

# A.S. PUSHKIN AND THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE



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**Abstract:** 'Love' happens to be an important theme of A.S.Pushkin's works and consequently women occupy an important place in his works. Pushkin does not consider woman just as an object of love. She is pure, pious, beautiful, genius, source of inspiration for him. In his personal life Pushkin was attracted to many women, who loved him, his talent, and his brilliance. But he did not publicly make fun of them or ridicule them after a certain love affair got over. More than love, it was the bond of marriage between a man and a woman, which was pious to Pushkin. He held this bond in high esteem and many a times tried to demonstrate how sacred the institution of marriage is for a woman, how faithful she is to her husband and how a husband too fights to save the dignity of a married woman and goes to the extent of not only sacrificing his life but even after death he safeguards the honour of his wife. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore Pushkin's attitude towards the Institution of Marriage in general and his heroines in particular.

**Keywords:** Love, marriage, institution, pious, honor, sacrifice

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in particular.

I have chosen six works of Pushkin for this purpose out of which his masterpiece *Eugene Onegin* was written during (1823-1831). While he was busy with *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin also wrote *A Romance in Letters* (1829), *Tales of Ivan Petrovich Belkin* (Sept – Oct 1831), *Small Tragedies* (Nov 1831). *Dubrovsky* was completed in 1833. While *Eugene Onegin* (the first Russian realistic novel) and *The Stony Guest* (from the *Small Tragedies*) are written in verses, the remaining works: *The Station Master*, *Snow Storm*, *The Young Peasant Woman* and *Dubrovsky* are written in prose.

Though *Eugene Onegin* is considered as the true picture of high society of Pushkin's time, the relationship between Tatyana and Eugene represents Pushkin's views about love, marriage and the Institution of marriage. But before we look into the tragedy of Eugene Onegin, let us stop for a while at the station where old Samson Vyrin, Dunya's father is working as 'The Station Master'. Dunya – the young, beautiful, intelligent daughter of a petty, class fourteen government servant was abducted by the hussar – Minsky. The father, unaware of Dunya's desire to elope with Minsky and her attempt to change her future for the better, keeps worrying about his daughter. He even goes to Petersburg and requests Minsky to give him back his daughter, but Minsky refuses by saying that they love each other. Begging for pardon from Samson Vyrin, Minsky promises that he would never leave Dunya, but the old man remained apprehensive about her future until his death. He knows that 'she is not the first, nor will she be the last to be abducted by these young men, and who, today live in all comforts but tomorrow sweep the streets of Petersburg.' He prefers death for Dunya, rather than living such a disgraceful life. In this story, apart from the theme of 'the little, poor, exploited man', the theme of love between Dunya and Minsky as well occupies an important place and Pushkin, unlike the old father of Dunya, chooses a happy end for this love. At the end of the story, after Samson Vyrin's death, a rich lady with three kids and a nurse comes in a troika and pays her homage to the old man at his grave. It was Dunya.

So, Pushkin does not like love just for love's sake, for enjoyment's sake, he wants to see it cemented in the bond of marriage irrespective of the lovers' financial status. By showing marriage between Minsky and Dunya Pushkin has proved this.

While Dunya was daughter of a poor, illiterate station master, the heroine of 'Romance in Letters' – Liza, though from a noble family, is also poor. She rushes to her grandmother in their native village when she notices that young and rich Vladimir has fallen for her. Afraid that he would not marry her because of her poverty, she evades him, but Vladimir follows her to the village. He is impressed by her beauty and intelligence and marries her. Thus, we see that Pushkin is interested in converting love into marriage.

But the lovers do not always manage to get married. If the girl is married to some other person, how does she react to it? In the *Young Peasant Woman*, Aleksei and Akulina are in love with each other, while their parents dislike each other. Alyosha's father Berestov and Akulina's father Muromsky (who in reality is Liza's father) hate each other. Liza has heard a lot about Alyosha and in order to meet him, she goes to the forest in the guise of a peasant woman Akulina. Alyosha starts loving her and Akulina too reciprocates. It so happens, that Berestov

and Muromsky, who were enemies till yesterday, become good friends and decide that their children should be married to each other. Alyoshka is invited to Muromsky along with his father and Liza, scared that her secret would be out, puts on funny make up on her face, dresses up ridiculously, so Alyosha fails to recognize her. He decides to tell Muromsky that he cannot marry the latter's daughter and goes to him the next day. As soon as he enters the house, he sees his Akulina reading his letter in the drawing room. The riddle is solved and they are married. But the heroine of *Snow Storm*, Masha Gavrilovna, has to face a lot of trauma before she is united to her husband – not to her lover. The story is like this:

Masha Gavrilovna loves Vladimir and knowing that her parents will not agree to her marriage with poor Vladimir, hatches a plan. Masha and Vladimir decide to meet in the old church and get married secretly. Masha reaches there in a carriage sent by Vladimir, but Vladimir loses his way due to severe snow storm and cannot reach the church in time. Next morning, when he reaches there, he does not find anyone. Masha comes back to her house and falls sick. Thus pass four years. Her father dies and she goes to her native village. Masha does not want to marry any one, and Burmin, the protagonist, loves her so much that she starts feeling some affection for him. But Burmin never proposes to her. On the eve of his departure from the village, he confessed to her that he was married, but he does not know who his wife is, nor does he know whether he will ever be able to see her. It so happened that four years ago, on a stormy night, he lost his way and while looking for a shelter, spots some light nearby and goes there. It was an old church. As soon as he entered the church, the people present over there exclaim: 'Oh God, good that you reached in time or the bride would have collapsed. He is married to a young girl present there, he also does not refuse and when they were asked to kiss each other, the girl looked at his face and screamed: 'It is not Him' and she fell unconscious. Burmin came out from there and went his way. He did not know who the girl was, which village or which church it was. He had taken the whole thing in a very light way, but somewhere, deep in his heart, he had the feeling that he was married and this feeling prevented him from proposing to Masha or to any other girl. As soon as Burmin finished his story, Masha exclaimed: "so, it was you! And you did not recognize me?" Now Burmin carefully looked at her and the next moment he was at her feet.

Here we see that though the marriage took place like in a game, like in a dream, though there were no witnesses, both, the husband and the wife, remained faithful to each other. Neither Burmin married any other girl, nor did Masha contact her lover Vladimir, nor did Vladimir ever meet her. So, the bond of marriage had a sacred meaning for Pushkin and his characters never thought of being unfaithful to each other.

Heroines of *Eugene Onegin* and *Dubrovsky* also act in the same way. When Tatyana Larina, who expresses her love to Onegin, is rejected by him, she gets married to another noble person. Eugene, a play boy that he was, does not find her attractive. After killing his friend Lensky in a duel, he goes away from that village and meets Tatyana in Moscow, after a few years, at a ball. This time he is shocked by her beauty and starts following her. He even writes a few letters to her expressing his love, but Tatyana never answers them. Ultimately, unable to bear the trauma, Onegin rushes to her house and finds her alone there. He falls at her feet, now Tatyana asks him, "Then – in the village – you rejected my love. You did not see anything special in me then. What is it now that drags you towards me? Is it the wealth, or my position in the society,

or my husband's status? But, though I still love you, I am betrothed to someone else and I shall always remain faithful to him".

Heroine of *Dubrovsky* – Masha (Maria Kirilovna) – also meets the same fate. When the two best friends, Kirill Petrovich Troekurov and Andrei Gavrilovich Dubrovsky turned into enemies, Troekurov confiscates the whole estate of Dubrovsky pleading that it had belonged him since ages. Andrei Gavrilovich dies and his son Vladimir Andreevich Dubrovsky, unable to find a shelter, turns into a dacoit. He comes to Troekurov house in the guise of French teacher with the sole aim of taking revenge upon him, but instead, falls in love with Masha. When Troekurov comes to know about the real identity of the French teacher, Dubrovsky goes away, taking a promise from Masha that she will be his, and in case of any emergency send a message to Dubrovsky, who would come to her rescue.

Things take an unexpected turn, an old noble man, proposes to Masha. Her father is too happy to accept the offer. Masha sends word to Dubrovsky, who comes to her rescue, but it was too late! The marriage ceremony was already over and when Dubrovsky attacks the people accompanying the bride and groom to their village and tells Masha, "You are free!" she answers, : No. It is too late now. I am married, I am Vereisky's wife."

"What are you saying?" screamed Dubrovsky, "no, you are not his wife you were forced to marry him, you never agreed..."

"I did agree. I have taken oath," she protested in firm voice, "Vereisky is my husband, please ask your men to free him, and leave me with him. I did not deceive. I waited for you till the last minute...But now, I say, it's too late. Leave us!"

Once given in marriage to someone, Pushkin's heroine remains faithful to him not only during his lifetime, but even after his death she does not forget him. *Stony Guest* is the story of Dona Anna, who after her husband Don Alvar was killed by Don Guan, goes to the church every evening and prays before the statue of Don Alvar. Don Guan by chance sees her and starts loving her.

Though poor Dona Anna was asked to marry rich Don Alvar by her mother, she remained faithful to him. But Don Guan manages to get an invitation from her and expresses his love! Before visiting Dona Anna, he, in an ironical way, invites the 'statue' also to come to Dona Anna's house. Don Guan goes to Dona Anna and when he was about to kiss her, the statue enters the room declaring that he has come on the invitation extended to him, commands Don Guan to leave Dona Anna and orders Don Guan to shake hands with him. Don Guan, unable to free himself from the grip of stony statue, collapses. Thus Dona Anna's honour is saved by the statue of her husband.

Here we see another dimension to the Institution of Marriage.

For Pushkin, faithfulness of wife alone is not enough. He has shown that the Man tries his best to save the sanctity of Marriage; he protects his wife during his lifetime, as well as after his death. *Stony Guest* is a good example of man's devotion to his wife. And why only *Stony Guest*, we have seen that Lensky calls Eugene Onegin for a duel, when Onegin tried to win over

Tanya, to whom Lensky was engaged. Tanya was the symbol of his prestige, which he could not manage to lose, and gets killed in the duel, for the sake of her.

Minsky, for the same reason, refuses to give back Samson Vyryin his daughter Dunya and Burmister declares that he can't marry Masha Gavrilovna as he was already married to someone by accident whose face also he does not remember.

It is worth noticing that Pushkin's views about the Institution of Marriage were not confined to his literary works alone, they were precious to him as well, and that's why he called Dantes for the duel on knowing about the rumours of his affair with Pushkin's wife. Ironically, Pushkin too sacrificed his life to save the honour of his wife!

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### A.С.Пушкин и идея брака

**Аннотация:** *Любовь - важная тема творчества А.С.Пушкина, и следовательно, женщины занимают важное место в его произведениях. Пушкин рассматривает женщину не как объект любви. Она для него чиста, богородица, прекрасна, гениальна, источник вдохновения. В личной жизни Пушкина привлекало много женщин, которые любили его, его талант, его гениальность. Но он не высмеивал их публично и не издевался над ними после того, как та или иная любовь угасала. Больше, чем любовь, для Пушкина были благочестивы узы брака между мужчиной и женщиной. Он высоко ценил эти узы и много раз пытался показать, насколько свят институт брака для женщины, насколько она верна своему мужу и как муж также борется за сохранение достоинства замужней женщины и идет не только на жертву своей жизни, но и защищает честь жены после смерти. В данной работе предпринята попытка изучить отношение Пушкина к идее брака в целом и к его героиням в частности.*

**Ключевые слова:** *любовь, брак, институт, благочестие, честь, жертвование*