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## **A Marriage Proposal (The Proposal)**

by **Anton Chekov** ([Anton Pavlovitch Tchekhov](#))



**Anton Chekhov** was a **Russian** playwright and short-story writer, was born in **1860** in **Taganrog**, located **south in Russia**.

**Born:** 1860, Taganrog; **Profession:** Playwright, Writer; **Nationality:** Russia.

### **Important Dates-**

1860	Born in Taranrog, Russia
1867-68	Taranrog grammar school
1868-79	Educated at a school for Greek boys, Taranrog
1879-84	Moscow University Medical School
1884	Graduated as doctor
1887	First-produced play, Ivanov
1888	Recipient: Pushkin Prize
1890	Traveled to Sakhalin Island
1901	Married the actress Olga Knipper
1884-92	Practice doctor in Moscow
1897	Suffered severe haemorrhage of the lungs

1898	First collaborated with Nemirovich Danchenko, Stanislavsky, and the Moscow Art Theater, on a revival of Chayka (The Seagull)
1892-99	Practice doctor in Melikohovo
After 1899	Moved for reasons of ill-health to Yalta
1899	Member, Imperial Academy of Sciences
1904	Died in Badenweiler, Germany

**Chekhov was devoted to the relief work during the 1892 famine.**

1. As an author, a playwright and a physician, Anton Chekhov lived throughout the **early revolutionary phase of Russia in the late nineteenth**. While Anton Chekhov did not consider himself a socialist, and is viewed by many of his readers as a non-political writer, it is apparent that there are many political themes in his works. Living in Russia during the time of the empire, one would indisputably be shaped by its culture, characterized by an oppressive government and revolutionary socialist ideas. Chekhov contributes to this pattern as he writes with **implicit socialist themes**, sometimes in historical context, and sociological nonfiction, which demonstrates the effect of his country on his philosophy as he **longs for a more liberal lifestyle**.
2. Chekhov lived in the time of the Russian Empire, ruled by **Alexander II**, the period before the revolution and Lenin's communist government.
3. Chekhov explicitly states his political views on freedom in his nonfiction compilation of letters, *Letters of Anton Chekhov*.
4. His plays *The Sea Gull* and *The Cherry Orchard* examine the repercussions of the **emancipation of the serfs in 1861**.

*(The 1861 Emancipation Manifesto proclaimed the emancipation of the serfs on private estates and of the domestic (household) serfs. ... The serfs were emancipated in 1861, The reform effectively abolished serfdom throughout the Russian Empire.)*

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### **The Sea Gull-**

1. In *The Sea Gull*, Chekhov embodies this **socialist theme** in his **protagonist Nina**, an aspiring actress from the Russian countryside. Throughout the play Nina evolves from a rural farm girl to a dedicated traveling actress. Nina's situation at home is representative of the **oppression of the Russian people under the Russian Empire and its emperors as "her father and stepmother watch her so closely"** that, for her lover Constantine it is as if he is "stealing her from a prison to get her away from her home" (Chekhov, *The Sea Gull*, 1.3).

2. According to Marx and Hegel's philosophy, employed here by Chekhov, to make this transition and thus, to progress, Nina must go through a **conflict**. In the second act of the play, Nina falls for famous writer, Boris Trigorin, ending her relationship with Constantine and thereby causing him to fall into a deep depression, from which even great success cannot release him. In between the third and fourth act is where Nina is truly tested; she moves to the city to pursue her acting career, has a love affair with Trigorin, becomes pregnant, and following the birth, her baby dies.
3. As Marx and Hegel would have proposed, **Nina has progressed due to her hardships**. She has developed insofar that, in the final act, she comes back to find closure with Constantine, and despite his struggle he has not progressed (demonstrated by his suicide contrary to his success), which establishes **Nina's evolution**. As she attempts to find closure with her former lover, the fact that she knows she "shall feel better after this" confirms once and for all her progress after her struggle (4.53).
4. The most explicit references to the oppression of the Russian empire on its citizens and the socialist reaction to its tyranny are made in his **nonfiction compilation of letters entitled: *Letters of Anton Chekhov to His Family and Friends***.
5. Chekhov acts as a sociologist as he examines the Amur countries and sees their populations as "**independent, self-reliant and logical**" and writes with a yearning tone. Chekhov criticizes the Russian government for its "**distrust of the natural sciences**."
6. ***The Telephone***, written in 1886, is one example of Chekhov's sense of humor.
7. In 1888, Chekhov published his long story in the highly acclaimed ***Severny vestnik* {Northern Herald}**. His long story, ***The Steppe***, marked the end of Chekhov's production of light pieces. This **autobiographical** work featured a child's impressions of trip in the Ukraine.
8. Shortly after his success as a serious writer, Chekhov presented his first drama, ***Ivanov* {1889}**. His older brother, Nikolay, died that same year of tuberculosis. This play is very **heavy and morbid**. It is a study of the spirit of the terminally ill and ends with the lead character, a young man, committing suicide.

9. As a medical doctor, Chekov participated in the **first effort to perform a census on Sakhalin Island**. He interviewed and treated thousands of political and criminal prisoners and settlers over the course of three months. Shocked by what he saw, he wrote a book titled *The Island of Sakhalin* documenting his experiences.
10. As a result of Chekhov's work on the census and book, people observed, Russian society was confronted with their first exposure to the terrible living conditions and treatment of prisoners and settlers on the island. Back home at his country estate, Melikhovo, he built schools and hospitals for the poor and continually treated patients. In his hometown of Taganrog he supplied books for public libraries, and endowed institutions that provided basic education for the needy.
11. He told his readers how difficult the life of a Russian was, he never forced upon them his own personal way of overcoming this difficult reality.
12. Chekhov suggested that his fellow Russians should make their own personal choices and solve their own moral dilemmas.
13. Chekhov's **lack of directness** opened him up to criticism and misunderstanding,
14. Chekhov is most famous for his plays including *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* and for such stories as "The Lady With the Little Dog" and "The Huntsman."
15. His **Wood Demon** (1888–89) is a long four-act play, converted—largely by cutting—into *Dyadya Vanya* (**Uncle Vanya**), one of his greatest stage masterpieces. The conversion—to a superb study of aimlessness in a rural manor house—took place sometime between 1890 and 1896; the play was published in 1897.
16. Chekhov is famed as a master of the short story. Although some of his best prose pieces are almost novel length, the stories, as well as his better-known short works, achieve their effect with a minimum of artistic means. All of Chekhov's best work is an illustration of his dictum or statement: **"Conciseness is the sister of talent."** Chekhov's plays deal with the passing of the vitality of the Russian gentry.

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17. Historically, Russian authors have been prominent commentators on society and politics, **Alexander Pushkin**. At a time in Russian history when writers were predominantly aristocrats, Pushkin became the first literary figure to establish writing as a profession. Malaev-Babel described how **Pushkin emerged as an influential figure following the rise of the Decembrist movement and its subsequent exile**. Pushkin wrote in defense of Tsar Nicholas I—but also in support of the Decembrists' ideals of freedom. He continued to combine social commentary with his art and established himself as a vital voice in Russian society. Upon Pushkin's death, the tsar, concerned by the potential for political demonstrations at the funeral, ordered Pushkin to be buried in secret

**Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin** (1799 –1837) was a Russian poet, playwright, and novelist of the Romantic era who is considered by many to be the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature.

Pushkin recited his controversial poem "Ode to Liberty", one of several that led to his exile by Tsar Alexander I of Russia. Pushkin wrote his most famous play, the drama Boris Godunov. His novel in verse, Eugene Onegin, was serialized between 1825 and 1832.

18. **Nikolai Gogol** intended his novel Dead Souls to be the first book in a trilogy that would "restore Russia's soul."
19. **Leo Tolstoy** is best known for the novels War and Peace (1869) and Anna Karenina (1877),

