

THE BEAR
AND
**THE
TWILIGHT OF
A CRANE**

O LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

MODEL ANSWERS

QUOTATIONS WITH EXPLANATIONS

USEFUL VOCABULARY

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Twilight of a Crane – Answer 1

***Twilight of a Crane* shows how human beings are caught between their desire for money and passion for love.’ Do you agree? Discuss, referring to the play.**

The play is written by Junji Kinoshita and is adapted from a folk tale. He is a leftist writer and used his creativity to make people more aware of the insidious allure of money, capitalism and consumerism. I agree with the above statement and in this essay, I will explore how the love of money becomes a root cause of the dissipation of human relationships.

At the beginning of the play, the audience is presented with a serene scene with children running around. They wake Yohyo and he plays with them. This implies that the children love being around their house. Children love to spend time at places where there is love, peace and harmony, and where they are given the attention they need. They also ask for Tsu; they clearly love her. The neighbours trust them enough to let their children play around their house. These facts show us that Yohyo and Tsu had a great understanding and that there were signs of a happy, content and satisfied family at their home.

‘sweet heart’ / ‘darling’ / ‘dear’

The two main characters use endearing terms as shown above to refer to each other. This is a sign of being devoted or even doting on one another. It is safe to say that they love one another. The use of such terms reveal the intimacy they share and the trust they place on one another. Their lives have become valuable to each other. If there is any resentment or bitterness toward your partner, using such words is not possible. Therefore, we can argue that there is not conflict whatsoever between them, and that they are transparent with each other.

‘Cold soup is no good for my sweet heart.’

Likewise, their actions align with these sentiments. Yohyo is portrayed in the play as someone who is not the brightest nor the most skilled individual. However, despite this, he is very keen in ensuring that the soup is warmed up for Tsu. He shows how considerate he is, as he says that cold soup would do no good – he is genuinely concerned about Tsu’s well-being and nourishment. This is evidence that Yohyo was fully devoted to Tsu and loved her and valued her as an important person in his life.

However, Unzu and Sodo influence Yohyo in a negative way. These two characters from the village represent capitalist ideas – they are more concerned about profit and money than human lives. The fact that Tsu becomes extremely weak while she makes the cloth is a rather obvious symbol of the exploitation which is a feature of capitalism. These two characters persuade Yohyo into getting his wife Tsu to make more and more Senba ori. She becomes extremely weak. This reflects the capitalist system which devalues human lives and gives a higher value to money and profit.

‘Well, then, you might coax your wife again’

Unzu and Sodo manipulates Yohyo by their enticing words. As mentioned above, they represent capitalism, and they persuade Yohyo with promises about money and a fancy experience in Kyoto. The significant fact is that he was perfectly content when the two of them approached him. He had enough and more money (a whole sack full of it), He had a loving wife who took care of him, and he had a life full of joy. It was a simple, yet peaceful and fulfilling life. Even the villagers and the children adored them and loved to spend time with them. Yohyo had a strong relationship with his wife. He valued her and

took care of her. With the arrival of Unzu and Sodo, he begins to change. Tsu mentions that he is 'gradually' changing. This adverb is important as it shows us that it is a slow process. Yohyo transforms into someone else. His perception of things in his world changes. Even though he valued Tsu more than anything in the world, the Senba Ori and the money it would bring him entices him and he cannot help being more and more attached to the idea of money.

Yohyo, my dear- what's happened to you? You are gradually changing. I can't understand why. But you are moving to the other world where I can never live.

Tsu perceives the change happening in Yohyo, and is worried about the transformation. She reminisces about how he used to be a kind and considerate person who cared about others without expecting anything in return. But the love of money has begun to poison his heart and she says that he is moving to the other world. She identifies the love of money, or avarice, as a different world because capitalism and its obsession over profit (at the cost of humanity and human relationships) is something beyond her understanding. She fails to speak or understand the language of capitalism. When Unzu and Sodo speaks to her, she does not understand them. When Yohyo tries to persuade her, she finds it difficult to understand what he says. This is because he is moving away from his passion for love and becoming desirous of money. The first cloth he receives from her was received as a gift – he was able to see the beauty and the value of it as something special given to him by Tsu. Later on, they merely become objects that will get him money. Rather than seeing the effort and the love that Tsu puts into the cloth, or seeing the beauty of it, Yohyo's perception of it has changed to a strictly capitalistic one. This is the moment that he begins to lose his love for Tsu.

Yes, I dislike you. I don't like you. I'm not fond of you- you are a cross woman!

Yohyo's behaviour towards Tsu changes as his priorities begin to get mixed up. Rather than valuing his wife above everything, he values money or the Senba Ori above his wife. Therefore, he begins to see her not in a loving manner, but through the eyes of the capitalist system. An employee who needs to be exploited, or a resource to be used up for maximum profit. When the desire to extract the value from this human capital is not fulfilled, Yohyo acts like a disgruntled manager who is complaining about his employee. Their relationship which was transparent and genuine without any interference of a third party has been infiltrated by the money.

As the play comes to an end, Tsu leaves yohyo and he holds on tightly to the cloth she made for him. This may possibly indicate the fact that he is unable to let go of his desire for money. He ends up losing Tsu, who loved him with all her heart – everything valuable that he had is lost. This play thus exemplifies how Yohyo's desire for money overpowers his passion for love and he ends up making the wrong choices and ends up losing his most valuable relationships.

Twilight of a Crane – Answer 2

Critically comment on the relationship between Yohyo and Tsu.

Junji Kinoshita staged his play in the late 1940's in a postwar Japan which was going through various changes. Western influences were an important factor at the time: Japanese culture and lifestyles were profoundly impacted due to this. Their value systems were also challenged and changed. The play uses the two characters Yohyo and Tsu in depicting how these changing landscape and values bring about rifts in relationships. I will explore how they had a strong relationship and how outside influences entice Yohyo to lose his way and his relationship with Tsu.

The couple live in Yohyo's tumble-down hut. They do not live in luxurious conditions. However, the children love to play with them. This suggests that they had a strong bond with the village and that they trusted them. Children gather around places where there is joy and safety. Tsu and Yohyo offered these things. They had love and happiness in their hut. The children were always welcome to the house, even without invitation - they had nothing to hide. There was no deception in their lives. They were transparent with one another.

Yohyo is presented as a simple farmer, who is perhaps not the smartest. He seems to forget things.

Why, I've forgotten to boil rice for Tsu!

However, out of his care for his wife, he goes out of his character to make sure the soup is warm enough for Tsu.

Cold soup is no good for my sweet heart !

Just going to warm up some soup for you.

He is concerned about her welfare and comfort. His world revolves around her. His main concern is to ensure her happiness and health. His sentiments are also displayed through the endearing terms he uses to address her. They call each other 'sweet heart,' 'dear,' and 'darling.' This suggests the intimacy of their relationship.

Tsu is quite clear about what she values and expects from her husband. She does not ask for materialistic objects, but wants to spend her time with her husband. These details suggest that the two of them have a perfectly content life. We learn that Yohyo does not even have to work hard in order supply their financial needs because Tsu had provided the Senba Ori which he was able to sell. With a sack full of money, the audience is well aware that there were no pressing needs in their family. They had everything they needed to be happy. However, their bond is challenged by the arrival of Unzu and Sodo.

These two men represent the capitalist and consumerist culture of society. At the time of writing the play, America had occupied Japan and Japanese cultural values were being mixed with many western values, ideas and the economic system. The excessive focus on mass production of goods and the creation of excessive wants paved the way to a consumerist culture. Unzu and Sodo stand for these ideals, where the value of human relationships are diminished. Instead, the desire for materialistic objects and the value placed upon profit become higher. They fail to see the value of humanity and in

their obsession with wealth and consuming goods, they become blind to elements such as love and kindness and consideration which are the necessary foundations of a strong relationship.

These men entice Yohyo into becoming money-minded like them. Their deceptive and exploitative nature is clear from their conversations.

Unzu, you must be making a pretty good profit in your deals with that cloth.

For the two of them, money is more important than transparency and honesty. They also ridicule his honesty and the respect Yohyo has for his wife. Yohyo respects Tsu's request to not peep into the room while she weaves the expensive cloth. However, Unzu and Sodo are not concerned about integrity or the genuineness in a relationship. Even Unzu's interactions with Yohyo are filled with lies and deception, for he has been keeping an extra off the profit for the Senba Ori.

Even though they try to speak to Tsu, she does not understand their language. Later on we find out that she has trouble understanding Yohyo also, when he starts to speak like the other gentleman. This is because she is not tainted with the greed for money - she does not understand the language of those who have deception in their hearts. Unzu and Sodo succeed in planting the seeds of these thoughts in Yohyo's mind.

When Sodo inquires about the cloth, Yohyo tells him that she loses weight every time she makes the cloth. This reflects the exploitation that employees undergo at the hand of large capitalist industries. Large scale businesses are more concerned and prioritizes their profit over the health and well-being of an individual. Even if it harms her, the two men are adamant about getting their hands on the Senba Ori and entice Yohyo into their scheming.

If she says she can't weave any more, you've got to threaten to leave her.

Their schemes begin to change Yohyo and his focus in life begins to change. Ever since Tsu became his wife, his life revolved around her and loving her. She was a loving wife, ready to be by his side at all times. But through Unzu and Sodo, he becomes more and more obsessed about money - to the extent that he is willing to deceive Tsu and manipulate her into weaving more cloth.

These deceptive thoughts germinate from the love of money. For Tsu and Yohyo's relationship, it becomes a pollutant, a foreign element that adulterates their relationship built on honesty and transparency. It disrupts the balance they had in life, the joy they found in each other. While Tsu's affections and attention is on Yohyo, his longings have changed.

Even though Tsu agrees to finally weave the cloth for Yohyo to keep him, he makes the mistake of peering into the chamber as she weaves. This action is a direct result of the influence of Unzu and Sodo who initiated this curiosity and thus made Yohyo break his promise to Tsu. As a result of his greed and his association with people who are more concerned about wealth rather than human relationships, he loses the best thing he had in his life. Tsu flies away, and the only memory he has of her is the Senba Ori.

Quotations with Explanations

The Twilight of a Crane

1. Oh dear, I almost forgot! Cold soup is no good for my sweet heart!

(Tsu - Now I'll make supper for you)

Both Tsu and Yohyo care for each other. They care concerned about each other's well-being and comfort. They prioritize each other and spend energy and time to ensure their partner's happiness. We later understand that Yohyo is rather forgetful; but he goes out of the way to somehow remember to heat up soup for his wife. This suggests that his mind and thoughts are on Tsu – she is the most important thing in his life, not money.

Yohyo calls her 'sweet heart.' This shows the intimacy they share. They seem to have a relationship which is full of contentment and peace. They do not hide anything from each other.

2. Since she came here, he never does anything but, sleep by the fire-side all day long.

This shows us that Yohyo already had everything that he needed to be happy. He was financially secure because of the Senba Ori that he sold. He did not have to toil and labour. He was emotionally complete because he received the pure love of Tsu. He had a happy life and the villagers were clearly envious of him. This good fortune befell Yohyo because of Tsu. Tsu brought love into his life as well a financial stability. However, when she leaves, he loses all of it.

3. Unzu, you must be making a pretty good profit in your deals with that cloth.

We learn that Unzu has been deceiving Yohyo about the profit. This shows us the insincerity of both Unzu and Sodo. The both of them are more focused on making profits rather than being honest and truthful.

4. Yohyo, my dear- what's happened to you? You are gradually changing. I can't understand why. But you are moving to the other world where I can never live. You are becoming the same as those whose language I cannot understand.

In the play, Tsu is a character who symbolizes ideal love. She is not human and is beyond human trappings (weaknesses) such as greed and selfishness. We know this because she cannot even speak or understand the language of greed. She loves Yohyo with all her heart as she mentions in the play and seeing him changing into someone different makes her worried. She sees the gradual change. It has been happening for some time. It warns people of how change comes little by little. She speaks of greed, which is a kind of mindset, as a different world which she cannot understand. Her mind, her thoughts are about their relationship. Her world revolves around him. She has committed to loving him and when this is not reciprocated, she is unable to understand him.

5. You were once so innocent and kind that you could take the arrow out of my back solely through tenderheartedness-and only out of sympathy for me.

This quotation points to the change that Yohyo goes through. He was once genuine and sincere. His actions were done with love and care for others. It is his sympathy and kindness that drew Tsu to him. However, with the arrival of Unzu and Sodo and their schemes, he begins to idolize money. Money becomes his priority. He used to help and care for Tsu without expecting anything in return, but now with the newfound desire for money, he is ready to use/exploit her to gain profit which he does not even need. Even the fact that she will suffer for this does not deter (stop) him from forcing her to spin more cloth. He has transformed from sympathizing and helping her to exploiting and using her for profit.

6. (noticing Tsu in the house) Yohyo! Go ahead! If she says no, you tell her you're leaving, do you see? You poor idiot! If you get a lot of profit from it, your wife'd be pleased, too.

Here, Unzu entices and advises Yohyo into manipulating his wife. Unzu represents capitalism, a system which exploits people in order to gain profit. Yohyo who used to respect and love his wife is now obsessed about making profit and going to Kyoto. These desires in him (which were planted by Unzu and Sodo) are so powerful that he is ready to use his wife for profit. He goes to the extreme of manipulating her emotions. The act of threatening to leave her is emotional manipulation. It suggests to the audience that Yohyo acts like he wants Tsu not because he loves her, but because she is able to give him the valuable cloth – the object which gives him access to money. If this object he gets is not received, he says he will leave her.

Beyond the material (for Yohyo the cloth has become nothing more than a way to make money - he no longer sees the beauty in it as he used to) object she is able to give him, he behaves as if he sees nothing in her that is worthy of love. Tsu becomes nothing more than a piece of machine that produces a good which brings him profit. For Yohyo, the value of Tsu as a person in this moment does not depend on her love for him or who she is – it depends on if she can remain a reliable 'machine' which produces the goods for profit. Her value as a person disappears in Yohyo's eyes. She is devalued. Her humanity has been stripped away from her and in Yohyo's perception, she has become a mere machine to be used and thrown away, discarded, if it does not perform. Do you think that if Tsu remained without leaving, Yohyo will stop asking for more Senba Ori? Where will this greed end? Tsu has already become weaker – what would have happened to Tsu if he continued to manipulate her and force her to make more cloth?

**7. - Yes, I've got money. I've got a lot of money in that sack...
- To make a lot of money. So.....I want another piece of that cloth...**

The sad truth is that money has become an idol, or a god that he has begun to worship. What is money? What is the end purpose? To purchase goods and services that you require. Does Yohyo and Tsu have everything they need? Are they happy? Yes. The above quotation makes it clear that he has enough money at this point to last for a long time. Yet, the allure of money has become so deceptive that he believes he wants more and more of it. Even though he has a happy life and love in his life, the ideas brought by Sodo and Unzu about money has taken root in his heart. Rather than understanding that money is something you use to buy stuff that you need, we see that the capitalist system is using him. Rather than Yohyo controlling the wealth he has, the fantasy of wealth is controlling him. He has forgotten what he loves: Tsu.

8. -Buy? What's "Buy"? What's nice thing? What do you want beside me? No, no please, don't want anything but me! I hate money, I hate "buying" too. Please love me, love only me. Love me forever, and let us live together always!

- You are not as fond of me as of money, are you? You are not as fond of me as of Kyoto, are you?

Tsu painfully realizes the truth that Yohyo no longer loves her as he did. He is more focused on obtaining more Senba Ori and money, rather than attending to her needs. Two words stand out in the above quotations. The first is 'buy'. The idea of buying is what creates the culture of consumerism. This is the obsessive, compulsive tendency to buy things that a person does not even really need. Yohyo wants to buy nice things – he does not specifically know what he wants to buy. It is not a need, but merely the desire in him to buy or consume things.

The second word is want. She pleads with him to want nothing but her. It is this desire of wanting materialistic goods that has come between Yohyo and his wife Tsu. Rather than focusing on what he needs (the necessities of life), he has begun to chase after the things that he desires which he does not need. This desire has made him even forget his love for Tsu.

Tsu asks him if he loves Kyoto more than he loves her. Kyoto, as an urbanized city, stands as a symbol for capitalism. It is a hub of consumerism where many fancy things can be bought for money. Tsu realizes that Yohyo loves the idea of buying fancy things with his money, rather than spending time with her or just caring for her and loving her as he used to. After Unzu and Sodo spoke to him, he has begun to see Tsu as the producer of Senba Ori – the way he can earn money.

The irony is that the 'nice things' he wants to buy would not take care of him or love him as Tsu does. The mistake he does is that he loves things that won't return his love, and he uses the person that loves him.

Lesson: Use things, not people. Love people, not things.

The theme of Nature vs Man in The Twilight of a Crane

The play can be seen as a commentary on man's exploitation of nature. From this perspective, Tsu becomes a symbol for nature, while Yohyo resembles humanity. Tsu is a crane, and takes on a human form after the kindness shown by Yohyo – she rewards him with the beautiful cloth. But Yohyo begins to exploit her – he uses up her without concern for her well-being. This is in many ways similar to the way that humans use up natural resources. Often, rather than using what we need, humans tend to over use everything so much so that we waste a lot of the resources in nature. We as a species have exhausted the supply of resources, and we have also reaped the consequences. Tsu leaves at the end of the play – this would suggest that nature seems to have given up on humans as well. Yohyo will never receive the Senba Ori that he was blessed with – man will no longer be able to enjoy the beauty of nature after we destroy it. How many dystopian movies have you seen where there are no trees in the future?

The village is described as a place where people are closer to nature. Life seems simple and carefree. They do not chase after materialistic objects – they probably did not have an annual plastic wastage of tons and tons. They were more respectful toward nature. However, Kyoto is an urbanized city and is a symbol of capitalism. This means 'buying' and 'selling' and the production of all sorts of goods. Yohyo is enticed by the things it has to offer. He is more interested in Kyoto (symbolizing the man-made paradise full of goods produced usually at the cost of nature – polluted lakes, air, soil and also exploited humans and animals). Read this article as an example of how human interference destroys nature and animals (<https://www.thegreatprojects.com/palm-oil-a-dark-future-for-orangutans>).

As Tsu leaves, Yohyo will have no way to enjoy Kyoto because the only thing that provides him what he needs to go to Kyoto was Tsu – this points to the fact that without nature and without making it our first priority, there will be no goods or services for us to enjoy. Even though capitalism is so hell-bent on making profit and the growth of their companies, nothing will be sustainable if we do not take care of nature above all. When Yohyo loved Tsu and took care of her, he had everything. When he started exploiting her and treating her without respect and care, everything in his life collapsed.

Useful Sentences for *The Twilight of a Crane*

1. Tsu has a pure heart which is **unadulterated** (untouched/unspool) by greed.
2. Yohyo **gradually transforms** into a **manipulative** and **self-seeking** person.
3. Unzu and Sodo are **deceptive** and **avaricious**.
4. Tsu **puts her own life at risk** in order to produce the Senba Ori **demand**ed by Yohyo.
5. Yohyo was a **sympathetic** man who helped people without expecting nothing in return.
6. Unzu and Sodo **exploit** Tsu in order to make profit. They **fail to see her value** as a person. Their lust for money makes them **dehumanize** her, because they only see what they can **extract** out of her – as if she is a machine.
7. Tsu is **disappointed** because of Yohyo's change – she realizes that he **desires** money and Kyoto more than her. These **materialistic** objects have **replaced** her.
8. Yohyo is **enticed** by the idea of **hoarding wealth** and he is easily **influenced** by Unzu and Sodo's **tempting thoughts**.
9. Unzu and Sodo **persuade** Yohyo to **emotionally manipulate** his wife in order to **exploit** her and **obtain** more Sena Ori.

The Bear – Answer 1

'Both Smirnov and Popova in the play, *The Bear*, have similar characteristics.' Do you agree? Support your answer with detailed reference to the play.

The Bear, written by Anton Chekhov, is a farce in one act and similar to many of his plays exposes the foibles, flaws, histrionics and hypocrisies of the middleclass. The two main characters of the play share similar characteristics.

Both Smirnov and Popova are temperamental. They react to circumstances in rather extreme and unpredictable ways. Popova, who is in mourning for her husband, has been wearing 'widow's weeds' for over seven months. This is rather extreme, which is an observation made by Luka. She refuses to go out of the house or receive anyone into the house.

He is in his grave, and I have buried myself between four walls.... We are both dead.

As the above quotation suggests, she would rather bury herself than move on from the death of her husband. On the surface this can be interpreted as her grief and her turmoil regarding the loss of a loved one: her husband. However, in the light of the fact that she moves on so easily later in the play may hint at the fact that this can also be interpreted as her guilt or her performance of grief to portray herself as a faithful wife till the end, even half an year after the passing of her husband. Her guilt because she hopes that the husband will be able to see her faithfulness. Even though the husband was unfaithful, she feels that his watchful eyes would always be upon her, and thus, she may be trying to stay true to him. It may also be that she wanted to project a praiseworthy image of herself to society which may be why she performed the mourning wife for so long. These causes compelled her to act in a rather temperamental and highly emotional manner.

Toby, Toby! Tell them to give him an extra feed of oats.

At the mention of Toby, she is transported into a reverie, reminisces about the husband, fails to contain herself and starts wailing. While Luka is worried about her behaviour which seems to be self-destructive, she reminds herself of the goodness of her husband.

Likewise, Smirnov has his share of temperamental behaviour. He has a serious anger-management issue and fails to behave reasonably in many instances. While the reader should understand that he is in a rather desperate situation where those who owe him money have failed to do so in his hour of dire need, the playwright makes us witness exaggerated and humorous behaviour by Smirnov. He becomes uncontrollably angry at Popova for not attempting to return his money immediately. This is unacceptable as he does not give her prior notice to get the money ready. He decides to rampage on a widowed woman who is still in mourning for her dead husband – he does not have the patience nor the empathy to respect the pain of the woman she is railing at. This unreasonable behaviour and temperamental and highly emotional disposition is similar to Popova's exaggerated performative behaviour – ***both seem to elevate the circumstance they face in order to gain the sympathy and attention of others.*** When each of them meets their match in each other, the output is explosive (highly emotional) and humorous.

What pleasure it will give me to put a bullet into your thick head! Devil take you!

This is evident in the way Popova reacts to Smirnov's heated invitation to fight with pistols, during a very unstable state of mind. Rather than realizing that Smirnov is not in his right mind, that he is being impetuous and vain, Popova displays her unsound judgment as she herself is blinded by her rage and thus foolhardily accepts his challenge. The author brings out even more humour by letting the audience know that she does not even know how to wield or use a pistol. This adds to the rashness of her behaviour. She is not in control of her emotions. The emotions seem to be in control of her.

On the part of Smirnov, asking a widowed woman in mourning to a pistol duel again shows his abrasiveness as well as capricious nature. He forgets his surroundings and loses his reason and intellect as he is overpowered by his strong emotions.

Another shared characteristic is their fickleness. Both of them are prompt to make vows – never to marry or fall in love with those of the opposite gender. However, in a comical turn of events, both of them break their vows at the hands of the other.

I vowed never to the end of my days to cease to wear mourning, or to see the light

Popova has resolved to never take the hand of any other man after her husband's death. This promise is tested only for a very short while in the presence of Smirnov, and in the most ridiculous of circumstances. This shows how her vows did not truly capture her intentions but glosses over other emotions. She was trying to prove to herself and to her husband (even though he is dead), that she is faithful and a good wife. All her efforts and determinations are thrown out when Smirnov begins to see her in a new light and admits it to her.

I'd taken a vow, and now all of a sudden I'm in love, like a fish out of water.

Smirnov, who has had a number of unpleasant experiences with women, has become bitter towards them. He sees all women as unfaithful and ungrateful individuals. Therefore, he has vowed to never consider taking the hand of a woman. Yet, in a very short time, his words become empty and he desires her. This shows how fickle and inconsistent his emotions and thoughts are.

Another characteristic they share is their hubris. This surfaces in their defensiveness when they are offended. Smirnov gets highly offended when Popova claims that he does not know how to behave in front of women. He loses control of his emotions and rails at her, speaking extensively about his encounters with women. This is a sign of him attempting to piece together his sense of pride, which was shattered by Popova's comment. He defends himself vehemently, arduously making arguments about his chivalry. She refuses to be impressed.

On the other hand, he insults her about the performative nature of her weeping, claiming that it is utterly superficial and selfish. Furthermore, he insults women in general, harping about perceived intellectual deficiencies of women. Popova is quick to defend herself (and women in general) and exposes her late husband's unfaithfulness.

As analysed above, Chekhov exposes the flaws and idiosyncrasies of the two characters and both of them share these features.

The Bear – Answer 2

What is your impression of Smirnov in the play *The Bear*? Discuss with detailed reference to the play.

The Bear is a farce in one act written by Anton Chekhov. Similar to his other plays, the story revolves around a middleclass family and exposes the idiosyncrasies and foibles that mark their lives. He exposes the hypocrisies and fickleness of human nature. In this play I will explore how he portrays Smirnov as a temperamental and capricious character who is struggling to come to terms with changing social values in a Russian society that is rebelling against rigid social structures.

Smirnov reveals his **views on women** midway in the play. He elaborates on how he once used to support the emancipation movement of women as well as how he once used to be passionate about love, romance and other carnal pleasures. He also states that **women are morally inferior** to men.

I used to chatter like a magpie about emancipation, and wasted half my wealth on tender feelings, but now--you must excuse me! You won't get round me like that now!

Tell me truthfully, have you ever seen a woman who was sincere, faithful, and constant?

It is evident that he has spent a great deal of money and energy on women. It is important to understand the context in which the story is set. When Chekhov wrote this play, Russia was relaxing its strict gender roles which did not allow women to gain a proper formal education. These social structures prevented women from finding jobs which offered a decent salary. Therefore, women were not able to be financially independent. However, our character is living in a time when these social structures were changing and women were finally allowed to get a formal education; thus, paving the way for their financial independence rather than solely depending on a male (usually through marriage).

As Smirnov is used to a system where being a man afforded you privilege over women, being rejected by nine women is not something he might have expected. Therefore, these undesirable experiences have shaped the way he perceives all females. He has grown to become bitter towards women in general. He confesses that he tried to embrace the emancipation, but we understand that he is now full of animosity towards women; possibly he had experiences where women were unfaithful with him and did not submit to his whims and fancies. It seems that there were women who challenged him, which does not sit well with him. These experiences which are a result of the changing structures of society has resulted in him developing a rather misogynistic attitude.

Smirnov also believes that **women are intellectually inferior** to men. His rants on this topic reflect the deep roots of patriarchy that governed Russian society for centuries and the struggle to change this kind of thinking. At the end of the play even though he is seemingly attracted to Popova, the keen audience observes that he does not change from his understanding of how women are intellectually inferior to men.

Smirnov is a **highly temperamental character with severe temper tantrums**. Smirnov, ironically, means 'quiet, still, gentle or peaceful.' It is also one of the most common surnames in Russia – selecting such a name arguably reveals that the playwright is using this character as a representation of Russian (or in general) middleclass men – who believe they are gentle but when things become complicated become boorish. Due to these uncontrollable ragings, he tends to **behave irrationally**. He enters Popova's house by force and begins to demand for the money which Nicolai, her husband, owes him. Even though at the

beginning he informs of this to her quite chivalrously, after being informed that he would not be getting his money instantly, he immediately puts up a tantrum; this creates a humorous effect which is how Chekhov exposes the foibles of the character of Smirnov.

All my inside is quivering with anger, and I can't even breathe.

As the audience we witness a grown man who becomes unreasonable and behaves **impetuously and irresponsibly, unable to control or regulate his feelings**. He makes unreasonable demands, saying that he needs the money immediately – he does not give Popova at least a day or a week to prepare the money. When she says the money can be given when the Steward returns, and that she is not in the right 'state of mind' because she is in mourning, he becomes increasingly agitated. While the audience may feel inclined to think that she is actually being rather petulant and maybe even narcissistic in her prolonged self-righteous bereavement, it cannot be denied that this does not warrant (justify) the kind of brute, brash and boorish behaviour displayed by Smirnov.

This sort of **raging and the consequential irrational reactions** are further manifested when he challenges the lady in mourning (who is also dressed up in her widow's weeds and make-up as Smirnov observes readily), to a pistol fight.

We'll fight it out! I'm not going to be insulted by anybody, and I don't care if you are a woman, one of the 'softer sex' indeed!

Imagining the spectacle of a highly emotional widow dressed up in rich clothes of mourning complete with make-up staggering out with two pistols (which she does not have the faintest idea how to use) elevates and exposes the ridiculousness of the middleclass of Russia and humans in general. It shows that humans, though civilization has tempered our raw emotions and we have learnt what we perceive to be the proper way to behave in society, or to behave in front of women (as they argue), are vulnerable to such instinctual and animalistic raging or other emotions which makes us even lose our sound judgment. Through the character of Smirnov, then, Chekhov presents how humans can easily lose grip on 'correct' and 'proper' behaviour and turn into a 'boor'.

Smirnov is capricious and fickle. He brags to Popova about the astounding number of women he has met in his lifetime and about his sentiments to women. He mentions that he passionately resents women;

I wouldn't give a brass farthing for the lot, madam!

Even though he makes his feelings towards women crystal clear midway in the play, while he instructs her on how to wield a pistol, his sentiments begin to take a different shape. He begins to admire her grit, audacity, vigour and gumption. He is surprised by her foolhardy and aggressive move to accept his challenge and this apparently changes his perceptions about women. He understands her to be different than all the women he has ever encountered. The playwright makes it comical by juxtaposing elements of violence, danger and aggression with elements of love, attraction and infatuation. The two were ready to put a bullet in each other's foreheads, and a moment later, while they are in the act of preparing the pistols, Smirnov expresses his undeniable love to her. The circumstances and the drastic leap from hatred to love adds humour and a level of disbelief; it borders on sarcasm and the audience understands rather uneasily that this union – if it were to be so – would be a highly tempestuous one which could go south (fail) very soon. This questionable change of heart shows how fickle Smirnov is and how his emotions often overpower his rational mind.

As discussed above, Smirnov comes off as a misogynist who was unable to come to terms with changing social values. He has an uncontrollable temper which results in rash reactions, and his emotions overpower his rational thinking, resulting in disastrous situations. Through satirizing these idiosyncrasies of his, the playwright invites the audience to look at themselves and laugh at themselves – making us contemplate about our own flaws and foibles.

The Bear – Answer 3

'Both Smirnov and Popova in the play, *The Bear*, have similar characteristics.' Do you agree? Support your answer with detailed reference to the play.

Anton Chekhov wrote the play in the late 1880's, more than two decades after the abolition of serfdom in 1861. He is famous for exposing (through exaggeration) the flaws and foibles of the decadent aristocrats (bourgeois). I agree that the two main characters in the *Bear* have similar characteristics – I will attempt to explore these through this essay,

Both Popova and Smirnov have strong opinions about the opposite sex. However, even though they had vowed to never again be intimate with the opposite sex, both of them end up breaking their vows. This is comical and exposes how fickle humans can be.

Popova is in mourning. Even after seven months of grieving, she still wears widow's weeds and vows to be a good wife even to her dead husband.

Let his ghost see how well I love him....

There, beyond the grave, he will see me as I was before his death....

It seems like she wants to prove to herself of her faithfulness - the audience is made aware that the husband was unfaithful and caused much heartache when he was alive. However, even through these experiences, her resolve to be faithful to him even at his death seems honourable and somber. However, at the end of the play, it takes merely a few minutes for her to jettison her affection, loyalty and the vow she had made to mourn her husband for the rest of her life. This is further consolidated by her instructing Luka to not feed Toby (the horse that Nicholai used to ride. At the beginning to the play she asks Toby to be given an extra serving of oats because it is a sentimental thing that links to the memory of Nicholai). This points to the fact that she is ready to completely let go of her late husband. This glaring irony emphasizes the contradiction between what she says and her actions.

In the same token, Smirnov manifests his bitterness toward women and reveals to us that he has vowed to never love again. He elaborates on how he was once a passionate lover.

I used to love passionately, madly...

I wouldn't give a brass farthing for the lot, madam!

He had apparently fought for women. He had rejected 12 women while 9 have rejected her. He also mentions how he lost half his wealth because of his labours of love. He apparently embraced the emancipation movement for the progress of women, but had grown to become resentful of all women in general. It is even safe to say that he has become excessively misogynistic. His disclaimer 'present company always excepted' before he vilifies women point to the hypocrisy in his speech. With each zealous loathing towards women, he seems absolutely resolute in his stance to never court any female ever again.

However, all these expressions of excitement come crumbling down when Popova shows her audacity, nerve and her more masculine side. As he falls in love, or into infatuation with her, the audience realizes the emptiness of his vows and bitter rants as the gap between what is expressed and enacted become exceedingly explicit.

He resents the beauty and perceived lack of intellect of women. However, despite Popova being beautiful (specifically her dimples that make her so according to him) and formidable, he is instantly attracted to her.

Another instance when words and actions do not align is when Smirnov insists that he knows how to behave in front of women. The social code at the time is that a man should not display aggression in front of a woman; instead, he should be chivalrous.

'How well you look in mourning!'

However, as the audience is shown, Smirnov is anything but gentle or genteel in his behaviour towards Popova. He insults her. Even though he proclaims with confidence that he is a refined, civil and cultured gentleman, he behaves like a boor (or a bear).

On the other hand, Popova also trips on her words by continuing to berate his late husband about his unfaithfulness and lack of affection toward her. When Smirnov insists that women are unfaithful, she reacts with an emotionally charged response, and the promises she made out of loyalty to her dead husband about loving him till death are made cheap.

This best of men shamelessly deceived me at every step!

She vents out all her frustration, anger and inner turmoil, unleashing all her pent up sorrows upon Smirnov. This shows that even though she portrays herself as a loving, forgiving and persevering wife, behind the mask made of words, she was hurting deep down and had all the pain and sorrow buried deep in her.

Smirnov brags about the number of people he has lent money to. He lists them down, and mentions that he is a land-owning gentleman. He asserts his authority and aristocracy. Even the act of lending money (these were probably people who used to work under him on his fields before serfdom was abolished) is a statement of the ability to do so; it reinforces his image as a wealthy gentleman. However, even though he rants on about his wealth and ownership of land, he behaves as a petulant and spoiled child pestering its mother for pocket money. He does not even have enough money to pay the interest on his mortgage. This ironically and comically portrays the hypocrisy of the bourgeois society who try to live in a past with the privileges they used to enjoy, which are all slipping away from their lives. His actions stand in contrast with the image of the wealthy gentleman that he tries to express to the world, through not only his words, but also his deeds.

Popova's rant about how men are unfaithful is born out of her experiences with her unfaithful husband. To the audience it is apparent that she has completely lost faith in men and their ability to remain loyal in marriage. This may be one of the reasons that she decides to never court a man ever again. Even when she has the means (horses and enough wealth to still project herself as a wealthy lady), when Luka urges her to move out and explore her options as a young and beautiful widow, she refuses, perhaps because the trauma of being in a relationship where she was not treated with care or faithfulness is still fresh in her mind. She comes to a conclusion about men based on her experience with her husband and concludes that men are never faithful. She is passionate and confident about her statement. Yet, the woman who declared the inherent evil in men, and who was audacious enough to engage in a pistol

fight with a man, finds herself being emotionally attracted to Smirnov. Her resolution about how all men are unfaithful is discarded in a moment as she gives herself to him by the end of the play.

Thus, what is evident is that throughout the play, the playwright plays with the fickleness of the characters and how they swing like a pendulum from one end to another, and how what they say does not reflect what they do. It also shows how sometimes language is used as a mask to cover the reality about a person, their longings, anxieties and their situations.

Quotations with Explanations

The Bear - Anton Chekhov

1. (With determination) I must ask you never to talk to me about it. You know that when Nicolai Mihailovitch died, life lost all its meaning for me.

This is Popova's reply when Luka suggests that she put an end to her mourning and go out to enjoy her youth while it lasts. He mentions the handsome beauties of the regiment. The stage direction given for Popova is interesting as this gives us the indication that she does not unflinchingly reject his idea of moving on and allowing herself to be available as a woman again. We can infer the fact that she contemplates the idea, which possibly sounds tempting to her, but decides after much consideration to not follow through. The direction 'with determination' suggests that it took her some mental effort to make that choice. Why does she reject it? Her love for the husband is not a convincing enough answer because we realize that she easily lets go of his memory later in the play and because of his callous and heartless behaviour. Therefore, it is arguable that her decision to remain in mourning may be based on the image of herself as a loyal and loving wife that she wanted to project. Throughout the first half of the play we encounter a Popova who is disciplined, punctilious, reserved and gentle. She is dressed in widow's weeds, even though, as Smirnov observes, she has not forgotten the powder! It is then conceivable that she may be preserving her image as a loyal, gentle and composed widow, so that people may not begin to weave stories around her because of her independent behaviour which is unbecoming of a woman (especially at that era).

2. He was so fond of Toby... Tell them to give him an extra feed of oats.

Popova is still holding on to things that are linked to Nicholai. Toby the horse contains a sentimental value as he is linked with Nicholai and her image of him as a strong, masculine and authoritative figure. This shows her inability to move past her husband. Even though the memory may be bittersweet (as we later understand) for her, it is not easy to move on from the traumatic experience of such a relationship where she did not receive the love, respect or the attention that she desired. But Popova lived as his wife for all of her adult life and her self-identity (who she is and how she perceives herself) revolves around that man. Therefore, she attempts to keep him alive through the things that he used, especially the things that are associated with good memories that she has about him. At this point of the play, Toby becomes a symbol of her attachment to him. This is the reason why her final words have a strong impact on the whole play.

Luka, tell them in the stables that Toby isn't to have any oats at all today.

She is ready to let go of the memory of her dead husband and to move on to explore new opportunities that are in store for her. The memory of her husband which was in certain ways a cage for her has been opened so that she can begin to reinvent herself and redefine who she is according to new possibilities that are presented to her. Therefore, refusing to spend any more time, energy, money or thoughts on Toby signals her freedom from the binding memory of her husband.

3. You fool, you're too fond of talking.... Ass!

Smirnov in Russian means 'quiet, still, peaceful, gentle.' However, ironically, he has the foulest mouth and the ferocious temper. The language he uses to address Luka, who is a servant, reflects his attitudes towards those who are in a lower social class.

4. Smirnov, landowner and retired lieutenant of artillery!

When addressing Popova he is genteel. He introduces himself as a landowner, which directly makes him a wealthy gentleman, worthy of respect and honour.

However, we come to know that he is desperate for money to pay his interest. With such monetary commitments, he has continued to lend money to other people and gotten into trouble. The question arises: If he does not have the money to pay for his own financial commitments, why would he go around lending money to others? This may well be an expression meant to maintain his image of the aristocracy. During the late 1800's, the Russian landowning gentry was going through major socio-economic upheavals. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 was one of the major reasons for this.

And Chekhov is known for satirizing the bourgeois community who, amidst crisis situations, attempted to maintain their image of aristocracy. Therefore, it seems that Smirnov's statement of wealth (which was to lend money to people who asked of him), has come back to steal from him even the remnant of what he used to possess. Thus, the playwright exposes the facades put up by people in order to maintain their false sense of dignity which comes from the contents of their purse; not their character.

5. I shall certainly pay you, but you must excuse me to-day, as I haven't any spare cash.

Moreover, it's exactly seven months to-day since the death of my husband, and I'm in a state of mind which absolutely prevents me from giving money matters my attention.

Popova makes it perfectly clear, as she later reiterates, that she is unable to provide the money immediately. She also mentions an important point: it is her late husband's 7-month death anniversary.

However, Smirnov does not listen to the plain fact that she is unable to pay the money. At one point when he goes on incessantly about the money he inquires of her. 'Then you won't pay me now? Eh?' She replies 'I can't'. The distinction between I won't and I can't is clear and she tries to make him realize this, but in his elongated paroxysm of anger, he does not seem to get the difference. He phrases the question in such a way that it implies that she refuses to pay the money even though she has it available. She changes her answer: without replying she won't, she corrects him and says she 'can't' which suggests that even if she did want to pay the cash, she does not have the ability to do so at that moment. What becomes apparent is that even though Popova is being very reasonable, Smirnov refuses to see the sound logic (the audience is aware of his inability to either process or accept the reasonable logic behind what Popova says, and his dramatic and petulant reactions create humour) behind what she says. In addition, it should be also noted that Smirnov's demand is unreasonable as such an amount should not be expected at such short notice. He should have at least given few days for her to get the money prepared. This further elaborates how blind Smirnov is to his own deficiencies in judgment.

On the other hand, he mocks and ridicules her for having a 'state of mind' and callously judges her for being too sentimental and naive. He blames this on the female logic, saying that they are more concerned about their 'tender feelings.' However, the sensible audience understands that a death anniversary is a harrowing experience, and since it's been only 7 months, and since she has resolved to remain in mourning for her life, the day must have been quite unbearable for her. (The fact that she forgets it altogether at the end of the play is a separate discussion for the topic right now is Smirnov's

reactions to such a tragic moment). This reaction of Smirnov shows that he is devoid of patience, empathy and a sense of propriety and is more concerned about his immediate needs rather than the mourning of a young widowed woman. Moreover, he blames her response on her gender, asserting that these 'poetic creatures' are too caught up in their emotions. (This, once again is ironic as he himself may be the most impetuous, capricious and mercurial character in the play).

6. *Excuse me, sir, I am not accustomed to listen to such expressions or to such a tone of voice. I want to hear no more.*

Sir, in my solitude I have grown unaccustomed to the masculine voice, and I can't stand shouting. I must ask you not to disturb my peace.

Popova politely requests Smirnov to leave the house. In these two instances, it is evident that she behaves in a manner that is expected of a woman in the 19th century patriarchal Russia. She does not raise her voice, she does not use inappropriate language and she does not get agitated in the presence of Smirnov. She maintains the image of the loyal, loving, composed and morally superior woman, preserving her image as a good wife and a good woman. She holds on to the traditional, more conventional image of a woman.

7. *I am not here as a visitor, but as a creditor, and there's no dress specially prescribed for creditors....*

Smirnov is self-conscious about his self-image. He is a landowning gentleman and is someone who is used to dressing up to the nines. But at Popova's house he is reduced to such a state that he says he looks like a 'brigand' (bandit). This suggests how low he has fallen from his aristocracy. His search for his money has allegedly taken him on an uncomfortable and sleepless journey, and his clothes are soiled just as his place in the aristocracy.

8. *A glass of vodka!*

He may be in a financially fragile state, but his tastes are expensive. Even on a formal with a headache to accompany him, he desires a Vodka to calm him down. This is typical of the bourgeois, who cling to their expensive and unsustainable tastes and habits while they lose their houses and lands.

9. *-Three times I've fought duels on account of women. I've refused twelve women, and nine have refused me!*

-I used to love passionately, madly.

-Present company always excepted, all women, great or little, are insincere, crooked, backbiters, envious, liars to the marrow of their bones, vain, trivial, merciless, unreasonable.

-you look into her soul and see a common crocodile.

Smirnov is offended when she says he does not know how to talk to women. While trying to counter her statement, he proves her right. However, the audience is made aware of his numerous encounters and labours with women. This further reveals his tendencies to be fickle, changing his word and loyalties quite hastily, in a rather mercurial manner.

His exhaustive list to define women in the most demeaning manner reveals his misogynistic attitude towards them. This is due to several reasons. One of it is the unpleasant experiences which have made

him bitter and resentful towards the opposite sex. Why? I'm glad you asked. In the late 19th century Russia, social change was slowly taking place and women who used to depend on men and marriage for social security and financial stability were increasingly given the opportunity to a formal education which opened up access to more stable and lucrative economic gain. This made women more independent and they did not have to depend on a man for their future as much as they used to. While women were quick to agree to proposals by men because of the social and financial security it brought, with the changing dynamics, they had more confidence to reject men. Smirnov, who was used to women being more submissive and timid, was possibly not used to being rejected by so many women. Even though he seems to brag about his ventures, it is inevitable that he would have developed an animosity towards women who rejected him - this bitterness may have eventually leaked onto his perception of all women in general, which is why he says that he begins to shiver with anger when he sees a woman.

10. I used to chatter like a magpie about emancipation, and wasted half my wealth on tender feelings.

The emancipation, or the struggle for equal rights for women brought on changes that are discussed above. Smirnov talks a lot about it but what we realize is that he has not understood what it really means and the implications of it - therefore, when he experiences the changes he faces with his interactions with women, he cannot reconcile their independence with his desire for submissive women which is what he is used to, as a result of living and being brought up in a patriarchal state where privileges align with masculinity.

He has used up his wealth in attempts to impress women as well. After all this, with women being empowered enough to reject him and having the space to perhaps be unfaithful to him, he is dejected and disillusioned about women.

11. After his death I found in his desk a whole drawerful of love-letters, and when he was alive-- it's an awful thing to remember!--he used to leave me alone for weeks at a time, and make love to other women and betray me before my very eyes; he wasted my money, and made fun of my feelings.

Popova's life with Nicholai was evidently full of heartache, insecurity, lack of attention, affection and warmth. This is nothing short of an abusive relationship where Popova was arguably nothing more than another ornament to complete the house.

As she states, it is her wealth that her late husband wastes and uses against her in a sense. This shows the voicelessness and the violence that Nicholai imposed upon her. Even though it is her money, after the marriage, it becomes his and she has no authority in a traditional patriarchal household where the husband is the head of the house and the woman's place is to be a submissive wife.

Popova, who has been in mourning for seven months, seems to again fall into the hands of a violent and impulsive man (who almost shot her to death). The grim reality behind the comic elements and the laughter is that her fate, if she latches onto him, could turn out to be worse than it was - he insults her, violates her (the kiss is initiated forcefully), rages at her like a 'boor'.

When the audience is given this information, one would ask the question, 'After all the trauma he put her through, why would she still persist to be loyal to him, even when he is in his grave?' The answer to this is the gender roles and expectations of women in that era in Russia. The role and expectation of a woman was to be a wife and mother. They were supposed to be submissive and respectful of the

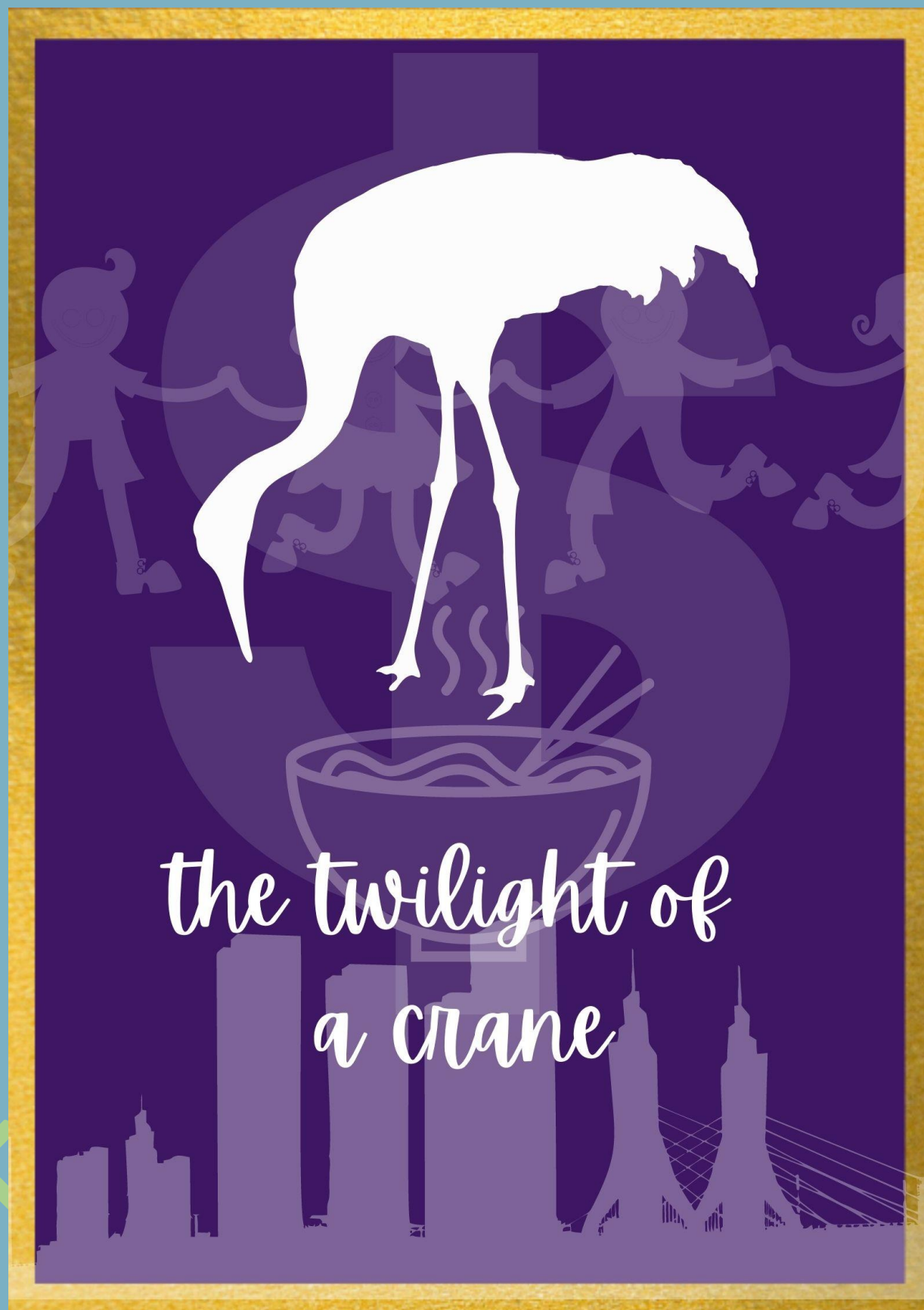
husband. Due to the lack of opportunities for formal education, they had no independence. Therefore, their whole identity was built upon the men in their world. For Popova, her life was defined as Nicholai's wife. That was her place in society. Even though she went through all that betrayal, there was no opportunity for her to leave him - she would have been rejected by society as a whore. However, we need to also understand that after years of learning her position in society, she herself believes that her role is to be a good, faithful wife to him - which is why even after his death she remains loyal to his memory. Even when her life was being wasted away by this man, her main thought is about how to be a good wife to him. However, by the end of the play, we see that she is able to let go of Toby and move on from her attachment to him. But the question remains: we agree that she has been released from the memory of Nicholai; but what is it that she has been released to? Smirnov? If that is so, is she still not trapped in the same abusive system?

12. *I'm off my head, I'm in love like a boy, like a fool! [Snatches her hand, she screams with pain]*

This line and stage direction gives us an indication of how violent he can be - she screams in pain at his gesture. But, in the end they kiss - the initiation is done by him rather forcefully, while she shouts at him to get away from him. Once he kisses her, she does not resist. Even though she seemingly wants him, with the given details about his unpredictable raging and her history of being in an abusive relationship, the audience has the bitter after-taste of something ugly about to happen.

Useful vocabulary for The Bear.

Smirnov	Popova	Useful Sentences
Landowner Bourgeois Fickle Melodramatic		1. Smirnov carelessly lends money without assessing his own position.
Hypocrite	Traditional	2. He is boorish and rude, loud and unpleasant .
Misogynistic	Emotional	3. He displays animosity toward women in general.
Rude		4. His character has dissipated – he has become animalistic.
Temperamental		5. He has no self-control but is governed by his emotional outbursts of anger and attraction .
Petty		6. Smirnov is apathetic to Popova's pain – he does not display any empathy.
Sarcastic		7. Popova tries to preserve the image of the loyal and faithful widow.
Narcissistic		8. Popova vacillates between letting go of her husband's memory and being open to new opportunities.
Alcoholic		9. Smirnov's raging and uncontrollable violence surfaces when he snatches Popova's hand, who screams in pain.
Manic		
Violent		
Brutish		
Capricious		





the bear