

The Bear by Anton Chekhov

Summary

The play "The Bear" is a farce. It is full of many absurd situations and remarks. There are three main characters in the play and they all make us laugh with their absurd behavior and comments.

Popova is a widow. Her husband died seven months ago, but she is still in mourning. Her servant, Luka advises her to give up her mourning. He advises her to see her neighbors, but she says that she will keep on mourning until her death.

In the meanwhile, Smirnov comes to take 1200 roubles from Popova. Her husband used to buy oat from him. Popova tells him that her steward is out and she will pay him the day after tomorrow.

However, Smirnov insists on taking the money that day. He behaves rudely. He even makes fun of Popova's mourning and her state of mind. Popova also becomes rude. They speak against each other's sex and use insulting words. Smirnov thinks that he has been insulted. He challenges Popova to fight a duel.

Popova accepts the challenge and brings her husband's revolver. However, she does not know how to fire. She asks Smirnov to teach her how to fire. The situation changes and Smirnov is impressed by her boldness and beauty. He says that he does not want to fight the duel. He expresses his love for her. He offers her his hand.

First, she insists on fighting, but then asks him to go. She changes her decision repeatedly and then decides to marry him. When Luka returns with other servants to beat Smirnov, he is surprised to see them touching each other.

Describe the reasons behind the marriage of Popova and Smirnov.

Both Popova and Smirnov had their own reasons of marriage. We shall discuss them one by one.

Popova had been mourning the death of her husband for the last seven months. She had been leading a lonely and sad life since then. Seven months was a long period. Now time had conquered her grief. Inwardly, she wanted some change in her life. She did not want to continue this mourning any more. Besides, it is human psychology that man gets sick and tired of doing the same thing for a long period.

The second reason may be the advice of her servant Luka. He shocked her by making her understand that in ten years' time, she would not be beautiful anymore and no man would look at her. It was shocking for Popova.

The third reason was that Popova had a very romantic nature. Her mourning the death of her husband for seven months shows this. However, when Smirnov assured her of his love, she was greatly moved. It was very romantic that a man was on his knees, was offering her his hand, and was speaking very romantic dialogues. Smirnov said, "...I'm on my knees like a fool, offering you my hand..." It was all according to her romantic nature. She could not resist it and accepted the proposal.

Smirnov decided to marry Popova because he fell in love with her. He was greatly impressed by her beauty and boldness. He said, "But what a woman!" and, "That's the sort I can understand!" He further says, "I've never in my life seen one like her!" He also says, "I love you as I've never loved before!"

Therefore, these were the reasons behind the marriage of Popova and Smirnov.

What was the main issue or conflict between Smirnov and Popova?

When we go through the play “The Bear”, we find that at first, the main conflict between them was money, but later this conflict changed into another conflict – insult.

Popova’s late husband was to pay some money to Smirnov. He used to buy oats for his horses. However, before paying the money he died. Seven months had passed. Now Smirnov and come to Popova to take his money. Unfortunately, Popova’s steward was not present. Therefore, she was unable to pay his money that day. She plainly told Smirnov about this situation. She promised that she would pay his money the day after tomorrow. However, Smirnov insisted on taking the money on that day. Smirnov talked to her rudely and in an uncivilized manner. He made fun of her mourning. Popova also made fun of him. She even abuses him and calls him a bear. She said, “You’re a boor! A coarse bear! A bourbon! A monster!”

Smirnov thought that Popova had insulted him. On the other hand, Popova thought that Smirnov did not know how to behave before women. She wanted to kill him for that. This was the second main conflict between them. This conflict between them grew serious and they decided to fight a duel. Popova brought her late husband’s revolver.

Therefore, we can say that at first the main conflict between them was money. However, later this conflict changed into another conflict – insult. Both of them thought that they had been insulted. Luckily, these conflicts did not bring any serious consequences.

The play “The Bear” is a farce (ridiculous situation). Discuss. Describe the comic elements of the play “The Bear”.

When we go through the play “The Bear”, we find that it is a farce. A farce is full of many absurd situations and remarks. These situations and remarks make the readers laugh. There are three main characters in the play and they all make us laugh with their absurd comments. There are also many absurd situations. When the play starts, we see that Luka is advising Popova to leave her mourning and go out to see her neighbours. However, his way of advising her is very absurd. He gives the examples of cats, midges, and spiders. We simply laugh at these examples. Popova looks at the photograph of her husband and calls him a ‘bad child’. The word ‘bad child’ makes us laugh.

When Popova refuses to give Smirnov the money, he says, “I have not the pleasure of being either your husband or your finance, so please don’t make scenes.” These remarks are very funny and absurd and we laugh at them. When Popova accepts the challenge of duel from Smirnov, he says that he will bring her down like a chicken. The word ‘chicken’ is very funny.

We find the most comic and absurd situation in the play when Popova brings her husband’s revolvers and asks Smirnov to teach her how to fire. This is very absurd that she asks her enemy to teach her how to fire. It is also very absurd that Smirnov starts teaching her. What a funny and absurd situation it is! He not only teaches her how to fire, but he also tells her the prices of different revolvers. Another situation is very funny when Popova changes her mind repeatedly. At one time, she asks him to leave and at another asks him to stay.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that it is a farce and there are many comic and absurd elements in the play. The writer has created comedy through funny comments and absurd situations. (

Discuss the title of the play “The Bear”.

The title of the play “The Bear” is quite justified. This title suggests the attitude of Smirnov who is just like a bear. In everyday language, we call ‘bear’ to a person who is rude, bad mannered and bad tempered.

When we go through the play, we find that Smirnov is bad-tempered and rude. On his first appearance in the play, he calls Luka, the servant of Popova, fool and ass. Popova tells him that her steward is not present and so she cannot pay the money that day but Smirnov does not listen to her. When Popova tells him that she is in a state of mind, Smirnov makes fun of her state of mind. He even makes fun of her mourning. He makes fun of her wearing lipstick and powdering her face.

Then he talks against women. Popova is right when she says that he does not know how to behave before women. When Luka asks him to leave, he gets angry and threatens him. He says, “Shut up! Who are you talking to? I’ll chop you into pieces!” these words spoken by Smirnov clearly show how bad-tempered he is.

He is so rude that he challenges Popova to fight a duel. Now it is very rude to challenge a woman to fight a duel. He is ready to kill her and says, “I’ll bring her down like a chicken! I’m not a little boy or a sentimental puppy; I don’t care about this “softer sex.”

Therefore, from the above discussion we can conclude that the title of the play is quite justified. It suggests the attitude of Smirnov who is just like a bear in his attitude.

Justify the end of the play "The Bear".

No doubt, the end of the play "The Bear" is very sudden and unexpected. We see that both Smirnov and Popova have revolvers in their hands. They are going to fight a duel and to kill each other but suddenly they decide to marry. This is unexpected. However, when we go through the play, we find that this sudden and unexpected end has many reasons. We shall discuss them one by one.

The reason of Popova's change of mind was that Popova had been mourning the death of her husband for the last seven months. She had been leading a lonely and sad life since then. Seven months was a long period. Now time had conquered her grief. Inwardly, she wanted some change in her life. She did not want to continue this mourning any more. Besides, it is human psychology that man gets sick and tired of doing the same thing for a long time.

The second reason may be the advice of Luka, her servant. He shocked her by telling her that in ten year's time, she would not be beautiful anymore and no man would look at her. It was shocking for Popova. The third reason was that Popova had a very romantic nature. When Smirnov assured her of his love, she was greatly moved. It was all according to her romantic nature.

Smirnov decide to marry Popova because he fell in love with her. He was greatly impressed by her beauty. When Popova accepted his challenge of fighting a duel, he was greatly impressed by her boldness too. So, he changed his mind and decided to marry her.

The most important point in that it is a comedy and the end of a comedy cannot be serious. Its end must be funny and pleasant.

Therefore, we can conclude that although the end of the play is sudden and unexpected, yet it is quite justified.

Both Smirnov and Popova have the same qualities of character. Discuss. Both Popova and Smirnov are the chips off the same block. Discuss.

It is quite right to say that both Smirnov and Popova have the same qualities of character.

When we go through the play "The Bear" carefully, we find that both are rude, romantic, quarrelsome and hot-tempered. Both swear not to marry all their lives, but they change their decision.

When the play starts, we see that Smirnov comes right in without getting any permission. He calls Luka fool and ass. Later, he makes fun of Popova's mourning and her state of mind. He speaks against women and uses insulting words. It is also very rude to challenge a woman to fight a duel. He threatens that he will chop Luka into pieces. He is romantic by nature. He falls in love with Popova. He tells Popova that he had fought duels three times because of women. He changes his decision and decides to marry Popova.

Popova is also just like Smirnov. She is rude too. She abuses Smirnov. She talks against men. When Smirnov challenges her to fight a duel, she at once accepts the challenge. She goes and brings revolvers. Smirnov wants to avoid the duel, but she insists on fighting it. This shows how quarrelsome and hot-tempered she is.

She is romantic by nature. She mourns the death of her husband for seven months. She talks to his photograph and promises to continue mourning until her death. This is romantic but she also changes her decision of mourning until her death and decides to marry Smirnov.

Therefore, we can conclude that both Smirnov and Popova are the chips off the same block and they have the same qualities of character.

The Bear as a Farce

Farce is "a kind of drama intended primarily to provoke laughter...but it has no apparent intention other than the good natured depiction of folly." The Bear is a light comedy with no intentions of satirizing the characters; therefore, it can well be called a farce. The play is to make fun of basic mistakes that we all make. It is a comedy of the very nature of man to err and then to recoil on the same. We encounter two characters that seem to claim the supremacy of their sexes and blame the other. They claim to have apt knowledge for detesting each other. They never realize their folly that understanding comes rather too late. Both are coarse and

unintentionally bear like in their actions and behavior. Both are trying to bottle up the very basic human emotions of love and family life but all their claims and slogans die with the overpowering of the basic emotions of love and emotional needs. The play opens with the emotional remarks of Popova who is vowing to stay "between four walls "of her house. She is mourning over the death of her late husband who died six months ago. This is very grave indeed. But the comic element creeps in when she tells the story of her husband. She relates that her husband was never sincere to her; he was enjoying on her expense; and 'he used to leave her alone for weeks at a time'; and he 'made love to other women' before her very eyes. But she wants to show him how faithful she is¹ She decides to remain in mourning and meeting nobody. There comes an intruder, Sminov, a strong middle aged man He wants to see the lady and does so. He claims to have lent some money to her late husband and now he wants it back. She refuses to pay it on account of her steward not being there. The man insists and the lady resists, It starts getting weary for the lady. The more she wants to get rid of the man the more he clings to her. There starts real comedy. Having got a purpose, the couple enters into an argumentation. This leads to a quarrel; they both say silly things that amuse us. The lady counts the evils of men who prey on other ladies. She cites the example of her own late husband. Smirnov makes fun of the ladies. He calls them emotional and stupid. He states how they use their tender feelings as a "chef d auvre". He goes on to claim that "" I'd rather sit on a barrel of gunpowder than talk to a woman." He tries to convince the audience that he is not a silly boy nor he would be caught in a mousetrap. It all becomes funny when Smirnov starts liking Popova all at once. All his claims are gone now. He 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". Because just a moment ago, he was claiming his debt with full force insulting and humiliating her: he was showing what a real man is. We see the same real man begging her hand. We look at the same person letting his debt go. This emotional relationship of the events changes the course of the play several times and it makes us laugh. The play is nothing but comedy and emotional accompaniment.

English & Foreign Languages Unit, Southern Provincial Department of Education, Galle.