Sample Research Paper

In Anton Chekhov’s short stories, we have an imbalance of love in relationships. In the relationship between two characters, there always seems to be one character that loves more deeply and one character that loves less deeply. Tolstoy’s theory about Chekhov’s writing is that the women in Chekhov’s short stories are able to love more deeply than men can. However, I discovered a contradiction to Tolstoy’s theory in one of Chekhov’s stories, where the man loves more deeply than the woman. We can approach this question by comparatively reading two of Chekhov’s short stories: “Anyuta” and “In Exile.” These stories are perfect examples to study because in “Anyuta,” Tolstoy’s theory is consistent, and we see the woman loving more deeply than the man, while in Exile, his theory is contradicted and we see the opposite, with the man loving more deeply than the woman. After examining these two stories, we see that the circumstances set the tone for who is going to love more strongly in Chekhov’s stories, the man or the woman. When the man is focused on his career, the woman loves him more deeply. However, when the circumstances are different and the man does not have a career to focus on, the dynamics shift, and the man will love more deeply than the woman. Now that we understand how the dynamics work in Chekhov’s short stories, we can absorb the message Chekhov is perhaps trying to send: when a man is either too involved with his career or lacks a career at all, he cannot love properly; when he is too obsessed with his career he does not love his wife, and when he has no career at all to focus on he becomes obsessed with his wife.
A “Boring Story” contains the imbalance of love in relationships, with one character loving more deeply than the other. The story revolves around Nikolai Stephanovich, a famous and honored professor who is terminally ill. He describes his morning routine, “My day begins with the coming of my wife. She enters my room...it is the same every morning...our conversation always ends in the same way. My wife suddenly remembers that I have not had my tea yet and becomes alarmed,” (58). The description of Nikolai’s wife conveys a sense of deep love and commitment to her husband – she sees to him every morning in a dedicated manner, making sure all his needs, including the minute detail of tea, are met. However, her love is not reciprocated. Nikolai narrates, “I look at my wife...this old, very stout, ungainly woman with a dull expression...I peer intently into the flabby, ungainly old woman’s face...it pains me to look at her,” (58). Nikolai harbors unpleasant feelings towards his wife. The fact that he describes her as old, unattractive, and dull, that he admits that it pains him to look at his wife, the woman he is supposed to be in love with, does not convey a sense of love towards his wife. From his negative description of her, it is evident that he is not in love with his wife. From the description of her actions towards him, it is evident that she loves him. Thus, we see an imbalance of love in their relationship – Nikolai’s wife loves him more deeply than he loves her.

According to another scholar, the females in Anton Chekhov’s short stories are “ultimately an ideal of womanly love, for men are not able to deal with matters of love, of complete giving of oneself to the loved one, which good women have done, do and will do so well and naturally.” (L/N. Tolstoy, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, Moscow, 1975, IXI, 375-376.) So writes the great Leo Tolstoy, a Russian writer and
one of Anton Chekhov’s contemporaries. Tolstoy’s theory about Chekhov’s writing is that the women in Chekhov’s short stories are able to love more deeply than men can.

While Tolstoy claims that the women in Chekhov’s short stories love more deeply than the men, I found evidence to prove the contrary, making Tolstoy wrong. I examined one of Chekhov’s short stories, “In Exile” and found that in this story, the characters do not behave in the way Tolstoy predicted, and instead of the women loving more deeply, I noticed the men loving more deeply. “In Exile” tells the tale of convicts exiled to a life of isolation on an island in Siberia. The Explainer tells the tale of Vassily Sergeich, one of the convict on the island, who deeply loved his wife unrequitedly. When Vassily announces the news that his wife is going to join him on the island, he says, “He rubs his hands and laughs. “I’m going to Gyrino to meet my wife...she’s coming.” And he even breathless with joy...in about three weeks...his wife went to Russia,” (164). Vassily’s love for his wife is revealed through his excitement and delight at his wife’s arrival. In contrast, we see his wife abandon him after three short weeks. It is clear from this evidence that Vassily loves his wife more deeply than she loves him, which contradicts Tolstoy’s theory regarding Chekhov’s stories.

We can approach this problem of my disagreement with Tolstoy regarding who loves more deeply in Chekhov’s stories, the men or the women, through a close comparative reading and analysis of two of Chekhov’s short stories, “Anyuta” and “In Exile.” These stories are perfect examples to look at to answer our problem because in one of them, “Anyuta,” Tolstoy’s theory applies, and we see the woman
loving more deeply than the man, while in "In Exile," Tolstoy's theory is contradicted, and we see the man loving more passionately than the woman.

We will now prove why "Anyuta’ and "In Exile" are the best stories to look at to approach our problem. The characters in “Anyuta” act in a manner consistent with Tolstoy’s theory, with the woman loving more deeply than the man. “Anyuta,” tells the story of a medical student, Klochkov, who lives with Anyuta, a thin 25 year old woman. One icy afternoon, as Klochkov learns the anatomy of the human body, he decides he would like a human skeleton to study, and calls Anyuta over. Anyuta, desperate to please Klochkov, immediately obeys and, despite the cold, takes off her shirt so Klochkov can use her body as a learning tool. "Anyuta was shivering and feared that the medical student, noticing her shivering, would stop drawing with charcoal and tapping, and would perhaps do poorly at the examination" (28).

Despite the fact that Klochkov clearly cares very little for Anyuta, not thinking about how cold and uncomfortable she would be modeling for him naked in the middle of the winter, Anyuta loves Klochkov so deeply she is willing to do anything, such as endure freezing temperatures naked, to please him. Furthermore, we see Klochkov’s lack of deep love towards her when he tells her, “we have to separate. We can’t be together forever” (30). His indifference is met with Anyuta’s deep despair, further proving her deep love towards him. “Her lips began to tremble” (30). Thus, “Anyuta” is a good story to look at to explore Tolstoy’s theory because it is a story in which a woman loves more deeply than a man, which proves Tolstoy’s theory correct.

"In Exile" is also the perfect story to look to see if Tolstoy’s theory is consistent throughout all of Chekhov’s short stories because it contradicts Tolstoy’s
theory. In this story, instead of the woman loving more deeply than the man, we see the man loving more deeply than the woman. "In Exile" tells the tale of convicts exiled to a life of isolation on an island in Siberia. The Explainer tells the tale of Vassily Sergeich, one of the convict on the island, who deeply loved his wife unrequitedly. When she arrives on the island, "My Vassily Sergeich fusses around her, can’t have enough of looking at her and praising her," (163). This is a clear example of Vassily’s love for her. However, despite his deep love, his wife abandons him. “The lady didn’t live with him long...she got bored...He galloped after them, pursued them for five days...he began howling and beating his head on the floorboards. His wife went to Russia, and so he was drawn there too, to see her," (164). Vassily is so excited when his wife joins him on the island and is beyond despair when she leaves him. His love is unrequited – the fact that his wife abandons him after a short stay displays her lack of love for her husband. In this story, Tolstoy's theory is contradicted, and the roles are reversed – the man loves more deeply than the woman. Thus, it is a perfect story to look at to explore Tolstoy's theory and see if it applies to all of Chekhov’s stories.

Now that we have established that “Anyuta” and “In Exile” are the best stories to look at to approach our problem, let us explore Tolstoy’s theory: does it apply to all of Chekhov’s work, and what are the circumstances that it exists in? After examining these two stories, we see that the circumstances set the tone for who is going to love more strongly in Chekhov's stories, the man or the woman. When the couple is in society and the man is focused on his career, the woman loves him more deeply. Firstly, “Anyuta” serves as the example of the story where the man
is more focused on his career, and thus, the woman loves more deeply. In “Anyuta,” the man is focused on his career. The first description we get about Stepan Klockkov is his career, that he is “the third year medical student,” (27). Chekhov continues to present him as a dedicated student, constantly studying. “The right lung consists of three sections...repeated Klockkov...straining to visualize what he had just read, raised his eyes to the ceiling. Getting no clear impression, he began feeling his own upper ribs through his waistcoat, (28). Klockkov is repeatedly presented as being a studious medical student, thinking only about his studies and career. He even uses Anyuta as a human skeleton to study to further him in his career. The last description we ever get of Klockkov is, just like the first description, of him focusing on his career. "The student drew the textbook towards him and again began pacing up and down,” (31). Klockkov is presented as placing a huge emphasis on his career, we always see him studying and working towards his career. As we previously discovered, Anyuta loves Klockkov more deeply than he loves her. Thus, it is evident that the circumstances set the tone for who loves more deeply: when the man is focused on his career, then Tolstoy’s theory is accurate, and the woman loves more deeply.

In contrast to “Anyuta,” we have a story in which the circumstances are different and the man is no longer in a society with a career to focus on, and thus, he becomes the one who loves more deeply. As we have previously discussed, in "In Exile," Vassily Sergeich loves his wife more deeply than he loves her. Through a close reading analysis of the text, we discovered a fact that sets this story apart from the other stories in which the women love the men more deeply: in this story, the
man does not have a career to focus on, and instead spends his time focusing on his wife. He is a convict exiled to an island, where none of the men seem to have jobs.

The Explainer is described as constantly being drunk. The first introduction we have of the Explainer is, “Semyon, an old man...was drunk” (161). Likewise, whenever Chekhov writes about Vassily, he describes him chasing after his wife. When his wife leaves him for another man, “he began riding nearly everyday either to the post office or to see the authorities...he suffered some eight years like that,” (164).

Vassily spends eight full years chasing after his wife, and not focusing on his career. When the circumstances are different in the story, (the circumstance being that the man does not have a job) and the man is not focused on his career, like Vassily, then Tolstoy’s theory does not apply, and the man loves the woman more deeply than the woman loves the man.

Now we will look at the message that Chekhov is perhaps trying to send. When a man is either too involved with his career or lacks a career at all, he cannot love properly: when he is too obsessed with his career he does not love his wife, and when he has no career at all to focus on he becomes obsessed with his wife. One of Chekhov’s short stories, “The Huntsman,” provides an example of this message, where the man is too obsessed with his career that he does not love his wife. “The Huntsman” tells the story of a married but estranged couple, Yegor Vlasych and his wife Palageya, who have a chance encounter in a forest. Palageya tries to beg her husband, who prefers to be out hunting than spending time with her, to come home. Yegor describes his job, hunting, quite passionately, “I'm the best shot in the whole district...nobody can match me in the line of hunting...I scorn your village
Yegor is obsessed with his career of hunting. We see that it pulls him apart from his wife - he refuses to take time away from hunting to spend time with her. "I haven't seen you for a long time, Yegor Vlasych' says Palageya, gazing tenderly at the hunter... I've been waiting and waiting, I've looked my eyes out waiting for you... if only you'd come one little time!" (10). Yegor is so obsessed with his career that he never makes time to be with his wife, keeping Palageya at home waiting for him. When she finally convinces her husband to sit down with her for a few moments, he responds, "Sit down? Why not... Yegor says in an indifferent tone," (10). He is indifferent to her, not even caring to sit down with her. We see that Yegor is obsessed with his career and does not love his wife, which reveals the message that Chekhov was perhaps trying to send: When a man is either too involved with his career or lacks a career at all, he cannot love properly: when he is too obsessed with his career he does not love his wife, and when he has no career at all to focus on he becomes obsessed with his wife. Yegor's obsession with his career and indifference towards his wife proves that when a man is too obsessed with his career, he does not love his wife, lending to the message Chekhov is trying to send.

The flip side of Chekhov's message is that when a man does not have a career to focus on and become involved in, he becomes obsessed with his wife. "In Exile" provides an perfect example of this scenario. As we examined earlier, we saw that Vassily is obsessed with his wife. It is evident from the text that he does not have a job or career that he focuses on, since he is always described as chasing and obsessing after his wife, not as working or pursuing a career. When his wife leaves him for another man, "he began riding nearly everyday either to the post office or to
see the authorities...he suffered some eight years like that...He galloped after them...he began howling and beating his head on the floorboards. His wife went to Russia, and so he was drawn there too, to see her," (164). We see that when the man does not have a career to focus on, he becomes obsessed with his wife. This reveals the message Chekov was perhaps trying to send: when a man is either too involved with his career or lacks a career at all, he cannot love properly: when he is too obsessed with his career he does not love his wife, and when he has no career at all to focus on he becomes obsessed with his wife. Vassily's lack of career and obsession with his wife proves that when a man does not have a career to focus on, he becomes obsessed with his wife, lending to the message Chekhov is trying to send.

In Anton Chekhov’s short stories, I discovered an imbalance of love in relationships, with one character that loves more deeply and one character that loves less deeply. Tolstoy’s theory about Chekhov’s writing is that the women in Chekhov’s short stories are able to love more deeply than men can. However, I discovered a contradiction to Tolstoy’s theory in one of Chekhov’s stories, where the man loves more deeply than the woman. We approached this question by comparatively reading two of Chekhov’s short stories: “Anyuta” and “In Exile.” We discovered that the circumstances set the tone for who is going to love more strongly in Chekhov’s stories, the man or the woman. When the man is focused on his career, the woman loves him more deeply. However, when the circumstances are different and the man does not have a career to focus on, the dynamics shift, and the man will love more deeply than the woman. This led us to realize the message Chekhov is perhaps
trying to send: when a man is either too involved with his career or lacks a career at all, he cannot love properly; when he is too obsessed with his career he does not love his wife, and when he has no career at all to focus on he becomes obsessed with his wife.

Comment: Dear Hannah,
Well done as usual. Your grade for Essay 3 is an A. It was a pleasure to have you in class. Good luck with all of your future endeavors!