner. Olga Dmitrievna interprets Nikolai Evgrafovich’s desire to divorce her as a means of getting rid of her while also avoiding the responsibility of providing for her:

“ ‘But why no divorce?’ the doctor was beginning to lose his temper. ‘You’re a strange woman, I must say. If you’re really fond of him and he loves you, you two can’t do better than marry, placed as you are. Don’t tell me that given the choice you actually prefer adultery to marriage!’

‘Oh, I see,’ she said moving away. An evil, vindictive expression came into her face. ‘I see your little game. *You’re fed up with me and you just want to get rid of me by landing me with this divorce. But I’m not quite such a fool as you think, thank you very much. I’m not having a divorce and I’m not leaving you, oh dear me no.* Firstly, I want to keep my social position,’ she went on quickly as though afraid that he might stop her. ‘Secondly, I’m twenty-seven and Rees is only twenty-three. In a year’s time he’ll tire of me and throw me over. And what’s more, I am not sure I shall be so kin on him much longer, if you want to know... So there! I’m sitting tight!’

‘Then out of this house you go!’ shouted Nicholas, stamping, ‘I’ll through you out! You’re a vile, disgusting creature.’

‘We’ll see about that,’ she said and left the room” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 5).

Simultaneously, Nikolai Evgrafovich is portrayed in a clear Tolstoyan fashion, resembling Pierre in the scene where he confronts Helen Kuragina after discovering her infidelity with Dolokhov: “Intermittently, he states ‘we’d better break up,’ to which Helen responds, *‘Let’s part, if you please, but only if you give me a fortune.’* ‘To part, that’s what scared me!’ Pierre leaped up from the sofa and stumbled towards her, exclaiming: *‘I’ll kill you!’ and grabbed a marble board from the table, with a force he did not know he possessed, he swung it at her.* Helen’s face contorted in terror: she yelped and jumped away from him. The breed of his father had taken hold of him. Pierre felt the fascination and charm of rage. He threw the board, smashed it, and approaching Helen with open arms, shouted: ‘Out!’ in such a terrible voice that the whole household was terrified to hear this cry. *God knows what Pierre would have done at that moment if Helen had not run out of the room*” (Tolstoy, vol. 11, p. 31).

As we can see when comparing him to Pierre Bezukhov, Nikolai Evgrafovich behaves, although in a similar, yet much more peaceful way. The ending of “His Wife” is incredibly sardonic, paradoxically bearing some resemblance to Chekhov’s early humoresques:

“At eleven o’clock that morning he was putting on his coat before going to the hospital when the maid came into his study.

‘What is it?’

‘Madam has just got up. *She wants the twenty-five roubles you promised her yesterday*’ ” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 6).

It is possible that the ending of “My Wife” is a parody of the denouement of the scene between Pierre and Helene quoted above. In that scene, Pierre ultimately grants his wife power of attorney to manage all the Great Russian estates, which accounted for more than half of his fortune and departed for Petersburg alone a week later (Tolstoy, vol. 11, p. 31).

Chekhov’s parody of Tolstoy is rather biting and, moreover, multi-dimensional, satirizing not only “Anna Karenina” but also “War and Peace”. Hence it is no surprise that Tolstoy found this story “morally ugly”: “It happens, but the artist must not describe” (quoted from: Chekhov, 1977, vol. 9, p. 466). Evidently, Tolstoy believed that only situations like the one he depicted in “Anna Karenina”, where

characters compete in generosity (although rare in real life), should be described. Conversely, Chekhov held the exact opposite view. Nevertheless, Chekhov “re-wrote” *Anna Karenina* multiple times, taking a less satirical, more congenial vein with Tolstoy. It is enough, for example, to recall his stories “Concerning Love” (1898) and “The Lady with the Dog” (1899).

“Anna Karenina” in the perspective of a lover

In “Concerning Love” and “A Lady with a Dog” Chekhov presents a gentler version of the plot transformation seen in Tolstoy’s “Anna Karenina” in comparison to “My Wife”. The distinction lies the fact that Chekhov now portrays the same plot from in the perspective of a lover.

The first of these two stories portrays adultery as only a potentiality, unfulfilled in the lives of the protagonists. In contrast, in the second story, the characters, much like those in “Anna Karenina”, follow through with their affair until its culmination. Regardless of the difficulties they confront, they remain resolute in overcoming them.

The most notable symbolic signal of the hypertextual correlation between both works and “Anna Karenina” is the use of anaphoric first and patronymic names, much like Tolstoy’s heroine “Anna Arkadyevna”. In “Concerning Love” the heroine is named Anna Alekseevna, while in “The Lady with the Dog,” – Anna Sergeevna.

In the latter case, the situation is complicated by the complete coincidence of the name of “the lady with a dog” and that of the “cold” Turgenev heroine of his novel “Fathers and Sons”. Despite her affinity for Bazarov and her unmarried status, she refrains from impulsively joining him in the vortex of passion. Anna Alekseevna Luganovich seems to evoke separate associations with Odintsova: “the mystery of a young, handsome, intelligent woman, the wife of an unattractive, almost elderly husband (the man was over forty)” can be traced back to the fate of the heroine in I.S. Turgenev’s novel. In “Fathers and Sons”, a forty-year-old man named Odintsov is married to a twenty-year-old named Anna Sergeevna Lokteva (Bogdanova, 2019, p. 454).

The protagonists of these two works, Alyokhin and Gurov, share a common trait in that they both feel as though they are in the wrong place in their lives. In the story “Gooseberries” when Pavel Alyokhin is first introduced to the reader he is portrayed as “more like a professor or artist than a landlord” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 127). When in the story “Concerning Love” the reader parted with him forever, Burkin and Chimsha-Himalayan “felt sorry that this man with the kind, intelligent eyes – who had spoken with such sincere feeling – really was going round and round the same old treadmill, doing neither *academic work nor anything else* capable of making his life more pleasant” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 143).

Upon meeting Dmitry Gurov, the protagonist of “The Lady with the Dog,” one could perceive him as a slightly older version of the hero in “Concerning Love”, reminiscent of Alyokhin during his love for Anna Luganovich: “He was still in his thirties...² Gurov described himself as a Muscovite who had studied

² Meanwhile, at the time when the action of “Gooseberries” takes place, Alyokhin is already “a man of about forty” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 127).

literature but worked in a bank. He had once trained as an opera singer but had given that up” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 9). True, “he had a twelve-year-old daughter and two schoolboy sons”, so, paradoxically it is the same Alyokhin, who ended up with Anna Alekseevna. However, this is not the main point. What is significant is that both works share common motif in their portrayal of the main characters, namely, “real life as a contrast to human desires and aspirations.”

Just as Alyokhin was not destined to become a scholar – a motif that will soon be used again in relation to the hero of the “Three Sisters” Andrei Prozorov – so he was not destined to become Anna Luganovich’s lover. And the reason for this is nothing else than his way of thinking, which is dominated by the motives of moral duty declared from the very beginning of the story, his tendency to reflection and hesitation – in a word, everything that was completely absent in Vronsky’s character:

“When we’re in love *we’re for ever questioning ourselves. Are we being honorable or dishonorable? Wise or stupid? How will it end, this love?* And so on. Whether this attitude is right or wrong I don’t know, but that *it is a nuisance, that it is unsatisfactory and frustrating* – that I do know” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 137)

As we can see, Alyokhin is more like Tolstoy’s Levin than Vronsky. However, in his reasoning, he plays with alternative versions of the development of his love affair with Anna Luganovich, imagining himself in the role of other Turgenev’s heroes – apparently, primarily from the novel “On the Eve”: the revolutionary Insarov, the scientist Andrei Bersenev, the sculptor Pavel Shubin: “Things would have been different if my life had been romantic and enterprising: if I’d been *fighting for my country’s freedom, for instance, if I’d been a distinguished scholar, actor or artist*. As it was I should be conveying her from one humdrum, colourless milieu into another, or even worse” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 141).

It is well known that Turgenev claimed, while creating his characters, he was inspired by other people: Bakunin, Dobrolyubov³. Chekhov also utilized real-life biographical prototypes, but in his later works he used literary types more extensively.

Unlike Alexei Vronsky, Pavel Alyokhin never pursued a romantic relationship with Anna Alekseevna Luganovich but the end result was quite the opposite of satisfaction and happiness, it was the opposite:

“Anne had begun going away to her mother’s and sister’s more often in recent years. She had become subject to depressions: moods in which she was conscious that her life was unfulfilled and wasted. She didn’t want to see her husband and children at such times. She was under treatment for a nervous condition.

And still, we did not speak out minds. In company she would feel curiously exasperated with me. She would disagree with everything I said, and if I became involved in an argument, she would take my opponent’s side. If I chanced to drop something she would coldly offer her ‘congratulations.’ If I forgot the opera glasses when we went to the theatre, she’d tell me she had ‘known very well I’d forget those’ ” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 142).

In the end of the story “Concerning Love” Alyokhin, it appears to finally realize his mistake of not following his feelings of love: “She had already said

³ As Turgenev himself admitted, he “never attempted to ‘construct an image’ if he did not have as a starting point a living face as a fundamental basis to which he would gradually add and combine appropriate features” (Turgenev, 1981, vol. 11, p. 86).

good-bye to her husband and children, and the train was due to leave at any moment, when I dashed into her compartment to put a basket – which she had nearly left behind – on the luggage rack. It was my turn to say good-bye. Our eyes met there in the compartment, and we could hold back no longer. I put my arms around her, she pressed her face against my breast, and the tears flowed. Kissing her face, her shoulders, her tear-drenched hands – we were both so unhappy – I declared my love. With a burning pain in my heart, I saw how essential, how trivial, how illusory it was... everything which had frustrated our love. I saw that, *if you love, you must base your theory of love on something loftier and more significant than happiness or unhappiness, than sin or virtue as they are commonly understood. Better, otherwise, not to theorize at all*” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 143).

But then, why doesn't he at least now act in accordance with this new “understanding” of his: “I kissed her for the last time, I clasped her hand, and we parted – forever. The train had already started. I sat down in the next compartment, which was empty... sat there, weeping, until the first stop” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 143).

After all, Anna Alekseevna was going to the Crimea alone, and this was clear in advance: “It had been decided that we should see Anne off to the Crimea (where her doctors had advised her to say) at the end of August, and that Luganovich would take children to the west a little later” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 143).

And yet, it doesn't even occur to Alyokhin to go with or after her and, finally, actually act on the basis of “something loftier and more significant than happiness or unhappiness, than sin or virtue as they are commonly understood” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 143).

The main point to note here is that Alyokhin loves Anna Alekseevna and he does not aim to achieve just a romantic victory. Apparently, from his point of view, the time for drastic changes in her life is over. However, it's possible that his hesitant behavior is due to his personality traits, which include indecision.

In his story “Concerning Love” Chekhov sets up a kind of artistic experiment. He shows what would have happened to the characters in “Anna Karenina” if Alyokhin had been more like Tolstoy's Levin than Vronsky.

Meanwhile, at the very beginning of “The Lady with a Dog,” Gurov, like Vronsky, is devoid of Alyokhin's predilection for self-criticism: “Experience often repeated, truly bitter experience, had taught him long ago that with decent people, especially Moscow people – always slow to move and irresolute – *every intimacy, which at first so agreeably diversifies life* and appears a light and charming adventure, inevitably grows into a regular problem of extreme intricacy, and in the long run the situation becomes unbearable. But at every fresh meeting with an interesting woman this experience seemed to slip out of his memory, and he was eager for life, and everything seemed simple and amusing” (Chekhov, 2003, p. 286).

So, when we move from the story “Concerning Love” to “The Lady with the Dog”, we may get the impression that it is Dmitry Gurov who will meet Anna Luganovich in the Crimea. And he will bring to a close what Alyokhin did not do – finally he will give her what she lacked: a real love affair that will make up for her marriage, which does not fully satisfy her...

However, this impression is, of course, just an illusion. Because Anna Alekseevna Diderits, as it was clearly indicated from the very beginning of “The Lady with the Dog”, needed more than just a love affair.

Dmitri Luganovich and Alexey Suvorin

Meanwhile, these two Chekhov heroines, of course, have common features. After all, if Anna Sergeevna's husband, according to her own feelings, is a "flunkey" (Chekhov 2003, p. 290), then Anna Alekseevna's husband is a boring philistine. More precisely, according to the hero-narrator, Dmitry Luganovich "is a good fellow, one of those simple-minded chaps *who have got into their heads that the man in the dock is always guilty*, and that a sentence may be challenged only in writing, through the proper channels – most certainly not at a private dinner-table" (Chekhov, 2008, pp. 138–139).

In this regard, O.V. Bogdanova rightly noted that much in Luganovich brings him closer to both Belikov and Startsev: "...a man, although noble, is somewhat like Belikov from 'A Hard Case.' The subsequent (including his speech) traits of the character only strengthen the Belikov component of his personality. <...> The character, who 'keeps close to respectable people,' recalls the text of Chekhov's 'Ionych', where the protagonist visits the provincial club and respected nobles in the city without any interest, but with regularity and respect. The use of adjectives 'sluggish' and 'unnecessary' in the text, seems to create allusions to the earlier mentioned character of Dmitry Ionych Startsev (note that Luganovich and Startsev are namesakes)" (Bogdanova, 2019, pp. 451–452, 454).

Important touches in the image of Luganovich are introduced by his real-life prototype. Some researchers tend to believe the memoirs of L.A. Avilova, in which she says that her husband was such a prototype, and the story is based on Chekhov's failed love affair with her (Bogdanova, 2019, pp. 455–456)

It is probable that Chekhov's distinct relationships with A.S. Suvorin and his second wife, Anna Ivanovna Suvorina, are the root of the matter. Although they shared a deep admiration for each other, their relationship never extended beyond that.⁴ However, could this affection not be enough to cultivate a compelling plot for a work of art? Moreover, Anna Ivanovna was also significantly (by as much as 24 years) younger than Alexei Sergeevich. And about the same was the age difference between Anna Alekseevna and Luganovich "She was still very young, *not more than twenty-two, and her first child had been born six months previously*. <...> I tried to plumb the mystery of a young, handsome, intelligent woman, the wife of an unattractive, almost elderly husband (*the man was over forty*)..." (Chekhov, 2008, pp. 138–141).

When Chekhov met A.I. Suvorina in the winter of 1885, she was already 27 years old, and she already had more than one child. She married Alexei Sergeevich Suvorin back in 1877. But after all, Anna Alekseevna Luganovich is also getting older: "Meanwhile the years were passing. Anne now had two children" (Chekhov, 2008, p. 142)

Here is how Chekhov perceived Anna Ivanovna Suvorina a few years after meeting her in 1888: "I see many women; *Suvorina is the best of them*. She is as eccentric as her husband and doesn't think like a woman. A lot of what she says is nonsense, but when she wants to talk seriously *she speaks with independence and*

⁴ In her memoirs about Chekhov, she establishes Turgenev's design guidelines for their relationship right away. She reflects that, much like Grigorovich and her husband, she too was beguiled by Chekhov's allure. Her initial impression was that he resembled one of her beloved characters – Bazarov. For an inexplicable reason, this was her perception at the time (Suvorina, 1925, p. 185).

intelligence. <...> She has an amazing capacity for ceaseless chatter about nothing in particular, but it is *the chatter of a talented and interesting person and so one can listen to it without tiring, like a canary. All in all she is an interesting, clever and good person*⁵ (Chekhov, 2004, p. 142).

This is how she prepared herself to meet Chekhov at their home in St. Petersburg with A.S. Suvorin: “I was intrigued by this up-and-coming star and eager to meet him as soon as possible. I asked my husband to invite the Moscow guest to my personal living room, rather than his large study which was often crowded with unfamiliar faces. My living room was cozy and inviting, and I made sure to display my two favorite novels – ‘Madame Bovary’ and ‘Anna Karenina’ – although I’m not exactly sure why” (Suvorina, 1925, p. 185).

This initial encounter was enough to spark a deep, hidden infatuation, and Chekhov’s appearance in the Suvorins’ house, followed by a prolonged hiatus before Anna Ivanovna saw him again, could easily have been reflected in one of Chekhov’s stories like this: “ ‘You look worn out. When you came to dinner in the spring you seemed younger, more sure of yourself. *You were a bit carried away at the time, you talked a lot, you were quite fascinating. I couldn’t help being a bit taken with you, actually.* I’ve often thought of you during the summer for some reason, and when I was getting ready for the theatre tonight I felt sure I should see you’ ” (Chekhov, 2008, p. 139).

Naturally, some aspects of Alekhine’s relationship with Anna Luganovich may have had a different source or been purely imaginary on Chekhov’s part. However, there is one conversation in the story where the Luganoviches are undeniably linked to the Suvorins. This connection is evident in Alyokhin’s narration about Luganovich’s adherence to the law in his role as deputy chairman of the district court: “At the arson trial *four Jews had been found guilty and it had been made a conspiracy charge: quite indefensibly in my view.* I became rather agitated at dinner – most distressed, in fact – and I’ve forgotten what I said, now, except that Anne kept shaking her head and telling her husband that ‘I just can’t believe it, Dmitry.’ <...> ‘You and I didn’t start that fire,’ he said gently. ‘Which is why you and I aren’t being tried and sent to prison’ ” (Chekhov, 2008, pp. 138–139).

The episode of the “arsonists” appears to have been influenced by the infamous Dreyfus affair. This sensational case caused a major rift between Chekhov and Suvorin in the late 1890s, as they had serious disagreements about it, much like the rest of Europe. The Dreyfus affair involved Alfred Dreyfus, a French officer of Jewish descent who, in 1894, was wrongly accused of spying for Germany and sentenced to life in exile. This sparked widespread protests in France and beyond. Emile Zola famously published a scathing article titled “I accuse!” in a newspaper, which resulted in him being sentenced to a year in prison.

During this time, Chekhov made multiple trips to France and became a fervent supporter of Dreyfus. He attempted to convince Suvorin numerous times that the documents used to incriminate Dreyfus were forgeries. Eventually, Suvorin came to agree with Chekhov’s viewpoint. Nevertheless, Suvorin continued to publish materials that were against Dreyfus in his newspaper, as he was aligned with the government’s stance on the matter.

⁵ The letter to the Chekhovs dated July 22–23 was written from Feodosia, where Chekhov was staying at the Crimean dacha of the Suvorins.

Chekhov had personal interactions with Suvorin that made him realize the perils of indifference and spinelessness. In fact, Chekhov attributed Suvorin's "extreme spinelessness" for the persecution of Dreyfus in *Novoye Vremya* and noted that he had managed to convince Suvorin of Dreyfus's innocence. Kovalevsky (2005, p. 111) reports that Suvorin wrote to Chekhov saying, "You convinced me." Chekhov expressed his affection for Suvorin in his letter to the writer Ivan Leontiev-Shcheglov, but also acknowledged that "spineless people could be more dangerous than outright villains in crucial moments of life" (Literary heritage, 1960, p. 488).⁶

Much like Chekhov himself, who was deeply unsettled by the "Dreyfus affair," the protagonist in his story, Alyokhin, was visibly distressed during dinner, appearing serious and unable to recall what he said. On the other hand, Luganovich's conduct regarding the matter of Jewish "arsonists" reveals that Anna Alekseevna's husband is not just a dull commoner but a spineless individual, willing to make concessions to those in authority. In contrast, Anna Alekseevna displays a strong sense of justice.

Chekhov wrote his story "Concerning Love" in June–July 1898 and shortly before that he broke off relations and correspondence with Suvorin because of the Dreyfus affair. On February 23 (March 7), the day Zola was charged for one year in prison, Chekhov wrote to his brother from Niece: "The attitude of *New Times* to the Zola affair has been simply vile. The boss [Suvorin] and I have exchanged correspondence on this subject (in extremely measured tones, be it said) and silence reigns now on both sides. I don't wish to write to him, nor do I wish to receive letters from him in which he justifies the insensitivity of his newspaper's stance by claiming that he approves of the military – I don't wish to receive letters from him because I got bored with it all long ago. I also approve of the military, but if I owned a newspaper I would not allow cacti to publish Zola's novel in the Supplement without payment, while at the same time flinging mud at the self-same Zola in the rest of the paper – and in the name of what, pray? In the name of something which is in fact quite foreign to every single one of the cacti, namely a noble impulse and purity of soul. And in any case, to attack Zola while he is on trial is simply not literature" (Chekhov, 2004, p. 387).

Thus, in Chekhov's "Concerning Love," Anna Luganovich's relationship with her husband, a government official like Alexei Karenin, takes on a politically astute dimension that Tolstoy's novel lacked.

"The Lady with the Dog" and "Anna Karenina"

As for "The Lady with the Dog", it relates to Tolstoy by many invisible threads. Like Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich and later Chekhov's Vershinin from "The Three Sisters", Gurov "didn't like to be at home" (Chekhov, 2003, p. 285) However, in his initial frivolous attitude to love affairs, he clearly resembles Vronsky: "...at every fresh meeting with an interesting... *he was eager for life, and everything seemed simple and amusing*", "but yet in his manner, his tone, and his caresses there had been a shade of light irony, the *coarse condescension of a happy*

⁶ Apparently, many other images of Chekhov are also associated with A.S. Suvorin: starting with Professor Nikolai Stepanovich from "A Boring History" (see: Kubasov, 1998, pp. 236–238) to Dr. Chebutykin from "Three Sisters" (see: Kibalnik, 2022, pp. 270–275).

man who was, besides, almost twice her age” (Chekhov, 2003, pp. 286, 293). Despite beginning a love affair with Anna Sergeevna, he remains unchanged in this regard: “Gurov felt bored already, listening to her. He was irritated by the naïve tone, by this remorse, so unexpected and inopportune; but for the tears in her eyes, he might have thought she was jesting or playing a part” (Chekhov, 2003, p. 290).

At the outset of the story, Anna Sergeevna bears a striking resemblance to Anna Karenina based on her outward appearance. On the day when she first becomes his mistress, “when she turned to Gurov her *eyes were shining*” (Chekhov, 2003, p. 288) This trait is similarly emphasized in Anna Karenina after she meets Vronsky. With a brief glance, Vronsky observes the animated vitality that subtly plays across Anna’s face, flickering between her *shining eyes* and a faint smile adorning her rosy lips. It seems as though an overwhelming surge of something within her struggles to express itself in either her gaze or smile, despite her attempts to contain it. Even during their conversations, a joyful *twinkle flashes in Anna’s eyes* and a smile of contentment appears on her cheeks (Tolstoy, vol. 18, p. 65, 86).

The similarity between the heroines of Chekhov and Tolstoy persists even after Anna Sergeevna becomes Gurov’s mistress. “‘Not good, terrible’, ‘I am a bad, low woman’, ‘may God forgive me’ are Anna Sergeevna’s assessments of her act. – N.I. Prutskov summed up Anna Karenina’s self-awareness. – Through the whole novel, there are characteristics that reveal Anna’s difficult moral state: ‘the painful color of shame’, ‘criminal joy’, ‘once a proud, but now a shameful head’, ‘shameful relationship’, ‘criminal wife’, ‘shameful situation for a woman’, who left her husband and son and joined her lover, etc.” (Prutskov, 1971, p. 237).

It looks like the emotions Chekhov’s heroine goes through are the same: “The attitude of Anna Sergeevna – ‘the lady with the dog’ – *to what had happened was somehow peculiar, very grave, as though it were her fall* – so it seemed, and it was strange and inappropriate. Her face drooped and faded, and on both sides of it her long hair hung down mournfully; she mused in a dejected attitude like ‘like the woman who was a sinner’ in an old-fashioned picture. ‘It’s wrong,’ she said. ‘*You will be the first to despise me now.*’ <...> “Forgiven? No. I am a bad, low woman; I despise myself and don’t attempt to justify myself” (Chekhov, 2003, pp. 289–290).

However, if Tolstoy’s Anna Arkadyevna only gradually becomes aware of the vulnerability of her own position, then Chekhov’s Anna Sergeevna feels it immediately. And in this respect, at times she rather resembles Katerina from A.N. Ostrovsky’s “Thunderstorm”: “The Evil One has beguiled me.’ And I may say of myself now that the Evil One has beguiled me” (Chekhov, 2003, p. 290).⁷

The reason for the contrast between Chekhov’s Anna and Tolstoy’s lies in the fact that the former had a vastly different persona from the beginning: “Anna Karenina, who craved existence itself. Her fervent desire was to cherish a life with a loving companion. Chekhov’s Anna, however, also ‘craved existence,’ but this was realized not merely through a life with a partner, but as an aspiration towards something ‘better’; a craving for a ‘different’ life, if you will. Unlike Karenina, *Chekhov’s Anna carries no guilt towards her spouse; she is fully cognizant that*

⁷ Beforehand, the protagonist of Chekhov’s “Drama on the Hunt” (1884–1885) – Olenka – was compared to Anna, yet the contrast between the two was more discordant than harmonious. For further information, refer to: Kibalnik, 2023.

she did not betray her husband, but rather herself – out of a longing for ‘another life.’ Regrettably, this led her to become, in her own eyes, ‘a common, contemptible woman that any man could disdain’ ” (Prutskov, 1971, p. 241).

It seems that Tolstoy intentionally named his protagonist Anna, while Chekhov chose to name his – Anna Sergeevna. It becomes increasingly evident, as the story of “The Lady with the Dog” progresses, that it presents an antithesis to Chekhov’s tale of infidelity compared to Tolstoy’s.

The connection between Vronsky and Anna remains stuck at the stage of adultery. Eventually, they even turn into bitter adversaries: “Anna’s ‘charm’ at the Moscow ball is seen as a manifestation of the ‘spirit of evil and deceit’, while Karenin struggles to break through her ‘impenetrable armor of lies’ in order to get her to open up. <...> – All of this depicts Anna’s passion as a lethal obsession rather than a radiant and exalted emotion” (Kupreyanova, 1964, pp. 340–341).

In stark contrast to Vronsky’s relationship with Anna, Gurov’s connection with Anna Sergeevna evolves into a love with a capital L. “Chekhov did not view love as an all-consuming, destructive force. Instead, he saw it as a positive and elevating power that unites and humanizes. For Gurov and ‘the lady with the dog,’ their love was predominantly a matter of their spiritual beings” (Prutskov, 1971, pp. 241, 243).

This transformation occurs primarily due to the temporary spiritual “rebirth” experienced by Gurov, brought on by his love for Anna Sergeevna during their time together in Crimea: “Gurov thought how in reality everything is beautiful in this world when one reflects: everything except what we think or do ourselves when we *forget our human dignity and the higher aims of our existence*. <...> Complete idleness, these kisses in broad daylight while he looked around in dread of someone’s seeing them, the heat, the smell of the sea, and the continual passing to and from before him of idle, well-dressed, well-fed people, made a new man of him; he told Anna Sergeevna how beautiful she was, how fascinating. He was impatiently passionate, he would not move a step away from her...” (Chekhov, 2003, pp. 291–292).

Furthermore, his internal crisis while in Moscow serves as another factor in his transformation: “Gurov did not sleep all night and was filled with indignation. And he had a headache all next day. And the next night he slept badly; he sat up in bed, thinking, or paced up and down his room. He was sick of his children, sick of the bank; he had no desire to go anywhere or talk of anything” (Chekhov, 2003, p. 295).

Unexpectedly, Gurov stops resembling Vronsky, but begins to resemble the love-stricken protagonists of Pushkin – Don Juan, who falls in love with Donna Anna, and Angelo, who loses his peace when he is swept up in passion for Isabella:

Throughout the day, Angelo remained *desolate and taciturn*,
 Secluded from others, consumed by a single thought,
 Devoted to a sole desire; *sleep evaded*
His weary eyes the entire night. <...>
 In need of reflection and prayer
 He finds himself *utterly distracted*,
 Uttering word towards the heavens,
 But in his heart, he yearns solely for her. *Enveloped in despair*,
 He mechanically mouths the name of God,
 While sinful thoughts boil over inside. *Overwhelmed*
By mental anguish. *Rule for him*,
 Like a sensible, long-finished book,
Now proved unendurable. *He yearned*; as if it were a burden
 He was ready to renounce his position...
 (Pushkin, 1948, vol. 5, pp. 114–115)

It turns out that Chekhov's characters "did not lose themselves but found themselves" (Prutskov, 1971, p. 237). If "the most complicated and difficult part" of their life "was only just beginning" (Chekhov, 2003, p. 302), then the problem does not stem from the very nature of their love, as is the case with Tolstoy's Anna and Vronsky, but in their tangled family relationships in which they found themselves as a result of their previous mistakes.

Recent studies of "The Lady and the Dog" suggest interpreting the story as showcasing a "familiar ambivalence in the situation: it can be seen both as a deeply romantic tale of genuine emotions and a cynically ironic portrayal of a mundane love illusion. Simultaneously, the story presents the purely subjective notions of the protagonist and the heroine as the foundation for their connection. Gurov and Anna believe in some sort of mystical bond, as if they were destined for each other by an inevitable fate. The reader may choose to understand and accept this perspective, while also entertaining doubts regarding its veracity" (Bolshev, 2013, p. 39).

However, contrary to the researcher's statement, the passage from the story does convey the author's perspective on the matter: "Anne and he loved each other very, very dearly, like man and wife or bosom friends. They felt themselves predestined for each other. That he should have a wife and she a husband... it seemed to make no sense. They were like too migratory birds, a male and a female, caught and put in separate cages. They had forgiven each other the shameful episodes of their past, they forgave each other for the present too, and they felt that their love had transformed them both" (Chekhov, 2008, p. 20).

Disregarding the phrase "it seemed to them," the underlying message is clear – the characters truly love each other. Therefore, the doubts raised by the researcher regarding the genuineness of their feelings lack a solid foundation. The concluding statement, "this love of theirs had changed them both," alludes to Pushkin's renowned poetry which emphasizes the profound transformative effect of love on the human soul. It also references numerous literary characters from novels like Eugene Onegin, Fyodor Lavretsky, and Konstantin Levin. This suggests that the story was written with a deliberate reliance on the aesthetic of personal transformation, a common theme found in Russian classics spanning from Pushkin to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. However, it should be noted that the story's inspiration comes more from the character arc of Konstantin Levin rather than Anna Karenina.

Conclusion

Chekhov's narrative reflects an intriguing "pre-conceptualist" approach. It is worth noting that the protagonists in his later works can be linked to well-defined literary prototypes, some originating from specific literary works and others embedded in the wider sphere of Russian classics. Consequently, Chekhov no longer solely tells the tales of characters born from real-life encounters; rather, he skillfully crafts his own interpretations of the motives that resonate within these celebrated literary prototypes.

References

- Bogdanova, O.V. (2019). *Russian literature of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries. Traditions and the contemporary interpretation*. St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo RGPU im. A.I. Gertsena Publ. (In Russ.)

- Bolshev, A.O. (2013). *Morphology of a love story*. St. Petersburg: Publishing House of St. Petersburg State University Philological Faculty. (In Russ.)
- Chekhov, A. (1977). *Complete works* (vol. 9). Moscow: Nauka Publ. (In Russ.)
- Chekhov, A. (2003). *Ward no. 6 and other stories* (C. Garnett, Transl.). New York, Barnes & Noble Classics.
- Chekhov, A. (2004). *A life in letters* (R. Bartlett, Transl.). New York: Penguin Books.
- Chekhov, A. (2008). *The Russian master and other stories* (R. Hingley, Transl.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dostoevsky, F.M. (1972–1990). *Complete works*. Leningrad: Nauka Publ. (In Russ.)
- Golovacheva, A.G. (2011). Chekhov and Tolstoy: On 100th anniversary of L.N. Tolstoy. *Chekhov's Readings in Yalta: A Collection of Research Works* (issue 16). Simferopol: Dolya Publ. (In Russ.)
- Kibalnik, S.A. (2021a). Flaubert's hypertexts in Chekhov's works. *Literaturovedcheskiy Zhurnal*, (3), 100–111. (In Russ.)
- Kibalnik, S.A. (2021b) Osip Dymov and Charles Bovary (The intertextual structure of Chekhov's short story "The Fidget"). *The Issues of Historical Poetics*, 19(3), 187–205. (In Russ.) <http://doi.org/10.15393/j9.art.2021.9922>
- Kibalnik, S.A. (2022). *The secret writing of Russian writers: From Pushkin to Nabokov*. St. Petersburg: Petropolis Publ. (In Russ.)
- Kibalnik, S.A. (2023). Chekhov's "Drama at the Hunt" as the hybrid hypertext of A.N. Ostrovskiy. *The Issues of Historical Poetics*, (4) (in print). (In Russ.)
- Kovalevsky, M.M. (2005). *My life. Memories*. Moscow: Rosspen Publ. (In Russ.)
- Kubasov, A.V. (1998). *A.P. Chekhov: The art of stylization*. Ekaterinburg: Ural State Pedagogical University. (In Russ.)
- Kupreyanova, E.N. (1964). Leo Tolstoy's *Voina i mir* and *Anna Karenina*. *The History of Russian Novel* (vol. 2). Moscow, Leningrad: Nauka Publ. (In Russ.)
- Lakshin, V. (2010). *Tolstoy and Chekhov*. Moscow: Moskovskiy Uchebniki Publ. (In Russ.)
- Literary heritage* (vol. 68). (1960). Moscow: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences. (In Russ.)
- Prutskov, N.I. (1971). On one parallel (*Anna Karenina* and *The Lady with the Dog*). *Poetics and stylistics of Russian literature. In memory of Academician Viktor Vladimirovich Vinogradov* (pp. 236–246). Leningrad: Nauka Publ. (In Russ.)
- Pushkin, A.S. (1948). Angelo. In A.S. Pushkin, *Complete Works* (vol. 5, pp. 107–129). Moscow: The Academy of Sciences Publications. (In Russ.)
- Suvorina, A.I. (1925). Memories of Chekhov. *A.P. Chekhov: Lost Works, Unpublished Letters, New Memoirs, Bibliography* (pp. 185–195). Leningrad: Ateney Publ. (In Russ.)
- Tolstoy, L.N. (1928–1958). *Complete works*. Moscow, Leningrad: Goslitizdat Publ. (In Russ.)
- Turgenev, I.S. (1981). After "Fathers and Sons". In I.S. Turgenev, *Complete Works and Letters* (vol. 11, pp. 86–97). Moscow. (In Russ.)

Bio note:

Sergey A. Kibalnik, Doctor of Philology, leading researcher, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences, 4 Naberezhnaya Makarova, St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-5937-5339. E-mail: kibalnik007@mail.ru