

A Love Affair as Regeneration: Comparing Joyce's Duffy and Chekhov's Gurov

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I

James Duffy's story in "A Painful Case" is often categorized together with Maria's in "Clay," as "celibacy stories" in *Dubliners*. Yes, Duffy is a single man and so he, we assume, has never been married in his life. Joyce, however, doesn't simply introduce Duffy's life as a celibate but he seems more preoccupied with portraying what had happened in his quiet life (i.e. a sudden affair with a lady), how he responds, cautiously though, to it, and finally if he undergoes any kind of moral, emotional, spiritual transformation at all from the beginning to the end of the affair. Quite interestingly, we have another case of an affair by Anton Chekhov who had admittedly had influence on English Modernist writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, who modelled on Chekhov's "small-scale narratives" that capture a character's entire world in a few moments (Kelly 6). Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov from "The Lady With a Dog" strikes a casual tryst with a lady but when she leaves him, he, contrary to his expectation, gradually

feels a subtle affection towards her. Such a sudden feeling toward her puts Gurov in moral and emotional disturbance, which leads him to somewhere at the end of the story. In both stories, the two men, one Irish and the other Russian, experience a similar emotional shock, which at first breaks their emotional equilibrium and then brings them to some sort of moral awakening.

A love affair may happen suddenly to any of us. The same constantly happens to fictional characters as well. If the characters are married, the emotional ramifications grow complicated, yielding secret joy as well as inhibitions. Gurov and Duffy are married and single, respectively, in the clutches of love with married women. Both encounter these women, regularly meet them, and come to appreciate their company. Their emotional involvement, however, differs radically. Gurov pursues his affair to the end, following his heart while Duffy suddenly disconnects with his liaison, severing any emotional attachment. Despite these different attitudes, both Gurov and Duffy undergo significant development as humans and change their perspective on themselves, as well as others, in the course of the narrative. This paper traces the developmental trajectory of each, while comparing their different ways of achieving their spiritual regeneration through their love affairs.

II

Even before Duffy and Gurov met their women in their stories, they were different, not just in marital status. They were totally different characters in their lifestyle, perspective, and emotional and intellectual background. Duffy, a bachelor working at a bank, leads a private, uneventful life. His reticence towards communal life, the highly selective items in his bare room, and his preoccupation with order and cleanliness betray his solipsistic personality. Such ascetic cautiousness and avoidance of human relationships simply intensify his isolation, celibacy and emotional starvation: “He had neither companions nor friends, church nor creed” (Joyce 105). He “lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts

with doubtful side-glances” (Joyce 104). He even records his own life “in the third person . . . in the past tense” (Joyce 104). In a word, he is more preoccupied with recording the “adventureless tale” (Ingersoll 217) of his own life rather than living it in the full sense.

Unlike Duffy, an extreme solipsist (or we might label him as an abnormal case of self-alienation) who abhors any kind of human fellowship, Gurov, we are told, is a manly man who has had lots of relationships with women before. True, he cannot “live a day without them but his estimation of women is very low. He even calls them “the lower race” (Chekhov 222). He is not serious in his marriage either. Married very young, Gurov is not happy with his wife who is very outspoken and pretentious. Gurov dislikes his wife and he dislikes sexually aggressive women whom he has been with in the past. At the age of forty, he already feels sick and tired of life. Staying in Yalta for a week doesn’t make him feel refreshed. When he spots a lady with a dog, he therefore approaches her with no serious intention. He simply regards it as one of many casual affairs. A man of worldly experience, Gurov immediately reads from her fashion and expression her class, marital status, boredom and even loneliness, since she travels without a husband or friends. Gurov talks to her just for fun, as usual: “the seductive idea of a brisk transitory *liaison*, an affair with a woman . . . suddenly took possession of his mind” (Chekhov 222). Like many Chekhovian stories, Gurov’s tryst with Anna starts all “by chance” (Jackson 57) but it develops as any affair would. After their first meeting at a restaurant, Gurov recalls nothing particular except her shy and controlled manner as well as her physical attractiveness. A male-chauvinist, Gurov feels threatened by strong women while preferring a woman he could dominate. He therefore prefers Anna, who is soft, childlike, weepy and vulnerable, even a bit “pathetic” (Chekhov 222). Gurov is drawn to her “pathetic” qualities not only because they make her easy prey but also because these qualities in Anna reflect an aspect of Gurov that he is slow to recognize. Gurov, like Anna, is bored and unhappy in his marriage and is “eager for life.” Perhaps Gurov feels sympathy for Anna in her sadness because he feels sad himself both at home and in the company of others.

Like Gurov's chance affair with Anna, a similar event happens to Duffy. His uneventful and even schizophrenic life style is challenged when he encounters Mrs. Sinico at a concert. Unlike Gurov, however, Duffy approaches her with cautious but serious intention. A woman of unconventional sensibility, Mrs. Sinico confronts Duffy's self-centeredness as well as his asocial behavior. But while she longs for emotional involvement with him, he shows more interest in her intellectual charm. With feminine warmth and earthiness, Mrs. Sinico tries to redeem Duffy because his soul, she senses, is drained by the ideas, theories and enclosures swirling within himself. Her dark, steady "gaze" is sexually inviting, but Duffy denies this because he simply cannot negotiate feminine sexuality. Duffy's obstinate resistance to Mrs. Sinico's erotic appeal betrays either his fear of involvement with her or his emotional impotence in her company (Hart 113-14). Duffy therefore meticulously "fossilizes" her in his mind: "while they talked he tried to fix her permanently in his memory" (Joyce 105). Yes, Gurov enjoys casual relations with women around him because he cannot do without them. But Duffy, strangely enough, cannot feel any emotional attachment with Mrs. Sinico. Sure enough, both Duffy and Mrs. Sinico were serious in exploring and getting closer to each other but the ways they expressed their desire were totally different.

Despite Gurov's seductive intention, Anna is hesitating but serious in her encounter with Gurov. Their affair progresses as they continue meeting daily for a week. Gurov's bold advances toward her induces her willing if cautious response. Like Gurov who married as an undergraduate, Anna married young at twenty. Like Gurov who is unhappy at home, Anna reveals her tedious relationship with her husband whom she calls a "flunky." Anna fell victim to an early, unsatisfactory marriage.

I wanted something higher. I told myself that there must be a different kind of life. I wanted to live, to live . . . I was burning with curiosity . . . you'll never understand that, but I swear to God I could no longer control myself, nothing could hold me back. (Chekhov 225)

Anna seeks to liberate herself from the petty materialism and oppressive marital

arrangements of her time, searching for a higher spiritual good. A woman burning with desire for an alternative life is easily led. (Mrs. Sinico's sexual needs, we recall, have long been ignored by Captain Sinico.) After getting Gurov's overnight stay in her hotel room, Anna, however, feels chagrin. She blames herself: "I'm a wicked, fallen woman. I despise myself and have not the least thought of self-justification (Chekhov 225)." She feels sorry not for her husband but for herself. Such unexpected remorse and self-derision by Anna Gurov simply ignores as *naïveté*. He regards his affair with her as mere amusement to satisfy his "desire for life" (Chekhov 222). For Gurov, it was simply an affair for fun and no more. He even flatters himself, feeling "a new lease on life" (Chekhov 227). Seeing her off at the train station, he mutters to himself that the affair "had been just one more of the many adventures in his life" (Chekhov 227). He never knows what sort of aftermath awaits him. He simply doesn't understand the moral seriousness Anna brings to the tryst with Gurov. Young and inexperienced as she is, Anna tries to be faithful to how she feels and what her true motivation leads her to do. That's also the natural way Mrs. Sinico expresses herself. As old and worldly Gurov may be, he has never brought himself to confront his true feelings. Nay, he possibly has never felt any genuine feeling towards another human beings.

Duffy, another egocentric, might have cured his loneliness had he released his instinctual urges and welcomed Mrs. Sinico's healing, feminine mystery. He yields, however, to his egocentricity and returns to his former state when Mrs. Sinico "[catches] up his hand passionately and [presses] it to her cheek" (Joyce 107). He doesn't know how to respond to Mrs. Sinico's emotional advances because he simply doesn't feel. Arguably, it is very hard to blame Duffy for how he feels toward Mrs. Sinico. He may be a frigid who has never felt any sexual attraction to women all his life. (This does not necessarily makes him a homosexual either but Wachtel suspects his homosexuality [Wachtel 50].) If that is the case, Duffy is not responsible for how he (un)feels toward Mrs. Sinico. Rather, Mrs. Sinico should be criticized for committing such an abrupt gesture and crossing the line (Lowe-Evans 397), not recognizing who Duffy is. What may be argued here is,

Duffy should not have cut his connection with her so abruptly, putting her in total shock. (Later on, we hear she has become an alcoholic.) He should have shown some respect, not love, to another human being at the very least, which he regrettably did not. At this point, he fails to recognize either who he is or who Mrs. Sinico is. Like Gurov back in Moscow, he has a long way to go, and four years pass until he hears the news of the accidental death of Mrs. Sinico.

So far, there is nothing special or touching about the end of both the affairs, Duffy's and Gurov's. Duffy intentionally disconnected his liaison with Mrs. Sinico, and Gurov allowed Anna to return home, with no further appointments. Until that point, both Duffy and Gurov are simply what they used to be, two self-centered and self-complacent men. The second halves of each stories, however, take a dramatic turn toward the moral discovery of both men. It's up to them to find out who they are and who their lovers were. Such a moral recognition doesn't come easily, and each of the men should pass through a period of unexpected but painful self-confrontation. Before furthering this argument, it is important to mention two factors that promise the chance of their moral transformation. First, Duffy's life has been gradually enriched when Mrs. Sinico partly succeeds in making "his nature open to the full," thus making their relationship "less remote" (Joyce 106). The following passage portrays the soul-warming process their companionship brings Duffy:

Her companionship was like a warm soil about an exotic. Many times she allowed the dark to fall upon them, refraining from lighting the lamp. The dark discreet room, their isolation, the music that still vibrated in their ears united them. This union exalted him, wore away the rough edges of his character, emotionalized his mental life. (Joyce 107)

Mr. Duffy's personality is intellectual while Mrs. Sinico's is emotional. In order to be whole, Duffy's existence must be complemented by Mrs. Sinico's warm, exotic richness. Gradually merging his soul with hers, Duffy achieves "fervent" intimacy with Mrs. Sinico. His own status seems elevated to that of an angel, a Nietzschean

Zarathustra, which he so admires. Such an exaltation can be summarized as “the emotionalization of his mental life,” a humanizing process to smooth the roughness of his character. Mrs. Sinico tries to liberate Duffy from his vain, self-consuming thoughts.

Second, a day’s drive to Oreanda, a beach town close by Yalta, brings Gurov a sense of unity with Anna as well as a chance for cosmic meditation. Looking at the sea in the morning mist and motionless white clouds on the mountain top, Gurov ponders the possibility of human salvation in the face of nature’s indifference to human destiny. Such a conceptualization evoked by nature is not unusual for Chekhov’s fictional writing (Chudakov 409).

Side by side with a young woman, who looked so exquisite in the early light, soothed and enchanted by the sight of all this magical beauty—sea, mountains, clouds, and the vast expanse of the sky—Gurov told himself that, when you came to think of it, everything in the world is beautiful really, everything but our own thoughts and actions, when we lose sight of the higher aims of life, and of our dignity as human beings. (Chekhov 226)

In such a lovely moment of philosophizing, Gurov thinks about such higher goals as human perfection and human integrity. It sure is a moment of personal illumination for Gurov, which evidences both the range of his moral capacity and the chance of his moral transformation. Spellbound by nature’s beauty, it is the most lyrical, intense, and deeply felt moment in their early love affair. At the moment, however, he simply glimpses the alternative dimension of human existence and soon forgets about it.

The continuing process of moral recovery starts for both Duffy and Gurov when they break up from the women they’ve been dating. Four years after their breakup, Duffy discovers in the evening paper of Mrs. Sinico’s death in a train accident. The newspaper also reports her strange behavior, possible symptoms of alcoholic addiction, for which Duffy, I argue, is not a little responsible. The news of Mrs. Sinico’s suicide shocks Duffy. His initial responses are violent anger and

disgust toward Mrs. Sinico, who has damaged his sense of propriety: “Not merely had she degraded herself; she had degraded him” (Joyce 111). He feels anger towards himself for having chosen Mrs. Sinico as his “soul’s companion” (Joyce 111). When the news sinks in, Duffy feels less and less vindictive towards the deceased. That she is gone, and has become just a memory, leads Duffy to sympathy: “Why had he sentenced her to death . . . one human being has seemed to love him and he denied her life and happiness” (Joyce 113). Illumination comes too late and at too high a price. Ironically, Mrs. Sinico, even after death, exerts a spiritual pull on Duffy and he embraces the spectral touch of Mrs. Sinico’s hand, which he previously rejected. Feeling “imagined intimacy” with the deceased, he listens to whatever voice emerges from the depths of his own soul. Wearing away the hard shell of his egotism, Duffy, for the first time, feels guilt for causing Mrs. Sinico’s untimely death. He takes the first step towards self-discovery as well as moral regeneration.

A similar moment of self-enlightenment strikes the self-complacent Gurov. Back in Moscow, Gurov immerses himself in business, meetings, clubs, banquets, celebrations, and card-games. But he finds no solace. The thought of Anna, unexpectedly, frequents his thoughts, mixing memory and desire: “. . . and then memory turned into dreaming, and what had happened mingled in his imagination with what was going to happen” (Chekhov 229). Further still, Gurov feels her ubiquitous presence following him everywhere like a shadow. Finding no one to share his exquisite and even poetic vision of Anna, feeling as though he were in a madhouse or a prison, Gurov becomes infuriated at the trivial and savage routine in Moscow. Gurov’s emotional disturbance even causes headaches and sleeplessness. Certainly, it is a personal crisis for the protagonist. He never expected a chance tryst with Anna would affect him in such a devastating way. To get away from his agony, mental and emotional, Gurov also takes a step toward his moral awakening; he determines to journey to Anna.

When the moral shock of Mrs. Sinico’s death ebbs, what happens to Duffy? He starts to become introspective and takes a look at himself. Humbled, Duffy

confronts his stark loneliness. For the first time ever, he glimpses the terrible fact of *his own* emotional starvation, living death, and the aftermath of his own eventual death. He fears no one will ever recollect him. This moment is Duffy's inner crisis as well as his self-revelation: his own humanity, specifically, his mortality. Accepting his culpability in Mrs. Sinico's death, Duffy achieves a self-redemption, limited and temporary as it may be. (Some critics suspect the authenticity of Duffy's remorsefulness because it is "slightly overblown" [West 701]) Duffy's moral discovery is confirmed when he spots the shadow of a pair "making love" which he has rejected. The young lovers, prostrate in the dark, remind Duffy of the richness of life that merging with another might bring. Duffy's self-recognition continues as he works out sexual imagery from a train in the distance. The fiery headlight of the train ploughing through the darkness is a poignant phallic signifier for Duffy who has just passed an amorous scene. In the train's droning whistle, he hears the voice of Mrs. Sinico whose desire he has brutally repressed. The train proceeding "obstinately and laboriously" is a regrettable metaphor for his tired sexuality as a bachelor. The dynamics of Duffy's moral regeneration is portrayed in such an audio-visual imagery poignantly recapitulated at the end of the narrative.

A similar trajectory awaits Gurov who leaves for Anna. He feels himself dumbstruck when he finds her living in a house fenced with nails. She was a young woman "who had to look at this accursed fence from morning to night" (Chekhov 230). That Anna, like himself caged in Moscow, should live in such a confined and depressed milieu is enough to make Gurov feel sad. It makes him sadder when he succeeds in spotting Anna among provincial theater-goers in the evening. When Gurov looks at her without any condescending illusion, his egocentricity is dispelled and his moral awakening starts (Smith 217). For the first time, he recognizes who she really is and how deeply he is in love with her.

This little woman, lost in the provincial crowd, in no way remarkable, holding a silly lorgnette in her hand, now filled his whole life, was his grief, his joy, all that he desired . . . he thought how beautiful she was . . . thought and dreamed . . . (Chekhov 231)

Ironically, a revised vision of Anna brings Gurov to see her genuine self, and he recognizes he had “fallen in love properly, thoroughly, for the first time in his life” (Chekhov 234). Such a moment of emotional illumination has long since been prepared for Gurov, who feels slightly remorseful for taking advantage of a young, innocent lady in Yalta.

He had been friendly and affectionate with her, but in his whole behaviour, in the tones of his voice, in his very caresses, there had been a shade of irony, the insulting indulgence of the fortunate male, who was, moreover, almost twice her age. She had insisted in calling him good, remarkable, high-minded. Evidently he had appeared to her different from his real self, in a word he had involuntarily deceived her . . . (Chekhov 228)

As mentioned earlier, Gurov is an experienced man, who has had lots of love affairs before. He shows an elusive charm in both appearance and disposition. This attracts women. Since Gurov cannot live a single day without women, he seeks “light adventure” with the “lower race,” which brings a “pleasant variety” (Chekhov 222) in his life. Cunningly, he knows when to halt the affairs, when they bring about “excessive complication” (Chekhov 222). But Anna’s case was different. He thought it was simply one of those “transitory liaisons” that would soon be forgotten. On the contrary, her memory persists.

Gurov’s remorseful self-confrontation continues when he takes a look at himself in the mirror.

His hair was already beginning to turn gray. It struck him as strange that he should have changed so much in the last few years. The shoulders on which his hands lay were warm and quivering. He felt a pity for this life, still so warm and exquisite, but probably soon to fade and droop like his own. (Chekhov 234)

Gurov’s unexpected recognition of his aging makes his heart so emotional that he feels sympathetic towards, Anna, another aging, fragile being. Noticing Anna’s

fading beauty, he comes to acknowledge her as a person. It also leads him to criticize himself for being a graying old man who seduced women by pretending to be someone he was not. Gurov feels guilty for having pretended to be intelligent and respectable; taking advantage of his position as a wealthy man. Anna took Gurov's deception as his real nature and status. Gurov's remark demarcates the discrepancy that so often occurs when anyone loves another.

Women had always loved him differently from what he really was, had loved in him not himself but the man their imagination pictured him, a man they had sought for eagerly all their lives. And afterwards when they discovered their mistake, they went on loving him just the same. (Chekhov 234)

Ironically, Gurov has to admit to himself that he has behaved toward Anna as the women in his life have behaved toward him. Like Duffy, Gurov regrets having neglected such a woman that has been in love with him so fervently. Now he suffers terribly for having placed Anna in an unhappy situation. This is a painful moment of Gurov's epiphany. He faces with his truer self and comes closer to personal integrity. Going further, he recognizes he has been living two lives, in public and secret. He took the double life, he confesses, for granted thus far.

And owing to some strange, possibly quite accidental chain of circumstances, everything that was important, interesting, essential, everything about which he was sincere and never deceived himself, everything that composed the kernel of his life, went on in secret, while everything that was false in him, everything that composed the husk in which he hid himself and the truth which was in him . . . was on the surface. (Chekhov 233)

Throwing away the falseness he has been living until then, Gurov comes to embrace not only his genuine self but others as well. Gurov finds true love for the first time in his life: "There had been all sorts of things between them, but never love" (Chekhov 234). He also senses he didn't know he was keeping Anna alive, rescuing her from a suffocating provincial milieu. She confesses, "I could think of

nothing but you the whole time, I lived on the thought of you” (Chekhov 232). Accepting mysterious *otherness* of others, Gurov examines his affair with Anna from an enlightened perspective. He learns that he cannot tolerate living a lie anymore and that it was wrong to engage in a superficial relationship with Anna just for fun. In order to get over the alienation and loneliness which has bothered him for so long, Gurov has to abandon his cheap, false concept of love and entrust himself to the real feeling of love and accept all the difficulties to make it alive.

Finally, Gurov feels love has “changed” him. What started as a temporary seduction has proven regenerating for Gurov. The cleansing power of love brings Gurov heightened “pity, sincerity and tenderness” (Chekhov 235) towards Anna. Finally, Gurov feels confident that “a new, beautiful life would begin” (Chekhov 235), despite the complications that await them. He also recognizes that they must make painful and difficult decisions which will allow them to live together openly. The final note is of pathos. Muted and transient happiness is the fate which awaits Gurov and Anna. Like most Chekhovian short stories, “The Lady with a Dog” is “open-ended” (Cornwell 21). Chekhov’s development of the adultery theme has, again, no dramatic collision and tragic endings. Through the discovery of true love, Gurov is changed, not in relation to society, but in relation to his inner life.

III

So far we have examined in both cases of Duffy and Gurov how love affairs can bring about self-discovery as well as spiritual regeneration. Duffy is an extreme case of egotism. A chance encounter with a woman, however, challenges his solipsism in which he hid himself thus far. A bachelor banker in Dublin comes to know Mrs. Sinico and is consoled by her warm, earthy, maternal companionship. Duffy enjoys dating her but hopes to keep it strictly intellectual. When Mrs. Sinico tries for more, Duffy suddenly breaks from her. He abhors any physical contact with woman. Four years later, Duffy’s self-discovery comes too late when he hears of Mrs.

Sinico's sudden death. Feeling the nearness of the deceased, he admits his wrongdoing and poignantly feels his stark solitude. Limited though it may seem (Werner 53), this extreme egoist experiences spiritual purification at the narrative's end.

Gurov is not conventionally moralistic but his story suggests a highly personal morality. Gurov ignored his liaison with Anna as a chance encounter and thought he would soon forget about it. Back in Moscow, however, Gurov realizes that he cannot tolerate living a lie. He finds himself intolerant of the Moscow social life, a life of being "in a madhouse or a convict settlement" (Chekhov 229). This is the moment of Gurov's internal crisis which is considered the climax of the story. This dramatic moment brings about Gurov's moral regeneration. Realizing that he truly loves Anna, Gurov finds that he has underestimated his own moral character thus far. He learns that he is not the cynical, irresponsible lover that he thought he was. He not only feels remorse for having placed Anna in an unhappy situation but recognizes Anna's true emotions towards him. For the first time, Gurov learns a moral lesson regarding his attitudes towards women in general. He has always despised women, regarding them as the "inferior race." But throughout the story he learns to care more about another human being, Anna, and regards her as a true soul mate. Once Gurov had discovered true love, he yearns for "higher aims of life" and "human dignity" (Chekhov 226). Going further, Gurov is ready for embracing struggles to keep their love alive in the real world. Like Anna, Gurov is disgusted with his boring and deceitful marriage which has bothered him for very long until he finds Anna and his unexpected feelings for her. Chekhov neither romanticizes nor condemns the illicit love affair between Gurov and Anna. He simply presents it as a chance for Gurov to examine his meaningless, deceitful life and to undergo an internal transformation. (Once Chekhov suggested that the writer's job is "to depict only who, how, and under what circumstances people have spoken or thought" [Mathewson 95].) Both Gurov and Duffy are "changed for the better" through the painful discovery of true love and self. Love affairs unexpectedly brought self-regeneration to both of them otherwise impossible.

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Abstract

A Love Affair as Regeneration:
Comparing Joyce's Duffy and Chekhov's Gurov

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Feelings of love come suddenly to two aging men. The manners in which their affairs develop differ from each other but the lessons they take from them are similar. When Gurov started dating Anna in Yalta, he was not serious nor did he care about Anna's fear and hesitation. He simply took advantage of Anna's innocence and loneliness. When Anna left for her husband, Gurov felt little regret, making sure she would soon be forgotten. She was just one of the women with whom he had had trysts, however, Gurov is surrounded by Anna's presence and starts searching for her. Another encounter with her in Moscow raises his awareness, revealing his true self as well as Anna's. He admits the mysteries of other people and accepts Anna with sympathy. The regenerating power of love cleanses his soul and Gurov steps confidently toward their future, no matter where it leads. Duffy, a bachelor in Dublin, meets Mrs. Sinico at a concert and they befriend each other. Surprised by Mrs. Sinico's physical advance, Duffy halts their liaison because he fears physical contact with women. The news of Mrs. Sinico's suicide brings Duffy a chance to confront his egotism, to feel remorse toward her, and recognize the cold reality of his solitude. At the end of each narrative, both Gurov and Duffy gain spiritual regeneration through purifying love.

■ **Key words** : love affair, Gurov, Duffy, regeneration

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