

ABSTRACT

A Director's Approach to Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*

Rebecca Susan Johnson, M.F.A.

Thesis Chairperson: David J. Jortner, Ph.D.

This thesis examines the production process of the 2010 Baylor University Theatre production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* from the perspective of the director. This production highlighted the themes of art, love, and longing for fulfillment within the play. The study is broken into five chapters providing an overview of the production process. Chapter one provides a biographical overview of Chekhov's life, a brief production history of *The Seagull*, and a literary review of critical material about the play. Chapter two contains a detailed analysis of *The Seagull*, examining the given circumstances, structure, themes, and characters of the play. Chapter three follows the conceptual and design process of the production. Chapter four details the rehearsal process of *The Seagull*, focusing on the director's work with actors. Finally, chapter five provides a critical reflection of the final production and an analytical discussion of the director's work throughout the process.

A Director's Approach to Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*

by

Rebecca Susan Johnson, B.F.A.

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Stan C. Denman, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

David J. Jortner, Ph.D., Chairperson

DeAnna M. Toten Beard, M.F.A., Ph.D.

Marion D. Castleberry, Ph.D.

Stan C. Denman, Ph.D.

Michael B. Long, Ph.D.

Steven C. Pounders, M.F.A.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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CHAPTER ONE

The Playwright and the Play

Anton Chekhov's 1895 masterpiece *The Seagull* is a play about longing, centered on the characters' search for fulfillment in a world where happiness seems an illusory dream. The characters investigate who they are as artists and how to create meaningful art, as well as question the nature of love and struggle to find gratifying love. Through the characters' endless yearning, Chekhov questions whether or not significant art and love are even possible in this bleak world. While the characters outwardly clash with one other in their desire for approval and love, the play is largely about the characters' inner conflict with themselves. In *The Seagull*, Chekhov unfurls this conflict from moment-to-moment, each small revelation contributing to the total impact of the play. Chekhov synthesizes story, character, and theme by subverting traditional dramatic plot structure, building a web of cross-relationships. This study focuses on the coalescence of story, character, and theme through the protagonist, Konstantin.

In January of 2010, I directed Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* at Baylor University. The production was intentionally high concept, using expressionist devices and overt theatricality to highlight the themes of art, love, and the life of the writer. This thesis chronicles the production process through research, conceptual and design work, and rehearsals, to opening night in five chapters. Chapter one includes information about the play and the playwright, as well as a production history of the play and a review of literature. Chapter two contains a director's analysis of *The Seagull* including a thorough plot synopsis, and an analysis of the given circumstances, structure, thematic content, and

characters of the play. Chapter three follows the narrative of the design process and conceptual choices made during pre-production, including my collaboration with designers and their work on the sets, costumes, lighting, and sound. Chapter four consists of a detailed account of the rehearsal process including auditions, casting, and my collaboration with the actors in rehearsal, as well as my work in technical and dress rehearsals for the production. Chapter five contains a critical self-evaluation of my work throughout the process of the production.

History and Biographical Analysis

Equal parts excitement and dread composed the mood backstage at the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) on the opening night of *The Seagull*, December 17, 1898. The play had been produced before, by the Aleksandrinsky Theatre; however, the production was such a debacle that Chekhov had sworn off the theatre altogether. Perhaps because of this initial failure, the MAT actors' nervous tension was palpable. They had taken valerian drops to calm their fears. There were careers at stake, including both the future of the MAT and the playwright, Anton Chekhov. As the actors bustled about before the curtain rose in Moscow, the apprehensive playwright awaited news of the play's reception in Yalta. Already at an advanced stage of tuberculosis, Chekhov was exiled to warmer climates for the winter months and was unable to attend the opening. Masha, Chekhov's sister, begged the producers to call off the play, because she felt a second failure would have major consequences on his already delicate health (Troyat 219).

Meanwhile in Moscow, the audience waited for the play to begin. While biographers disagree about whether or not the house was "far from full" or completely sold out with "carriages jamming the street," an atmosphere of tension certainly filled the

theatre (Hingley 244; Rayfield 479). Konstantin Stanislavsky, who in addition to directing the production was also playing Trigorin, was so anxious that the audience could see his leg shaking during the first act (Hingley 245). Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, co-founder of the Moscow Theatre, described the end of the first act in his memoirs:

Something occurred which can occur in the theatre only once in a decade: the curtain closed, and there was silence, complete silence, both in the auditorium and on stage; it was as though everyone held his breath, as though no one quite understood. [...] This mood lasted quite a long time, so long indeed that those on stage had decided the first act had failed, failed so completely that not a single friend in the audience dared applaud. A nervous chill close to hysteria seized the actors. Then, suddenly, it was as if a dam had burst or a bomb had exploded—all at once there was a deafening crash of applause from everyone, friends and enemies. (Troyat 219)

Though Nemirovich-Danchenko's retelling may be hyperbolic due to his investment in the production, opening night was by everyone's account a success. Stanislavsky was so pleased that he did a victory jig onstage (Hingley 245).

The audience insisted that a telegram be sent to the author, and Nemirovich-Danchenko complied sending, "colossal success mad with happiness" (Rayfield 479). Chekhov wired back, "Tell everyone am infinitely, deeply grateful. [...] Your telegram has made me healthy and well" (Troyat 220). Soon *The Seagull* was playing to packed crowds and many waited in line outside the box office all night to get tickets (Troyat 220). The success of the production would secure Chekhov's place as a preeminent Russian dramatist and create a fruitful collaboration with the MAT, who would adopt the seagull as their emblem.

Due to Chekhov's importance as both a dramatist and a writer of short fiction, a lot of ink has been spilt on the subject of Chekhov's life and art. This analysis of *The Seagull* begins by examining the past, particularly some of the vast material that has been written about Chekhov's biography. Then I will discuss notable productions of *The Seagull* over the past one hundred years, and provide an overview of some of the scholarship that has been written about Chekhov and *The Seagull*. The study of history leads to a grounded understanding of a play which can inform a director's production choices. This section begins with an overview of Chekhov's life and his career as a writer, with a critical focus on the biographies of Donald Rayfield, Henri Troyat, and Ronald Hingley. These biographies represent Chekhov scholarship from three different decades, and provide three different perspectives on Chekhov's life. Rayfield offers the most comprehensive study of Chekhov's life through the revelation of new material, while Troyat supplies an idealistic view of Chekhov's life, and Hingley attempts to examine Chekhov's inner life.

Donald Rayfield's massive and thorough biography, *Anton Chekhov: A Life* (1997), utilizes a large quantity of previously unpublished sources to bring a new perspective on Chekhov's life. Anton Chekhov's complete works and some five thousand of his letters were published in thirty one volumes in Russia between 1973 and 1983 (Rayfield xvi). However, the majority of his correspondence in these volumes was censored by Russian editors; especially intimate passages about his love life, swear words, or anything "unbefitting the image of a Great Man" (Hingley xv). While most of Chekhov's biographers have all relied on these same vast, but incomplete, published sources, Rayfield uses a wealth of previously unpublished material found in the

Manuscript Department of the Russian State Library (Rayfield xvi). He also makes use of other biographical material that has lain untapped in various other archives throughout Russia (xvi). Donald Rayfield asserts that this material has remained hidden because it “discredits or vulgarizes” Chekhov (xvii). Rayfield feels that these letters do not disgrace Chekhov, but rather reveal the “complexity, selflessness and depth of the man,” one with both “human strengths and failings” (xvii).

Rayfield asserts that previous Chekhov biographers tried to paint him as a saint, and Rayfield’s goal was to present Chekhov as a complete human being, including his flaws (xv). Rayfield seems to focus on this new and sometimes “scandalous” material, and often to his detriment. He includes the details of Chekhov’s numerous love affairs with actresses and romps through the brothels, his bodily functions, and the toll his debilitating disease had on his body with unwarranted gusto. While Rayfield’s biography is certainly the most complete study of Chekhov’s life available, his obsession with revealing Chekhov’s dirty secrets feels invasive. However, Rayfield’s work is fascinating and his revelation of the complexity and depth of Chekhov’s many love affairs is especially enlightening.

In contrast, Henri Troyat could be accused of the idealizing which Rayfield wanted so badly to avoid. Troyat’s biography, *Chekhov* (1986), portrays Chekhov as a man who rose from nothing to a prominent place in literature, cared for his family unconditionally, and lived alone until he was swept off his feet by the love of his life. Additionally, Troyat often relies on Chekhov’s short stories to support assertions about his family background or behavior, instead of using correspondence. Even though these claims are not necessarily factual, Troyat clearly connects Chekhov’s literature and

characters with his life. While Troyat's biography is less comprehensive than Rayfield's, his straightforward style and storytelling skills make *Chekhov* read more like a novel, with heroic Chekhov as the focus, than a dry biography listing the facts.

Ronald Hingley's *A New Life of Anton Chekhov* (1976) is an updated version of his previous biography, published in 1950. Hingley's work provides an older perspective on Chekhovian scholarship, which relies on the previously discussed thirty one volumes of Chekhov's work and letters. Hingley admits that many of the letters have been bowdlerized, and the "four letter words" removed (xv). But, even though Hingley works with fewer sources than Rayfield, he takes great care to inform his reader of the source of each anecdote within the biography. Anton's brother, Aleksandr Chekhov's memories and account of their childhood, for example, differ wildly from Masha Chekhov's (7). Hingley also, unlike Rayfield and Troyat, attempts to unveil some of the mysteries of the Chekhov's inner life, including his lack of political convictions, his changing opinions on love and marriage, and his simultaneous love and hatred of both medicine and the theatre. While he provides his reader with a clear account of his sources, Hingley's endeavor to uncover Chekhov's motivations and draw unfounded conclusions makes his scholarship more old fashioned.

The biographies of Rayfield, Troyat, and Hingley provide a varied and fascinating picture of Anton Chekhov's life from three different decades of Chekhov scholarship. While each of these biographies, and their sometimes conflicting accounts, was useful, Rayfield's dense and thorough accounts of Chekhov's life provided by far the most material for analysis. Rayfield's inclusion of additional primary sources, including

countless letters from Chekhov himself, provides a more personal account of Chekhov's life than either Troyat or Hinley.

The main themes of *The Seagull*, including art and writing, love and heartache, and the inevitability of sickness and melancholy, are all mirrored in Chekhov's own life. Anton Chekhov's biography is fairly well known, therefore this study will highlight aspects of his life that are prevalent in his writing, especially *The Seagull*, and focus on them extensively. This summary examines his life story through thematic elements present in the play, including Chekhov's relationship with illness and depression, his medical career, the many loves of his life, and his prolific career as a writer in this brief biographical study.

Illness and Depression

Anton Chekhov's writing strongly featured characters suffering from depression, including Konstantin and Masha in *The Seagull*. And Chekhov himself suffered from feelings of depression, as well as tuberculosis, for the majority of his life. Well aware of his imminent death, he attempted to ignore his illness until the attacks began to interfere with his ability to travel and write. Additionally, tuberculosis haunted him outside of his own illness; as a doctor he saw countless patients suffering from the "white plague" (Rayfield 198). Several of his family members, including his brother Kolia, and a dozen close friends would also become victims of the disease (198). Kolia's death haunted him for the rest of his life, contributing to his reoccurring bouts of depression. Aleksandr Chekhov recalled how "awful" it was that Anton was the only family member who did not weep at Kolia's funeral; Rayfield attributes this coldness to Anton Chekhov's fear that "his grief might turn to self-pity" (199).

Perhaps partially because of his illness, Chekhov was plagued by feelings of depression throughout his life. Kolia's painful death troubled him, and had "convinced him that the absolute was unknowable and man's destiny opened onto a void" (Troyat 110). Sometimes he seemed to long for death. He wrote to his friend and publisher Alexei Suvorin, "In January I'm turning thirty. Hail lonely old age; burn, useless life" (113). His preoccupation with death was only a small part of Chekhov's feelings of melancholy. Like many of his characters, Chekhov often felt anxious and depressed. He wrote to his editor Nikolai Leikin, "For three weeks I've yielded to a cowardly melancholy; I've no desire to go outdoors, can't keep a pen in my hand—in a word, nerves, which you don't believe in. I've been so distraught I haven't been able to get a stitch of work done" (82). Chekhov saw his own feelings of melancholy mirrored in the unhappy people he saw around him, and in all of humanity. He wrote in a letter,

I'm leading a gray life, with nary a happy soul in sight. [...] Everybody has a hard life. Whenever I give it serious thought, I feel that people who have an aversion to death are illogical. As far as I can make out the order of things, life consists of nothing but horrors, squabbles, and banalities, one after the other and intermingled. (83)

Chekhov's pessimistic viewpoint on mankind's ability to enjoy life fills his writing; many of his characters share his boredom and depression.

Even success failed to elevate Chekhov's mood. He disliked praise and accolades for his work. On opening night of *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov was not present—as usual, avoiding any potential failure or public humiliation (Hingley 303). However, in the middle of the performance, he was called to the theatre by Nemirovich-Danchenko and pulled onstage, where he had to endure endless speeches in praise of his work, but he didn't enjoy one minute of it. The next day he wrote, "Yesterday my play

was on, so I'm in a bad mood" (304). He managed to miss all of the other opening nights of his plays at the MAT, sometimes simply because he got on a train and fled the city rather than face his reviews (303).

Chekhov's difficult childhood certainly contributed to his illness and depression. He was born and raised in Taganrog, a provincial port town in southern Russia. Chekhov's father, Pavel, would force him to work late into the night by himself in the family shop. Chekhov tried to complete his homework while working, but often it was so cold in the shop that his ink would freeze (Troyat 3). Additionally, Chekhov recalled his father as a dictator in a letter to his brother Aleksander, saying: "Tyranny and lies crippled our childhood so much that it makes me sick and afraid to remember. Remember the horror and revulsion we felt in those days when father would flare up because the soup was over-salted, or would curse mother for a fool" (Rayfield 17). Through many financial difficulties, Pavel Chekhov was forced to not only close the family business, but also sell their home. With many debts to repay, Pavel fled to Moscow, where his brothers were in school, and the rest of the Chekhov's would shortly follow (41). All of them, that is, except for Anton and his younger brother Vania, who wanted to finish school. Chekhov stayed in the family home with the new owner, Gavriil Selivanov (42). For the next three years while Chekhov finished his schooling, he was left alone by his family, an extraordinarily solitary way to grow up (51). Chekhov's isolation in Taganrog was bearable until he visited Moscow. Once Chekhov had returned to Taganrog he realized that he would never be happy there again. Like his fiction *Three Sisters*, Chekhov longed for Moscow (Troyat 35). As an adult, Chekhov blamed his indifference towards others on the lack of affection he received as a child, saying "So

little affection came my way as a child that I treat caresses as something unfamiliar, and almost beyond my ken, now that I'm grown up. That's why I just can't show fondness for others, much as I'd like to" (Hingley 9).

In the spring of 1890, Chekhov travelled across the frozen tundra to the Sakhalin penal colony in Siberia, a journey that likely contributed to his melancholy and pessimistic view of humanity. He voluntarily vowed to make the long and arduous trip, from which he thought he might not return, as a means to discipline himself and withdraw from his recent failures, as well as to collect data for a book (Rayfield 215). Biographer Rayfield suggests that he travelled mostly as an attempt to flee Kolia's ghost (218). Once he arrived at his destination, Chekhov spent several months conducting a census of over 10,000 of the inhabitants of Sakhalin (231). At the penal colony, Chekhov witnessed horrific acts of police brutality, floggings, and he saw children with no opportunities for education or proper medical care (231).

Upon his return, he claimed that the "hell of Sakhalin" left him with a "bad sensation": the island had made him feel queasy, as if from eating rancid butter" (Hingley 143). Biographer Troyat states that Chekhov, who had once claimed that a writer should never teach, now proclaimed that "God's world is good. Only one thing in it is bad: we ourselves" (132). He found that his priorities had changed: "Before my journey I found *The Kreutzer Sonata* an event; now I find it ridiculous and incoherent" (132). Sakhalin had provided him with a prospective of what was truly important. According to Ronald Hingley, Chekhov's taxing eight month journey had a significant impact on his literary maturity; however, writer and colleague Ivan Alexeyevich Bunin asserted that the trip was a tragic mistake that claimed many years of his already short life (145).

One of the recurring themes of Chekhov's biography was melancholy and illness. From his lonely childhood, his brother's death, and his eye opening journey to Sakhalin, Chekhov developed a bleak vision of humanity and of life. He endured a slow, painful deterioration of his health over many years, and finally succumbed to tuberculosis before his forty-fifth birthday.

Medicine

While Chekhov had a successful writing career, he also spent many years as a doctor both in Moscow and in the country. In the summer of 1875, Chekhov was to discover his two lifelong loves, medicine and literature. He developed peritonitis on a trip, and was nursed by a doctor so kind that he decided to become one. That same summer his older brothers moved out of the house and on to Moscow, so he began writing a magazine that he called *The Stutterer*, which poked fun at various Taganrog events. He wrote each issue to send to his brothers as well as for his classmates, but Aleksandr wrote to Pavel: "Tell the author of *The Stutterer* that his rag is less interesting than it used to be. It lacks spice" (Troyat 23). Needless to say, Chekhov ceased writing the journal. For the majority of his career Chekhov felt that medicine would be his life-- "I'm a journalist because I write a lot but it's only temporary...I won't die one. If I go on writing it will be from afar, hidden in a crack somewhere" (56). He never felt that he had the talent to truly be a writer (Rayfield 131).

Chekhov financially supported himself during his grueling medical school in Moscow by writing short stories, and then established himself as a practitioner after he graduated. During his studies there were many who doubted him. Ivan Selivanov, a family friend, expressed displeasure at Chekhov's chosen profession, saying: "I read the

letter of a doctor-to-be who in the not too distant future will in the course of his profession be dispatching several dozen people into eternity” (Rayfield 74). Long after he became a famous writer, he still diagnosed and took care of his friends and relatives, as well as the local peasants on his estates. Chekhov said, “Medicine is my lawful wife and literature my mistress; when I get tired of one, I spend the night with the other” (Chekhov and Garnett 99). As his health failed he gave up medicine, though he never abandoned his “wife” entirely (Rayfield 428).

Love and Heartache

Chekhov held a generally pessimistic view of love and marriage, and experienced his share of heartache. Ronald Hingley asserts that Chekhov was preoccupied with the idea “that love inevitably betrays the illusions of bliss which it promises” over the course of his life (Hingley 37). Clearly Chekhov felt that the lovelorn characters in *The Seagull* were fools to invest so much in something so unfulfilling. The illusory nature of love was a common theme in his short stories as well. For example, in *A Nasty Story* a woman has long been expecting a proposal of marriage from her “shy artist-suitor;” after a tense romantic buildup between the two she is distraught when he finally asks her, “my darling, be my—model” (37). Despite his wariness of romantic love, Chekhov was never far from women—from Maria Drossi, who would let him in her bedroom for a payment of twenty kopecks’ worth of sweets, to Olga Knipper, the woman who would finally marry him (Rayfield 33).

Biographer Rayfield asserts that Chekhov was absorbed with the idea of love and marriage for much of his life, though he often expressed skepticism about both (123, 125). Though Chekhov was “ever the best man, never the groom,” he was engaged for a

short time in January of 1886 to one of his sister Masha's friends, Dunya Efros (123).

The engagement was short and stormy. He wrote, "I shall divorce her 1-2 years after the wedding that's certain" (124). Quickly the engagement was broken off completely, and it would be another fifteen years before Chekhov actually married, though his friends encouraged him to settle down. Chekhov seemed to feel that marriage was not a suitable life for a writer. He wrote his friend Suvorin in response to his letters encouraging him to marry:

All right, I'll marry if you want. But I stipulate that everything must be as hitherto: she must live in Moscow and I in the country, and I'll visit her. As for happiness which goes on day in day out, from one morning to another: that I can't stand...I promise to be a superb husband, but give me a wife like the moon; one that won't appear in my sky every day. I shan't write any better for marrying. (Hingley 185)

These feelings did not stop him from carrying on numerous affairs. Hingley suspects that his "success with women lay in an unusually well-developed ability, which they could sense, to manage without them" (184). More than once he used his relationships to fuel his fiction. Like Trigorin, Chekhov found himself storing up the details of his own love life to inspire his writing.

For example, there were a few women in his life who appear in one way or another in *The Seagull*. According to all three biographers discussed above, Chekhov's complicated relationship with Lika Mizinova inspired the character of Nina. While Chekhov never stated that was his intention, his sister, and the gossips in Moscow, all saw the resemblance (195). Chekhov had a long-term romance with Mizinova, and while he was lured by her love and flirted with her incessantly, he told his friends that he had no intention of marrying; his focus was always on his work (Troyat 141). After many

years of cat and mouse, Mizinova tired of pursuing Chekhov and began an affair with the writer and violinist Ignaty Potapenko (164). Potapenko abandoned the pregnant Mizinova to return to his wife, much like the selfish Trigorin in *The Seagull* (Hingley 195). Mizinova's subsequent loss of her child would cement her to Nina and *The Seagull* forever (Troyat 173). However, Chekhov seemed surprised by the likeness in the characters, saying "if it really looks as if it describes Potapenko then it clearly can't be performed or printed" (Hingley 195). The resemblances must have been forgotten by the first performance of the play, and Potapenko himself helped Chekhov get *The Seagull* passed by the censors.

Lydia Avilova, a writer who was a devoted admirer of Chekhov, found herself being mocked in *The Seagull*. Avilova even wrote a book about their "relationship," which Hingley characterized as mostly fabricated from her "delusionary fantasies" (196). Nevertheless, the two did meet several times, at masked balls and other parties, and exchanged letters. She sent him a medallion inscribed with the title of one of Chekhov's books, and a page and line number. After looking up the lines she indicated Chekhov found the line "If you ever need my life, come take it" (Rayfield 340). Chekhov told Avilova that she would find his answer to the gift when she came to see *The Seagull* (Troyat 191). In the play, Nina gives Trigorin a similarly inscribed medallion which leads Trigorin to the same phrase. After seeing *The Seagull*, Avilova went home and searched through all of Chekhov's works without finding a suitable answer to her medallion. Then she looked through a volume of her own stories which she had sent to Chekhov, and quickly found page one twenty one, lines eleven and twelve: "It is improper for young women to attend masquerades" (191). Clearly, this humorous

rejection note was not the answer that Avilova had hoped for. He felt so callously about the gift and Avilova, that Chekhov eventually gave the medallion to Vera Kommissarzhevskaya, the first actress to play the role of Nina (191).

In addition to Mizinova and Avilova, Chekhov met many other interesting young women who become lovers and friends. He required that women in his life “should be beautiful, elegant, well-dressed, intelligent, witty and amusing; and above all that they should keep their distance” (Hingley 199). Yet, despite his demands to be left alone, Chekhov finally married the MAT actress Olga Knipper in the last few years of his life. He wrote in 1898 to his brother:

As for my marrying...what can I say? There's no point in marrying except for love. To marry a girl just because she's congenial is like buying something in the market not because you need it, but because you like the look of it. The most important thing in family life is love, sexual attraction, being 'one flesh.' All else is unreliable and boring, however ingeniously we may rationalize it. So it's a girl one loves, not a girl one just likes, that's needed.
(239)

And it seemed as though he had finally found a girl he loved in Knipper, one that he believed would bring him more than only fleeting happiness. Anton and Olga's marriage was spent mostly apart, as Anton was confined by his illness to his Yalta estate and Olga continued her career as a successful Moscow Actress. This separation, as well as Olga's flirtation with Vladimir Nemerovich-Danchenko, made their relationship a tempestuous one with anger on both sides (Troyat 282). Additionally, even though they tried Olga and Anton never had a child; Olga became seriously ill after a miscarriage (284, 285).

Their marriage certainly fell short of any romantic illusions that either of them might have had and yet, they committed themselves to each other. Hingley includes an apt passage from Chekhov's story *Concerning Love* to describe the marriage:

So far we've only heard one incontrovertible truth about love: the biblical 'this is a great mystery.' Everything else written and spoken about love has offered no solution, but has just posed questions which have simply remained unanswered. What seems to explain one instance doesn't fit a dozen others. (283)

Hingley suggests that if asked these difficult questions Chekhov and Knipper would have said that "they loved each other, and would not have wished to unscramble their union," and Knipper provided him true love and companionship in his last few years, despite the unconventional nature of their marriage (284).

Chekhov believed that love was ultimately an illusion and unfulfilling, and this point of view pervades his writing. However, despite his aversion to marriage and negative view of the promises of romance, he loved many women over the course of his life. Some of them entranced him, and some of them infuriated him, but they all made an indelible impression on his writing, and many of them appeared as characters in his stories and plays. Though his eventual marriage may have only confirmed his attitude about the deceptive nature of love, his relationship with Olga Knipper brought joy to the final years of his life.

Art and Writing

Chekhov had a prolific writing career as a dramatist and short story writer which culminated in his relationship with the MAT. He focused on the theme of writing and creating art in many of his works, including *The Seagull*. While a comprehensive discussion of his writing would fill volumes this study seeks to give an overview of Chekhov's productive career as an artist. Chekhov was already a well established popular short story writer before he wrote for the stage, and he owes this early success to Alexei Suvorin, the founder and editor in chief of *New Times*. While Chekhov wrote for

journals in both Moscow and in St. Petersburg, like *The Spectator* and *Fragments*, when he met Suvorin he all but transferred his patronage to *New Times* entirely. Suvorin could afford to pay him more, and was also publishing a book of his stories, *Varicolored Stories*. The book was not received well, but rather called “the tragic spectacle of a young talent’s suicide” (Troyat 75). Suvorin and Chekhov built a strong friendship with one another. Chekhov was honest with him in the way he was with no one else for many years. Suvorin’s ultra-conservative political stance would eventually drive a wedge between the two friends, but nevertheless he was a hugely influential presence in Chekhov’s life. After his introduction to Suvorin he began to take his literary career more seriously, and won the Puskin prize for his story *At Dusk*. As his health failed him, he sold his complete works to Adolf Marx, publisher of *The Cornfield*, for almost nothing because he needed the money. Later attempts to renegotiate the deal proved futile.

Chekhov’s earliest surviving play, *Platanov* (1880-1), is considered a terrible melodrama. It was not even published until twenty years after his death. *Platonov* explores one of Chekhov’s favorite themes, the boredom of country living, and the laziness and sadness that keep all his characters idle. Chekhov wrote several other plays in the early part of his career including, *Swansong* (1887-8) and *On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco* (1886). He also wrote several one act farces, including *The Bear* (1888), *The Proposal* (1888-9), *The Wedding* (1889-90), and *A Reluctant Tragic Hero* (1889-90). *The Bear* was particularly profitable, and Chekhov referred to it as “The Milk Cow” for that very reason (Rayfield 164).

Chekhov was persuaded to write a play for the Korsch theatre, a feat which he accomplished in ten days; the play was called *Ivanov* (1887). The play follows the

depression of the title character who loses his wife to tuberculosis and falls in love with the daughter of his creditors; the play ends in his death. This was the first of Chekhov's serious plays to be labeled as a "Comedy." The first performance, on November 19, went awry; only a few actors knew their lines and many of them were drunk (Rayfield 160). The reviews were brutal, even after the slightly improved second performance, saying that the play was: "deeply immoral, cynical rubbish...the author is a pathetic slanderer of the ideals of his time," and "In all the scenes there is nothing comic and nothing dramatic, just horrible, disgusting, cynical filth, which creates a revolting impression" (160). While the production was successful enough for the play to tour the provinces, Chekhov responded to the criticism by writing "plays that were time bombs for stage conventions and poison for actors. The more he was lectured on conventions, the more he would flout them" (160). Chekhov then set about the task of revising *Ivanov*, which Suvorin had agreed to produce in Petersburg in 1889.

The play had already undergone several revisions and Chekhov created difficulties for the company when he attended rehearsals to argue that his newest version was better (187). The premiere took place on January 31, and all of his hard work was rewarded by enthusiastic responses. After his "terrific reception" he was in a foul mood—"When things go badly I'm always more buoyant than when I'm in luck. Success panics me, makes me long to hide under a table" (Hingley 109). After the production he attempted to put *Ivanov* out of sight, saying he was "frightfully bored" with the play (109).

Even though Chekhov had achieved some success on the stage, he continued to complain about the current state of the Russian theatre. He said that actors "should

never...be permitted to air their views since these were inevitably so boring, whatever the subject” and he called the modern theatre “a skin rash, a sort of urban venereal disease” (109). However, despite his strong contempt for the theatre he added dramatic writing to his list of guilty pleasures by varying one of his favorite metaphors: “Narrative is my legal wife and drama a flamboyant, rowdy, impudent, exhausting mistress” (109).

Chekhov continued to develop his own ideas about dramatic writing, and what he felt modern theatre should become. In the summer of 1889 he travelled to Yalta where he opened a school for creative writing and gave advice to aspiring writers, including playwrights, like, “If in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act” (Rayfield 203). Chekhov, as an heir of the nineteenth century well-made play tradition, taught his students that playwrights should not set up dramatic expectations that will not be satisfied. Yet, in his own writing, he often subverted conventional dramatic writing by undermining the expectations of his audience. Chekhov also gave literary advice to his brother, who was writing a play. He said, “Declarations of love, wives’ and husbands’ unfaithfulness, widows’ tears, orphans’ tears, everyone else’s tears—all that’s been portrayed long ago. Your theme must be new and you can dispense with a plot” (Hingley 110). He also felt that “dialogue should be simple and elegant” (110). These bits of advice mirror Chekhov’s own developing craft, which would be innovative and accused of lacking dramatic action. His proposal of simple dialogue suggests the naturalistic style that he strove for. However, despite his theories and suggestions, Chekhov had not yet developed into the mature playwright he would later become, and this is evident in his next play, *The Wood Demon* (1889).

On a retreat with Suvorin, they began to sketch out the play *The Wood Demon*. When the play was rejected by the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg, they advised him to “Write a story. You have too much scorn for the stage and dramatic form; you don’t value them enough to write a play. Writing plays is more difficult than writing fiction, and, if I may say so, you are too spoiled by success to embark on a thorough study of the theatre” (Troyat 111). Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko seconded the theatre’s opinion, but felt that the weakness of the play was Chekhov’s “lack of knowledge,” rather than scorn for the theatre (111). Chekhov was deeply wounded by this rejection, and vowed, not for the last time, to never write for the theatre again (112). Chekhov would later rework the play extensively, and rename it *Uncle Vanya* (1890-6).

Chekhov’s next theatrical endeavor would be *The Seagull*, which he wrote in the summer of 1895, but he told Suvorin that his play that mocked his friends and attacked the theatre could not be staged. He wrote,

Believe it or not, I’m writing a play, which I’ll probably not finish until the end of November. I can’t say I don’t enjoy writing it, though I’m flagrantly disregarding the basic tenets of the stage. The comedy has three female roles, six male roles, four acts, a landscape, much conversation about literature, little action, and five tons of love. (Troyat 181)

Chekhov continued to press the limits of diminishing stage action in the service of realism. The Imperial Theatre Committee passed *The Seagull*, but unfortunately gave it to the Aleksandrinsky theatre in St. Petersburg. The first production of *The Seagull* did not improve Chekhov’s opinion of the theatre. The Aleksandrinsky was known for its French farces, and the performance was set for Levkeeva’s benefit night; she was known for her comedic roles and had a devoted following (Rayfield 388). Additionally, the

production only had nine rehearsals, and several actors had to be replaced throughout the rehearsal process.

Opening night of *The Seagull* in St. Petersburg, October 17, 1896, was a fiasco. Levkeeva's dedicated audience were prepared to see a comedy, not Chekhov's melancholy play, and they reacted by laughing and talking throughout. Vera Komissarzhevskaya, the original Nina, was so intimidated by the audience that she lost her voice entirely. Chekhov was distraught. Recalling the events of the evening to Suvorin, Chekhov said: "I roamed the streets. I sat. I couldn't simply forget about the performance. If I live even hundred years, I'll never give the theatre another play. When it comes to theatre, I'm doomed to failure" (Troyat 190). Chekhov was so depressed after the opening that he wandered the streets, and finally went to bed and refused to see anyone (Rayfield 397). Many people blamed the audience for the poor reception of the play, rather than Chekhov's writing, saying "The audience was somehow spiteful, they were saying "The devil knows what this is, boredom, decadence, you wouldn't watch it if it were free..." (395). Chekhov had once again vowed to give up the theatre and he left St. Petersburg for Moscow the very next day.

Rather than blaming the audience, Suvorin insisted that Chekhov take responsibility for the failure of the play, because he "lacked stage experience" (401). Perhaps Chekhov would have stuck to his word and abandoned the theatre had not Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko begged him for the rights to produce *The Seagull* for the first season of the MAT. Nemirovich-Danchenko wrote:

Of contemporary Russian authors I have decided to cultivate only the most talented and still poorly understood...*The Seagull*...enthalls me and I will stake anything you like that these hidden dramas and tragedies in every character of the play, given a

skillful, extremely conscientious production without banalities, can enthrall the auditorium too. [...] Our theatre is beginning to arouse the strong indignation of the Imperial theatres. They understand we are making war on routine, clichés, recognized geniuses and so on. (457)

Chekhov sent word through Masha that he had received the letter, but nothing further.

Nemirovich-Danchenko wrote again: “I need to know right now whether you are letting us have *The Seagull*...If you don’t, you cut my throat, since...you are the only modern writer of great interest to a theatre with a model repertoire” (457, 458). After a few more exchanges, Chekhov gave in to the pressure. Chekhov arrived in Moscow on September 9, 1898 for the first rehearsal. The cast had been working for weeks on the play already and Chekhov “found himself a longed-for oracle, not a nuisance, and his interest in the theatre revived once again” (461). The rehearsal was a positive beginning to his relationship with the theatre in more ways than one, as Chekhov also met his future wife, the actress Olga Knipper, who was playing Arkadina. Chekhov was made “healthy and happy” by the wild success of the production (479).

Chekhov had adapted *The Wood Demon* into *Uncle Vanya* in the fall of 1896, and the play was published soon afterwards (392). *Uncle Vanya* then enjoyed considerable success touring the provinces, but Chekhov was hesitant about allowing a production in either Moscow or St. Petersburg (Troyat 241). After much deliberation, Chekhov finally handed the script over to the MAT (Rayfield 487). The production opened in October of 1899, and was a triumphant success. Unfortunately, Chekhov was exiled in Yalta and was not able to attend the play, but the MAT would bring the play to him so he was able to see it performed in the spring of 1900. It was Chekhov’s first time seeing the play, and he “endured the roar when the audience spotted the author” in the audience (510).

As Chekhov's illness progressed it was increasingly difficult for him to write, but the MAT and Olga pressed him to write another play for the theatre. Chekhov began working on *Three Sisters* in November of 1899, but was not convinced it would be a success. Chekhov attended an early reading of the play at the MAT, where the negative comments frustrated Chekhov so much that he fled the theatre (Troyat 255). He made major revisions to the first two acts. Opening night on January 31, 1901 was a huge success, and Rayfield asserts that the play cemented him as Russia's greatest dramatist (Rayfield 525). Chekhov had been travelling for several weeks, and missed the opening, as usual. Despite reassurances from Nemirovich-Danchenko and friends that the play was a success, critics complained about the "seemingly disjointed dialogue, the endless pauses, the absence of action, the characters' wavering inclinations" (Troyat 258). Despite negative reviews, audiences were thrilled with the play and all the seats were sold.

The MAT cajoled Chekhov to write another play for the following season, but during the summer of 1902 Chekhov did not write, so they were forced to choose Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths* for their next season. Only after the MAT chose *Lower Depths* did Chekhov begin to work on *The Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov's tuberculosis had reached an advanced stage during the writing of his last play, and sometimes he could not even go to his desk (Rayfield 571). Chekhov wrote much slower than he used to when he could jot out a play in only nine days. Rayfield asserts that this "slowing down...marked not just the decline in Chekhov's vitality, but the extreme care with which, in his final period, every phrase was chosen" (572).

While Chekhov was convinced this new play was a comedy, Stanislavsky feared the worst, saying “I imagine it will be something impossible on the weirdness and vulgarity of life. I only fear that instead of a farce again we shall have a great big tragedy. Even now he thinks *Three Sisters* a merry little piece” (580). For the first time in many years, Chekhov was cajoled to attend the opening night of one of his plays, January 17, 1904. Nemirovich-Danchenko called him to the theatre in the middle of the opening night performance at the MAT. Once he arrived, Chekhov was pulled onstage and forced to listen to people praise him with speeches which he hated (587). Despite the enthusiastic reception of the opening, *The Cherry Orchard* received mediocre reviews (588). The *New Times* said, “Chekhov is not just a weak playwright, but an almost weird one, rather banal and monotonous” (590). Despite these early negative reviews, *The Cherry Orchard* is considered by many to be Chekhov’s greatest masterpiece (Hinley 318). Troyat attributes this to the

contrast between the tragic quality of the subject matter and the comic quality of the characters acting it out...absence of action creates dramatic tension. [...] The audience...ceases to expect change; it even finds itself hoping that nothing will happen to disturb the characters’ provincial existence, hoping that the cherry orchard will somehow be saved. (321)

The Cherry Orchard seems to represent the maturity of his writing style as a dramatist, attempting to create real life onstage.

Anton Chekhov had a prolific writing career as both a short story writer and dramatist, in addition to working for several years as a doctor. Chekhov’s writing for the stage matured through experience, and over the course of his career he developed and fine tuned his naturalistic style. Though he vowed several times he would never write for the theatre again, in the end he faced his bad reviews, and continued to write until he was

quite ill. His four major plays, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard* are performed frequently all over the world. The next section of my study examines the production history of *The Seagull*, which provides a director both historical context of the play's journey and inspiration for their production.

Production History

Since the successful production of *The Seagull* at the MAT in 1898, the play has been produced frequently all over the world. Therefore, the production history of the play is extensive and multifaceted. This study provides a brief overview of how *The Seagull* has been produced over the past hundred years. Laurence Senelick's book, *The Chekhov Theatre*, examines every major production of the play and has been invaluable to this study. Additionally, this study owes a debt to Patrick Miles' *Chekhov on the British Stage*, which thoroughly inspects the history of Chekhov productions in Britain. The following short summary highlights some historically important productions as well as productions that were conceptually influential to the Baylor Theatre production which is the focus of this thesis. Some of these elements include productions that focus on the themes of art and love, the use of symbolic rather than realistic design elements, the utilization of expressionism, concepts focusing on the character of Konstantin, and productions that endeavored to appeal to younger audiences.

Historically and Conceptually Important Productions

As previously noted, the opening night fiasco of *The Seagull* at the Aleksandrinsky theatre in St. Petersburg made Chekhov swear off the theatre all together. While he blamed himself, the failure was the result of many causes, including the short

rehearsal process, lack of preparation, and use of comedic actors in the piece.

Additionally, Senelick asserts that the Russian intelligentsia, Chekhov's true audience, was not present on opening night (29). Chekhov did not approve of the actor's characterizations; there was a wide gap between what the actors were capable of producing and what Chekhov asked for (32).

Early failure was, luckily, completely overshadowed by the great success of *The Seagull* at the MAT in 1898. The MAT production was perhaps the most important moment in Chekhov's playwriting career. Actor V.L. Vishnevsky, who played Dorn, remarked that *The Seagull* was the "to be or not to be of the Art Theatre" (51). The MAT had been created to be a "new theatre...protesting against everything that was pompous, unnatural, and 'theatrical', against well-thumbed, stereotypical tradition" (Balukhaty 40). Their goals aligned with Chekhov's, and *The Seagull* gave the MAT a platform to protest against the staid theatre of the time.

While Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko was eager to produce the play, Konstantin Stanislavsky was initially resistant. To Stanislavsky the play seemed "monotonous and boring, as well as unsuitable for the stage, and he did not know how it could be presented at all" (53). Nemirovich-Danchenko spent a long time trying to convince him that the play should be put on. Still, Stanislavsky "could not understand what there was to get excited about: the people in the play appeared to him sort of half-and-half, the passions not effective, the characters incapable of supplying the actors with good stage material" (54). After much cajoling from Nemirovich-Danchenko, Stanislavsky retreated to his estate to compose the mise-en-scene for the piece, and soon "fell involuntarily under the spell of the play" (54). A mise-en-scene is a detailed

production plan for the actors to follow. He sent bits of his plan for the production and Nemirovich-Danchenko conveyed his ideas to the actors (54). He wrote that because the actors were inexperienced that the “autocratic” method of working was necessary; he did not worry about the feelings of the actors (54). Stanislavsky writes of the experience:

I quite honestly thought at the time that it was possible to order others to live and feel as somebody else wanted them to; I provided directions for everyone and for every moment of the play, and these directions had to be implicitly carried out. [...] Detailed descriptions were given of the scenery, costumes, makeup, gestures, walk, and deportment and habits of the characters, etc. (55)

This controlling approach to directing actors was quite different than what Stanislavsky would use later in his career, while developing his system.

Stanislavsky used layered sound effects, long dramatic pauses, and controversial staging techniques (eg. actors facing upstage) to create a “Theatre of Mood,” which became what the Moscow Art Theatre was known for (Senelick 39). Some objected to their theatrical innovations, such as actors facing upstage to watch the play in Act I (44). Prince Urusov said that the actors were “twisting themselves into profiles—otherwise they can’t be heard—while their silhouettes...present no attractive sight” (44). Others loved the theatrical nature of Stanislavsky’s pauses (47). Nikolay Efros remarked, “Once you’d seen it you never forgot the deep grief, the eerie almost horrible feeling that echoed in your soul from those wordless, almost automatic waltz turns that Masha made...never had her maimed life been so painful as in those seconds of no dialogue” (47).

Vsevolod Meyerhold, who played Konstantin, called Stanislavsky’s work “scenic impressionism;” in the fourth act characters entered “in galoshes, shaking off hats, laprugs, shawls—a sketch of autumn, a freezing shower, puddles in the courtyard and

slender planks laid over them” (41). Senelick asserts that Stanislavsky’s various stage effects created a “layering effect,” where no single detail stood out but all contributed to the whole (41). Chekhov objected to both the pacing and Stanislavsky’s portrayal of Trigorin, but the Moscow Art Theatre audiences were thrilled (50).

However, not all of the early productions of *The Seagull* matched the success of the MAT production. In 1902, Petr Gnedich, the new director of the Alexandrinsky Theatre, wanted to revive *The Seagull* at their theatre. Chekhov refused, saying “Now, I hate that theatre, I can’t stand your actors, because they don’t learn their roles and they play their own words...For its creator’s sake don’t stage *Seagull*” (85). However, Senelick states that they made serious efforts to correct the errors of the past, including a full eighteen rehearsals instead of the previous eight (86). Though critics felt that the acting was one-dimensional and the production only average (86).

The first English language production of *The Seagull*, in 1909, was produced in Britain at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, translated and directed by George Calderon. Calderon’s knowledge of Russian production techniques aided the production, and critics complimented the company on their fine ensemble acting (McDonald 34). Yet, not all early British productions of the play were well received. The 1919 production at the Haymarket by the Art Theatre was seen as a gloomy reverie. The reviews read that the characters were “Neuropaths, all adept in the art of making themselves eternally unhappy” (Senelick 139).

Over time, Chekhov became quite popular on the British stage. While Miles compares Chekhov with Shakespeare, Laurence Senelick states that Chekhov became as permanent a fixture as Dickens; “Chekhovian...came to mean moon-drenched

landscapes, broken love affairs and exquisite plangency” (144). Vera Komisarjevsky’s brother, Theodore Komisarjevsky directed the play at the New Theatre in 1936. The production, which starred John Gielgud as Trigorin, Edith Evans as Arkadina, and Peggy Ashcroft as Nina, was considered an “endlessly beautiful production” and seemed to prove that Chekhov would be a popular ticket in England (McVay 79). Though the production was stocked with stars, critics complained about how dapper and blasé Gielgud’s Trigorin was, and called Stephen Haggard’s Konstantin sensitive, but boring (80). The *New English Weekly* complained about how reverential the production was, saying “no producer who still interprets Chekhov yearningly and in slow-motion is going to get any praise from me...to play *The Seagull* as though it were the Bible and at the tempo of a funeral march” is inappropriate to the author (Senelick 161). While some critics complained, others commented on how Komisarjevsky’s interpretation of Chekhov emphasized both the comedy and the tragedy, which may have contributed to the growing popularity of Chekhov in England (McVay 84).

The first American production of *The Seagull*, in 1916, was produced by the Washington Square Players at the Bandbox Theatre in New York. They were the first to use Marion Fell’s translation, which, according to Senelick was “Englished with dozens of blunders and misreadings” (172). Senelick cites Lawrence Lagner’s remark that the Square Players did not understand the play, and as such, “played it in semidarkness” (172). Senelick also quotes the review in the *Tribune*, remarking that Americans had nothing in common with Russians: “After the first act the play seems constantly to be wearing black lest the audience forget that utter wretchedness is the perennial state of mind in Russia” (173). Senelick, in his analysis, is quick to disagree with this

assessment, stating that Americans had much in common with Russians, including “the sense of an unconfined land mass with vast spaces between habitations, and of unlimited resources placed by nature at the disposal of humanity...provincial doldrums and the myth of the alluring big city; psychic atmosphere read as mood swings” (173). The conflict between the characters and the land, and their isolation in the country are important given circumstances of the play, and Senelick’s affirmation that these conflicts are relevant to Americans is fascinating. These commonalities give both actors and audiences one way to relate to the characters of the play.

George Pitoëff mounted two different productions of *The Seagull* in Paris. The first production was in 1921 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. By the time of the second production, Pitoëff’s expressionistic techniques had become widespread. The second production in 1939 at the Theatre des Mathurins was more symbolic than realistic; the outdoor scenes were simply realized with two large tree trunks stretching into the sky (Senelick 169). Pitoëff staged the whole play around the character of Nina, played by his wife, and her “grace, emotion, and conviction” (170). The production received almost entirely critical praise, and critics were especially complimentary of the playwright. The production ran for months to sold out houses (170).

Alexsandr Tairov produced the play in 1944 at his Kamerny Theatre in Russia (195). The most fascinating aspect of Tairov’s direction was his elimination of one third of the script in order to focus on the characters of Konstantin and Trigorin (197). The play became focused on the theme of art alone, a “Platonic dialogue on art, a discourse between Treplev and Trigorin” (197). Tairov’s other thematic focus was on “selfless love enduring through profound suffering,” or the various unrequited loves of the piece

(198). Tairov said the “lack of fulfillment” in the character’s love lives fills the play with a sensation of “tremulousness” and “anxiety” (198). A critic, Sergey Durylin, remarked that the play was staged as “Treplev dreamed of seeing a play in his new theatre” (197). The idea of staging the play as Konstantin would have imagined, in the style of symbolist drama, is a particularly exciting one to me. Tairov’s production had a strong appeal to the younger generation of theatre goers, but many critics felt the production suffered from “Meyerholditis,” and felt that the production had too many elements of the “poor theatre” (198).

Russian theatre expert Norris Houghton directed the play in 1954 at the Phoenix Theatre in New York. He recommended “selective realism” in scenic design, using only a few windows and doors with no interior walls (285). The cast was of various backgrounds and talents, which did not create an effective ensemble. A Czech Dorn, Russian Nina, and English Arkadina mixed with famous American actor Montgomery Clift as Konstantin whose film experience did not suit him for the stage (285). For many, Maureen Stapleton as Masha was the most engaging part of the production (Hackett 44).

Over time, notable productions of Chekhov’s plays were staged in both Europe and Russia. Otomar Krejča decided to produce the play at the Narodni Divadlo in Prague in 1960, even though the Communist authorities thought it was too pessimistic. Krejča tried to cut Konstantin’s suicide to please them, but ultimately decided it was impossible, insisting that “nothing can be deleted from Chekhov, for his plays are constructed as intradependently as Gothic cathedrals” (Senelick 240). Noted scenic designer, Josef Svoboda attempted to create a stage with extraordinary depth, to create the illusion of distance. (241) He hoped to mimic what Konstantin hoped to achieve with his own

scenic design: “No set of any kind. Open view on to the lake and the horizon” (Senelick 241, Chekhov 10). The stage was bare except for a long vertical path leading upstage; branches hung overhead, lining the path (Senelick 241).

Nikos Psacharopoulos directed *The Seagull* several times at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts, in 1962, 1967, and 1974. Psacharopoulos was Greek-born and Yale educated, and staged fifteen Chekhov productions while working at the Williamstown Theatre (Senelick 291). Psacharopoulos liked large emotion and big physical gestures, turning to opera for inspiration when actors became too internalized (Hackett 1). He infused each production with movement, vitality, sexuality, and high stakes (2). Laurence Senelick calls his colorful interpretations “red-blooded American” Chekhov (Senelick 292).

Anatoly Efros wanted to similarly enliven the text in his 1966 production at Moscow’s Lenin-Komosomol Theatre. He began his rehearsals with the statement: “Let’s pretend we are the first to stage *Seagull* for the very first time. Without the usual clichés of lyrical performance with pauses. Without all sorts of stratifications of Chekhovianism. Actively. Dynamically” (212). The focus of his production was on Konstantin, the “youthful rebel,” and since Efros saw the play about an artist in torment he divided the play into the stations of the cross (213). The set design revolved around the idea of prison; both Konstantin’s stage for the play within a play and the interior sets were reminiscent of a tiny jail cell.

In Germany, Peter Zadek’s 1973 production of the play concentrated on reminding the audience that a theatrical event is human beings performing for human beings. He relocated Konstantin’s stage to the middle of the audience and placed groups

of audience members facing each other (254). Konstantin was tiny and wore large glasses that reflected his grief-stricken eyes; he added a ton of neuroses to the character, including stuttering his words and walking with an uneven gait (254). At the end of Act IV he threw his writings into the orchestra pit and peacefully walked off to meet his death.

Andre Gregory's company, The Manhattan Theatre Project, thought that *The Seagull* was the perfect vehicle to appeal to the avant-garde (293). In 1975, they adapted Laurence Senelick's literal translation by adding in sections of popular songs and restating much of the dialogue. The production transferred to the Public Theatre with sets by Ming Cho Lee which created "an environmental space spread over the Theatre's third story" (293). The audience was forced to find new seats after each intermission to watch from another vantage point (293). The costumes were not entirely historically accurate; some actors only wore sweaters and tights (293). Gregory stated that the purpose of the production was to show that there was no divide between avant-garde and commercial theatre, a meeting of the past and present (294). Critics were upset by Gregory's defilement of Chekhov's "sacred" text (294). Similarly, Joseph Chaikin and Jean-Claude Van Itallie, of the then disbanded Open Theatre, directed and translated the play at the Manhattan Theatre Club in 1975. They saw *The Seagull* as a way to be led away from experimental workshops back into the theatrical tradition (294). Chaikin asserted that the conflict of *The Seagull* as being relevant today: "certainly in the confrontation between the old and the new, the conventional and the experimental" (294). Making the play relevant to a contemporary audience is appealing, and perhaps the clash

between old and new generations within the play is at the heart of making the play relatable.

There have also been several notable productions of *The Seagull* in Asia, including a 1980 production in Japan, directed by Andrei Serban. The stage for the play within a play was a large seagull shaped platform in the middle of a pool of water, which became Konstantin's study in the fourth act. He literally "drowned his book," instead of the traditional ripping of paper. Konstantin also painted his face white before his hara-kiri, and fell in the water upon his suicide (331). Serban's introduction of Asian traditions to the play speaks to the universality of Chekhov's drama.

Both Arena Stage and the Actor's Theatre of Louisville produced *The Seagull* in their 1988-1989 seasons. The Arena Stage production was a fairly "traditional" staging of the play, though Konstantin's gunshot was heard at various moments throughout the play (300). Jory's production revolved around Konstantin, and his descent into an outcast. The first act was staged in the style of a symbolist playlet, and the last in the style of the Moscow Art Theatre (300). This charted Konstantin's journey throughout the play, and his progression away from creativity. Act I's set was very symbolic with a large moon and Konstantin actively interacted with the other characters, while by Act IV he was on the fringes in an ultra-realistic box set (300). Unfortunately, this left acts two and three undefined. Emphasizing Konstantin's journey from the very active and hopeful writer of Act I to the beaten down, outcast of Act IV was an influential conceptual idea to the Baylor Theatre production.

While there have been many New York productions of *The Seagull*, the most recent production of *The Seagull* on Broadway was the 2008 production at the Walter

Kerr Theatre that had transferred from the Royal Court Theatre, directed by Ian Rickson. *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley asserts that the new translation, by Christopher Hampton is “blunt-spoken but sharp-witted,” and a perfect jumping off point for Rickson’s production (“Thwarted Souls”). Brantley also states that this production was the “finest and most fully involving production of Chekhov” he has ever seen (“Thwarted Souls”). Partially because even in the numerous silences “the air remains alive with crosscurrents of thought, clashing chords of longing and the steady thrum of time passing” (“Thwarted Souls”).

While this short overview of *The Seagull*’s production history has been far from comprehensive, the intention was to focus on historically and conceptually important productions. Productions that focused on the themes of love and art, used symbolic rather than realistic sets, concepts that revolved around Konstantin, or featured a visceral, dynamic look at the text were particularly highlighted. In addition to examining the production history of a play, a director must also do extensive research on the critical information available about the play. The next section of this study is a literary review, which gives an overview of the major critical works that have been written about *The Seagull*.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned in this chapter, Anton Chekhov was a prolific writer, not only as a dramatist but as a short story writer and essayist. A wealth of material has been written about Chekhov’s work, and this study does not seek to present a comprehensive literature review. Rather, the following discussion will concentrate on material which deals with *The Seagull*, focusing on the sources that have been most helpful when

crafting this production. This literature review will only address source material that is available in English. Material specifically pertaining to Chekhov's short stories or non-fiction writing will also not be included, as this study pertains specifically to Chekhov's career as a dramatist. While many of the sources included in this review deal with multiple subjects, these works have been placed into four categories: production history, historical context, critical analysis, and art and literature. The section on production history includes works that chronicle specific productions of *The Seagull*. Works that provide a background to the world that Chekhov was writing in, as well as the world that the characters inhabit, are included in the historical context category. The section on critical analysis contains sources that offer a broad literary analysis of the play, and cover several large topics. The final section discusses works that examine themes of art and literature within the play, eg. Konstantin's play. The section also examines the intertextual nature of *The Seagull*.

History of Chekhov Productions

Each of Chekhov's four major plays, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*, have extensive production histories. This overview begins with more comprehensive sources and concludes with sources that focus on one production. Laurence Senelick's *The Chekhov Theatre: A Century of the Plays in Performance* (1997) is a comprehensive guide to Chekhov production history. Senelick gives an extremely detailed account of all of the major productions of Chekhov's plays, including the critical reception of these productions. The book is organized roughly chronologically and separated by country or region. This methodology allows Senelick to state how each part of the world felt towards Chekhov at any given time in history, and

gives the reader a broad scope of how Chekhov became a part of the theatrical canon. Senelick's book is global in its scope, whereas *Chekhov on the British Stage* (1993), edited by Patrick Miles, is limited to productions in Britain. Miles claims Chekhov is the most important playwright in Britain besides Shakespeare. Including articles by several authors, the essays cover a broad range of topics, including issues of translation, critical reception of Chekhov productions, and directors' visions of the plays.

David Allen's fascinating collection of essays, *Performing Chekhov* (2000), focuses on specific director's interpretations of Chekhov's works, beginning with Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. The book is then broken into sections on productions in Russia after Stanislavsky, in America, and in England. Allen has chosen essays that reflect a wide array of productions and approaches to the plays. The American section, for example, traces the transfer of Stanislavsky's acting methods into America and its adoption by The Group Theatre and Lee Strasburg. This section also details the development of The Wooster Group's *Brace Up!*, a deconstruction of *The Cherry Orchard*. Allen's collection is eclectic, but each essay revolves around specific directors and their particular interpretation of Chekhov's works.

The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov (2000), edited by Vera Gottlieb and Paul Allain, is a book of essays on Chekhov that were specially commissioned for that particular volume. The collection covers a wide range of subjects, including biographical essays about Chekhov and discussions of his writing technique. The majority of the articles, however, deal with Chekhov in performance. There are several articles that are particularly interesting. Thomas Kilroy's essay "*The Seagull: an Adaptation*" deals with the subject of translation and adaptation for a particular performance. Kilroy set his

Seagull on an Anglo-Irish estate, and his article makes a case for the universal nature of Chekhov's drama. Another article of interest is an interview with Ian McKellen titled "Acting Chekhov: 'A Friend to the Actor.'" Though the article is in a conversational tone, McKellen does uncover some of the difficulties of acting Chekhov, including the ambivalent nature of many of Chekhov's characters.

Another useful article from the collection is Laurence Senelick's "Directors' Chekhov," which offers a very brief summary of Chekhov production history, from the perspective of how different directors have interpreted his works. He gives a broad overview and then covers each of the major plays individually, but perhaps most usefully, he includes a glossary listing directors and actors that he mentions with summaries of their contributions to Chekhov production history.

Konstantin Stanislavsky's production score of the MAT version of *The Seagull* is an important document in Chekhov studies. David Margarshack's English translation of the production score (1952) includes an introduction by S.D. Balukhaty which illuminates the entire development of the project, from Nemirovich-Danchenko's letters begging Chekhov to let them produce the play to opening night. Additionally, the score contains all of Stanislavsky's detailed notes on the mise-en-scene and character analysis, providing the reader a firsthand look into the rehearsal process

Anton Chekhov at the Moscow Art Theatre : Archive Illustrations of the Original Productions (2005), translated and edited by Vera Gottlieb, from the original 1914 journal of Nikolai Efros, serves as a nice companion piece to Stanislavsky's journal. The book collects the original photographs of each of Chekhov's four major plays produced at the Moscow Art Theatre. Production stills, scene sketches, and a few staged rehearsal

shots are included. The book includes an introduction by Nemirovich-Danchenko largely about the strong bond between Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre, as well as a more general historical introduction by Nikolai Efros. Both of these forewords have been translated from the original 1914 edition.

Offering a completely different perspective on how to stage *The Seagull*, Ellen Beckerman's "Finding the Boy Band in Chekhov's *The Seagull*: Lightbox's *Gull*" is an exciting foray into revisionist Chekhov. Beckerman's article was published in *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon* (2007) edited by Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin; a collection that seeks to analyze the effects that Chekhov as a Russian dramatist has had on American theatre and culture. Beckerman's main assertion is that Chekhov's texts have become dead in their familiarity, and are handled as though they are sacred. However, Beckerman states, "*The Seagull* is not fragile. Although its sensibility is delicate, the play itself is as resilient as Shakespeare. Whatever crazy experiments [take place] in rehearsals, the text remains strong" (254).

Beckerman also talks about the usefulness of connecting to Chekhov physically, rather than remaining simply intellectually attached to the text. Beckerman states that attacking the play through the body connects the play to the audience on a visceral level, creates an ensemble that is incredibly attuned to one another, and builds an environment that is able to support Chekhov's text. She then outlines some of her production choices, including the decision to have the characters dance to N'Sync's "Bye Bye Bye" between Acts III and IV. Ultimately, she states that she made these choices to enliven the text and infuse a contemporary sensibility that connects with audiences on a visceral level.

While many of these texts provided useful information about productions of *The Seagull*, by far the most useful volume for the Baylor Theatre prosecution was Laurence Senelick's *The Chekhov Theatre*. Not only does Senelick provide an ample and detailed guide to Chekhov production history, but he offers invaluable critical opinions of these productions as well as suggestions for further research on each production. Senelick's inclusion of this invaluable information into one volume has been of critical importance to this study.

Historical Context

The following works offer a historical context to Anton Chekhov's plays, including geographical information about Russia, the theatre of the time, and the social and political constructs that affected Chekhov. Researching the historical context in which Chekhov was writing provided the Baylor production's director insight to the characters' background and provided a deeper understanding of the given circumstances of Chekhov's play.

W.H. Bruford's sociological study, *Chekhov and his Russia: A Sociological Study* (1947) provides an overview of the historical circumstances relevant to Chekhov's writing. Particularly useful is Bruford's exploration into Chekhov's ideas about Russia: the broad expanse of Russia versus the people, Chekhov's opinions about the Russian people's depression, and their isolation and loneliness. Similarly, his detailed explanation of the intelligentsia, how the term came about and what it has come to mean, has offered the context needed to truly understand the social status of the characters in *The Seagull*.

Laurence Senelick's article "The Lakeshore of Bohemia: *The Seagull's* Theatrical Context," found in the *Educational Theatre Journal* (1977) was written largely to inform the reader about the theatrical world that influenced Chekhov's writing, particularly *The Seagull*. Senelick's opinion is that the play is largely about art and theatre, rather than unrequited love, and is influenced by Chekhov's years dealing with all types of theatre folk. The article follows Chekhov's biography and fills the reader in on Chekhov's opinions about actresses, playwrights, and the Russian theatres of his day. Senelick makes assertions as to which incidents in Chekhov's life influenced his characters, and attempts to explain why he chose the various theatrical references to fill his drama. Ultimately, Senelick claims that Chekhov is "negatively objective" with how each of the main characters seek artistic fulfillment, and leaves the audience with more questions than answers (213).

Many of the essays in the aforementioned *Chekhov the Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon* (2007), edited by Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin, have provided the thesis production with useful history of Chekhov's reception in America. Similar to Senelick's article above, Svetlana Evdokimova's "Chekhov's Anti-Melodramatic Imagination: Inoculation against the Diseases of the Contemporary Theatre" details Chekhov's desire for new forms, and his hatred of the staleness of the Russian theatre of his time. Other articles in the collection speak about the difficulties of translating Chekhov's plays in to English, the effect he has had on American writers, Chekhov's plays in production, and articles about Chekhov as a doctor. Another article that brought me to a greater understanding of the historical context of Chekhov's writing was Senelick's article, "Seeing Chekhov Whole." Senelick warns about the difficulties of

translating Chekhov, because “what is being translated is not Russian per se—it is Chekhov’s wielding of Russian. One is dealing not only with a language which is not one’s own, but with the artistically wrought language of a creative artist” (70). His main argument is that it is not a translator’s job to correct or improve the author.

Of these works, W.H. Bruford’s study, *Chekhov and His Russia* has been the most instrumental to this study. His straightforward examinations of the social constructs of the time and Chekhov’s opinions about Russia and the intelligentsia have been invaluable by providing an understanding of the given circumstances of the play. Additionally, Laurence Senelick’s article, “The Lakeshore of Bohemia: *The Seagull*’s Theatrical Context,” for the *Educational Theatre Journal* (1977) was helpful in providing the background of the theatrical world that influenced Chekhov’s writing.

Critical Analysis

The following sources cover a broad range of critical analyses of *The Seagull*. These works have provided invaluable critical thought on the structure, themes, story, genre, symbols, and characters of the play. The first few sources deal with material on the ambiguous nature of Chekhov’s writing, and the structure of his plays. David Margashack’s book, *Chekhov the Dramatist* (1952), contains an overview of the structure of Chekhov’s plays throughout his career. Margashack asserts that the more mature plays, *Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *Cherry Orchard*, are plays of indirect action, while his earlier works contain direct action. He explains that the difference is not that one is active and another inactive, but rather “the difference lies mainly in the different impact on the audience: the impact of the first is direct and immediate, the impact of the second is indirect and evocative...the characters...arouse in the audience an

emotional mood which is identical with their own” (161). In addition to analyzing the structure of Chekhov’s drama, Margashack delves into *The Seagull* in great detail, covering his thoughts on character, theme, and genre as well.

Similarly, Vera Gottlieb’s essay titled “Chekhov’s Comedy,” which can be found in the aforementioned *Cambridge Companion to Chekhov* (2000), deals broadly with the troubling issue of genre in Chekhov’s work. While *The Seagull* does not have a happy ending, Gottlieb states that the ending cannot be tragic if a “failure running away from life” shoots himself (232). Gottlieb believes that Chekhov used drama to be instructive to his audience, showing them how dreary their lives are in an effort to force them to take action and improve their lives. This positive message, therefore, is the message of comedy and not tragedy.

Another group of works provide detailed literary analysis of *The Seagull*, with a focus away from Chekhov and on the text itself. J.L. Styan declares that Chekhov’s plays cannot be analyzed in a typical fashion, simply describing the sequence of events, characters, and thematic structure, but must be taken apart bit by bit, each moment of the play. In his book, *Chekhov in Performance: A Commentary on the Major Plays* (1971), Styan attempts to do just that by starting at the beginning of each of the four major plays and working through them moment to moment. Styan attempts to create some of the drama of a stage performance in his criticism, rather than a simply literary reading of the text, and also attempts to give context to the theatre of the time in which Chekhov was writing. Styan then proceeds to work through each of the four major plays in turn, with an introduction at the beginning. Attention is given to even the minutest details of phrasing and pauses, and the analysis always seems fueled by the necessity of how one

should perform the play. For example, Styan talks about the character of Masha and her melodramatic first line: “I am in mourning for my life.” Styan says,

Masha can speak the line only in what seems to be a “theatrical” voice, both dramatizing and mocking herself at the same time. Whatever an audience might have expected after viewing the fantasy of the setting, it was not this. It is as if Masha were trying to conclude a conversation abruptly, not start one. Her casual and pettish reply is a whimsically cruel stroke against her dull lover, although it may be justified by her unrequited love for Treplev. [...] When the audience later observes her addiction to snuff and brandy, we see it both as a symptom of her need for the stimulant Medvedenko cannot supply, and as an eccentric gesture of a woman’s protest against her lot. (24)

Styan’s detailed insights into character have been a fascinating foray into his opinion of the play. An additional useful quality of Styan’s text is his focus on the practicality of producing the play, rather than purely literary analysis.

Richard Peace uses a similar tactic to Styan in his book *Chekhov: A Study of the Four Major Plays* (1983). His book contains essays about each of the four major plays that take the reader from the first moment of the play to the final curtain. His analysis is not as detailed as Styan’s, though he illuminates some confusing passages of the text.

For example, he speaks about one of Trigorin’s long speeches in Act II:

the term “citizen” has the specific connotation of an artist who devotes himself to social questions. Trigorin proceeds to outline such issues: the people...their present conditions...the question of human rights. [...] All these areas were difficult to write about in the late nineteenth century. Yet his public expects Trigorin, as a serious writer, to raise these issues, while editors and censors strive to mute and mutilate, thus he feels driven from all sides and his serious themes all turn out false. (30)

Peace’s analysis gives me insight into Trigorin’s character, for it reveals why he feels that he has to write about the “people” and the impossibility of doing such a thing. Peace also

focuses on Chekhov's creation of mood through literary references, music, and pauses, and his use of secondary characters to support the main themes of the play.

Harvey Pitcher takes a similar approach in his book, *The Chekhov Play: A New Interpretation* (1973), by analyzing each of the major plays in turn with a careful eye for detail. However, unlike Styan, Pitcher's point of view seems less focused on the performance aspects of the text and instead on strictly literary analysis. The article on *The Seagull*, "The Seagull, 'A Testing Ground?'" makes it clear that *The Seagull* contains many elements of melodrama, but is still steeped in the complexity of psychological drama. Pitcher spends much of the article trying to glean whether or not *The Seagull* is, in fact, a Chekhovian play, in the traditional sense. Pitcher focuses on the setting of the play, the mysterious lake, and character analysis. His examination of the final scene between Nina and Konstantin is particularly intriguing. Pitcher states that while Konstantin is living in the past, wanting to start over, Nina is a completely different person and cannot return to the joys of before. Pitcher notes that the fateful, final exchange between Konstantin and Nina:

is the climax of the play, and it sets the seal on Kostya's fate The overwhelming sense of failure, both personal and artistic, is too much for him. In reality, the prospects for his life are not so bleak, but Kostya does not have the resources with which to fight against adversity. Whereas Nina has reconciled herself to the disappointments of life and can turn her back on the lake by accepting a degrading job in a provincial theatre, Kostya cannot break its magic spell (63).

Pitcher concludes that *The Seagull* is an inferior play to Chekhov's other works because of its lack of emotional relationships and emphasis on art.

Richard Gilman's essay, "The Seagull: Art and Love, Love and Art," in his book, *Chekhov's Plays: An Opening into Eternity* (1995) is an examination of the play arranged

around Gilman's belief that the "reigning spirit" of *The Seagull* is antiromanticism (71). Like Styan, Peace, and Pitcher, Gilman's book contains essays on all four of Chekhov's major plays, including *Ivanov*, and an biographical essay on Chekhov's innovations as a writer of realism in the theatre. Gilman defends Chekhov's label of the play as a comedy, centered on the themes of art and love. One of his interesting points is a comparison of Chekhov's limited settings to Beckett's; none of the characters can escape their circumstances. Gilman then focuses on the themes of art and love within *The Seagull*, with a particular focus on the play-within-a-play and the final climactic scene between Konstantin and Nina.

Each of these works has provided a critical analysis of *The Seagull* and have contributed to the Baylor Theatre director's understanding of the play. One of the observations that can be made after examining the wealth of analytical literature about the play is that critics vary widely in their opinions about how to understand the play. Chekhov's plays do not easily lend themselves to concrete explanations, but remain ambiguous and therefore open to interpretation.

Art and Literature

The final section of this literary review focuses on works that comment on the subject of art and literature within the play, or the intertextual nature of *The Seagull*. Gilman, in the previously mentioned article, says that he takes a lot of his ideas about the play from Robert Louis Jackson's essay, "*The Seagull: The Empty Well, the Dry Lake, and the Cold Cave*," first published in *Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1967). Edited by Robert Louis Jackson, the collection contains several essays on the four major plays, two essays on Chekhov's naturalism, and several essays about Chekhov the man,

including personal notes on Chekhov by Maxim Gorky. However, Jackson's essay is the only essay in this collection directly concerning *The Seagull*. Jackson's excellent work revolves around analyzing Konstantin's play within a play. Jackson sees the play as a creation story and a metaphor of Konstantin's journey within *The Seagull*. The play-within-a-play is "a dramatization of unliberated life and creation; and, it is further apparent, this is also a crucial self-dramatization. The author Konstantin not only projects a vision of the universe in biological limbo; he, or his alter ego, also inhabits it" (4). Jackson equates Arkadina's interruptions of the play with the arrival of the "mighty adversary," the devil. In this way, Jackson traces the play-within-a-play as Konstantin's life journey. Konstantin's cry of "'the play is finished,' anticipates the abortive ending of his life drama; it constitutes a dramatic rehearsal for the ending of *The Seagull*" (7). Jackson further believes that Arkadina reacts so strongly against Konstantin's play because she fears that he might one day become a powerful artist.

One other interesting facet of Jackson's article is his attention to Konstantin as a "modern pseudotragic hero of *The Seagull*" (7). His tragic flaw is "his refusal to recognize his essential freedom and to accept the responsibility that it implies;" he instead relies on fate to determine his way for him. Jackson, however, ultimately states that because Konstantin's self-knowledge is so incomplete at the end of the play that he cannot truly be considered a tragic figure.

While Jackson chose to focus on Konstantin's play, W. Gareth Jones compares the lotto game of Act IV to a symbolist play in his article "*The Seagull's Second Symbolist Play-Within-A-Play*," published in *The Slavonic and East European Review* (1975). *The Seagull's* anticlimactic fourth act is seen as a deliberate departure from the

well-made play formula. Jones states that while the third act ends with a dramatic kiss between Trigorin and Nina and the promise of change for many of the other characters, the fourth act shows that none of these characters have changed over time. The danger in this sort of structure, Jones states, is that the “action” could fall flat now that the spark is out of the relationships. Jones then states that he sees the final game of lotto as the second play-within-a-play of *The Seagull*. He seeks to correlate the two “plays,” beginning with the notion that they both bring the dramatis persona together for a focused event. Each of the events is preceded by a lengthy preamble and then ends with applause, whether Shamrayev’s applause of Nina’s performance or Arkadina’s praise of Trigorin’s win. After Konstantin decides not to participate in the lotto, the characters then begin to echo the same exact opinions they had of Konstantin’s writing in the first act. Jones then attempts to give significance to the various numbers called in the lotto game by equating them with previous actions of the plays. Jones then states that the game of lotto is actually Chekhov’s second nod to symbolism within the play, and to the work of Maeterlinck.

Virginia Scott asserts in her essay “Life in Art: a Reading of *The Seagull*,” found in the *Educational Theatre Journal* (1978) that we are not asked to take sides in the theatrical debate between Konstantin and Trigorin, but simply respond to conflicting statements about art. Scott feels that Stanislavsky interpreted the characters of Konstantin and Trigorin incorrectly in the Moscow Art Theatre production of *The Seagull*. Chekhov was appalled by Stanislavsky’s interpretation of the play, which posed Konstantin as a theatrical genius, and Trigorin as a simple mediocrity. Scott then goes through each of the characters within the play and states their opinions on art, and how

they fit within Chekhov's complicated web. For example, Scott speaks of Arkadina's connection to art, saying, "Arkadina is an artist of surfaces; when she talks about acting, she connects it with appearance and dress" (361). One of the particularly interesting points is Scott's analysis of Konstantin and emphasis on his talent. Scott states:

Trepnev's lack of fixed goals is easily supported by the text, but his talent is less easy to perceive. We see his play, which reads like a parody of symbolism, but in which Dorn finds the evidence to say, "You've got talent and you must carry on." I suggest once again that anyone producing the play must find a way to elicit from the audience some agreement with Dorn's assertion that Trepnev is talented. (362)

Scott recommends that productions find a balance between the play's humorous qualities and the serious nature of Konstantin's art, and her remarks about his character have influenced this study's perception of Konstantin.

The lines between art and reality blur in *The Seagull*, and the following articles deal with that slippery quality of the play. "Referential Reflections Around a Medallion: Reciprocal Art/Life Embeddings in *The Seagull*," by Harai Golomb, uses Nina's gift of the medallion to Trigorin as a starting point to explore interactions between art and reality within *The Seagull*. Published in *Poetics Today* in 2000, Golomb covers a broad range of subjects including the problematic nature of the medallion, a biographical event from Chekhov's life. Golomb questions the legitimacy of using biographical events in art. Nina's appropriation of Trigorin's own words to state how she feels is only one example of how art and reality blend in *The Seagull*. Golomb states that not only does fiction mirror life in *The Seagull*, but the two sometimes blend together as well. The article is a fascinating look at the outwardly spiraling nature of how life and art embed within each other.

Literature is often the subject of conversation among characters in *The Seagull*, and each person feels connected to literature in some way. Zinovii S. Paperny examines the art within *The Seagull* by focusing on each of the character's "subject for a short story" within "Microsubjects in *The Seagull*." Paperny's essay can be found in *Critical Essays on Anton Chekhov*, edited by Thomas A. Eekman (1989). From Medvedenko's idea that a play should be written about schoolteachers to Sorin's "idea for a short story" about himself, each of the characters seem to find inspiration for literature in their own lives. This is especially true of Trigorin, who collects data from his life like a machine. Paperny also focuses on the literary references of the play, particularly Maupassant. Additionally, Paperny examines Shamrayev's seemingly random anecdotes within the play in contrast with Sorin's stories. Paperny sees Shamrayev's tales as pointless and completely superfluous, while Sorin's are completely connected to the action of the play; each of them contribute to the musicality of the play where tragedy and comedy collide.

Jerome Katshell's "Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Maupassant's *Sur l'eau*" attempts to trace the similarities between Maupassant's travel diaries *Sur l'eau*, which Arkadina reads in Act II, and *The Seagull*. This article can be found in Jean Pierre Barricelli's collection of essays, *Chekhov's Great Plays: A Critical Anthology* (1981). The collection also contains essays on Chekhov's other major plays. Katshell has two main points. He first compares Maupassant's misanthropy to Chekhov's hopeful view of humanity. Like Maupassant's *Sur l'eau*, *The Seagull* "shares with it the presentation of attempted mature and responsible life through vanity, superficiality, loneliness, emotional dependence, and the dead routine of bureaucratic work. For Chekhov, harmony and reconciliation can come, if ever, through hard work and the transcendence of art" (24). While audiences see

the failure of many of the characters in the play, “the striving to change this situation, especially through art, must be seen as the central problematic about which the play revolves” (24).

Katsell then examines the use of Maupassant’s *Sur l’eau* within the play. At the beginning of Act II, some of the characters are reading *Sur l’eau* in the garden. Katsell takes apart the relationship between Arkadina and Trigorin using sections of *Sur l’eau* that Arkadina had most likely read. Katsell sees Arkadina as having to dominate Trigorin out of fear that he will become a truly great artist, when she wants him to be kept under control.

Much has been written about the connections between *The Seagull* and *Hamlet*. T.A. Stroud’s “*Hamlet and The Seagull*,” which can be found in *Shakespeare Review* (1958), begins by asserting that Chekhov was influenced by *Hamlet* when writing the play, particularly in the creation of Konstantin. Stroud also identifies Trigorin as Claudius and Arkadina as Gertrude. Konstantin’s “mother issues” certainly place him next to Hamlet as young men with an Oedipal fixation. Both of the plays contain plays-within-plays which are cut short by passionate outbursts. He then insists that *The Seagull* is not a comedy, nor a story of courage that revolves around Nina, but much closer to a tragedy like *Hamlet*.

Thomas G. Winner also deals with the influence of *Hamlet* in his article, “Chekhov’s *Seagull* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: A Study of a Dramatic Device.” Winner’s article was published in the *American Slavic and East European Review* (1956). Similarly to Stroud, Winner first looks for evidence of Shakespeare’s influence on Chekhov in his biography. He then also identifies the characters of *The Seagull* with

the characters of *Hamlet*, especially Nina as an Ophelia-like figure whose parents disapprove of her loves. Winner identifies Trigorin with Polonius, however, and not with Claudius as Stroud does. The bandage scene in Act III is seen as *The Seagull*'s version of the closet scene from *Hamlet*. Ultimately, Winner contests that in the final scene between Konstantin and Nina, Konstantin realizes that he is not *Hamlet*, but is a coward afraid of life.

Conclusion

The journey of directing the Baylor Theatre production of *The Seagull* began with thorough research about the play and the playwright. Examining key events in Anton Chekhov's life, his illness and depression, his love of medicine, literature, and women, and his career as an author provided a context to begin a director's analysis. This study concluded that the overarching themes of art and love in *The Seagull* could be found mirrored in Anton Chekhov's own life. His opinions about art, love, and life infuse the play and the characters. Examining the exhaustive production history of *The Seagull* provides an overview of how directors have approached the complex play in the past and how critics and audiences have viewed these productions. The success of varying interpretations of the play throughout the years speaks volumes about the strength of the play as a work of literature and its continued relevance to modern audiences. Chekhov's play is sturdy enough to withstand new interpretations and continues to be produced often all over the world. An overview of the critical analysis of *The Seagull* reveals a multitude of opinions and conclusions about the work. These studies provided an ample foundation on which to build a playscript analysis. The next step in the development of

the Baylor Theatre production was to utilize this raw material and develop a director's analysis of the play.

CHAPTER TWO

Playscript Analysis

Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* is a complex play, full of depth and richness, layered characters, story, and theme. Scholar Robert Corrigan, in his introduction to the collection, *Six Plays of Chekhov*, states "To analyze these plays properly one would have to begin with the opening speech and then, making cross-relationships work through the entire play until the final curtain" (Intro). Corrigan's statement illustrates two key elements of my analysis: firstly, the interrelationship between character, theme, and story, and secondly, the vast quantity of critical material written about Chekhov's work. This director's analysis will attempt to examine some of these cross-relationships, focusing on the themes of love and art within the play. The analysis begins with a plot summary and discussion of the given circumstances of the play, and continues with a discussion of the structure, themes, and characters in order to delve into Chekhov's complex text.

Plot Summary

The Seagull is divided into four acts; the action of the first three acts unfolds over several months, and the fourth takes place two years later. The action is set on Sorin's rural estate that Trigorin describes as "paradise" (Chekhov 43). Much of the first act of *The Seagull* is cleverly disguised exposition. The first act takes place on "part of the gardens" of the estate, beside a lake (7). Chekhov's stage directions read that a stage has been erected, hiding the lake, for some kind of performance.

At dusk Masha and Medvedenko enter mid-conversation. Masha tells Medvedenko that she always wears black because she is “in mourning for [her] life” (7). Medvedenko confesses that he is deeply in love with her, though she doesn’t return his love. They also divulge that Konstantin’s play is being performed this evening, starring Nina, the object of his affection.

A very nervous Konstantin and his uncle, Sorin, enter and chase off Masha and Medvedenko. Konstantin talks at great length about his play, his fragile relationship with his mother, Arkadina, the theatre, and his own feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. He rails against the moralistic melodramas that his mother performs in feeling strongly that the theatre needs new forms.

Sorin responds to his outburst by asking about Trigorin, Arkadina’s lover, who Konstantin describes as a “pretty decent” and “melancholy” writer (14). Nina arrives, and engages in a short conversation with Konstantin about his affections towards her and the impending play. As Konstantin and Nina get ready backstage, the audience arrives for the play, including Shamrayev, the estate manager, and his wife Polina; their daughter Masha, and the aforementioned Medvedenko; Dorn, a local physician; and Arkadina and Trigorin. Before Konstantin’s play begins Arkadina impatiently takes the stage, treating everyone to one of Gertrude’s speeches from *Hamlet*. Konstantin retorts back with his own speech of Hamlet’s, one that pointedly expresses his disapproval of her affair with Trigorin.

Next, the curtain rises to reveal a view of the lake and the moon on the horizon, and Nina sitting on a rock. The play-within-a-play consists of a long apocalyptic monologue that takes place two hundred thousand years from now. Everything in the

universe has expired except for the great World Spirit, played by Nina. The World Spirit must conquer the Devil in order to finally merge “matter and spirit...in glorious harmony” (20). Arkadina keeps interrupting the action with jibes at her son’s writing. Angry and hurt by her actions, Konstantin rages for the workman, Yakov, to drop the curtain and end the play, then storms off into the gardens.

After the dust settles, Nina emerges from behind the curtain and meets Trigorin, whom she clearly admires. Nina leaves to go home, and the other characters (except for Dorn) return to the estate house. Konstantin approaches and Dorn tries to reassure him about his writing. Konstantin, however, is more concerned with finding Nina. Masha, who has been looking for Konstantin, arrives, but Konstantin ignores her and rushes off to pursue Nina. Act I closes with Masha’s confessing to Dorn that she is deeply in love with Konstantin, and she is afraid her love will make her ruin her life.

Act II takes place on the croquet lawn of Sorin’s estate at noon; Chekhov tells us it is hot, but that Arkadina, Dorn, and Masha are sitting in the shade reading Maupassant’s *Sur l’eau*. The action begins with Arkadina telling Masha and Dorn how young and attractive she still is, saying, “I could play a girl of fifteen” (30). When Nina, Sorin, and Medvedenko join them on the lawn, talk turns to Sorin’s illness and his desire to continue to live a full life. An argument erupts between Arkadina and Shamrayev which escalates until Shamrayev resigns and Arkadina vows never to leave the estate.

The following scenes between Nina, Konstantin, and Trigorin comprise some of the major rising action of the play. Konstantin finds Nina sitting alone and approaches her, laying a dead seagull at her feet. He tells her that he has just killed the seagull in her honor, and he is going to kill himself soon in the same way. Nina says she doesn’t

understand either the symbol of the seagull or him anymore. Konstantin blames his failed play for her change towards him, saying “women never forgive failure. I’ve burnt the whole thing, every last page of it” (38). Trigorin, walking and writing, comes toward them and Konstantin sorrowfully tells Nina that “the sun hasn’t even reached you and you’re smiling already, you’re melting in its rays” (39). Konstantin quickly exits, leaving Trigorin and Nina alone together.

Nina eagerly questions Trigorin on what it is like to be a famous writer, how fame affects him, and how lucky he is that he has such a “glittering life, full of meaning” (40). Nina’s admiration of his work and innocent questions provoke Trigorin to launch into a discussion of his writing. He speaks passionately about his obsession with writing, his feelings of inadequacy as a writer, and his wish to be more than just a popular writer. Nina refuses to believe Trigorin’s misgivings about himself, and says that she would “live in a garret and eat nothing but black bread” to have celebrity and glory (43). Trigorin seems enchanted by Nina and tells her he does not want to leave. He notices the seagull Konstantin has left on the ground and jots down a note for a short story that foreshadows the cruelty he will inflict on Nina. Arkadina arrives to announce that she no longer wants to leave, and she takes Trigorin off to the house. Act II ends with Nina left alone onstage in disbelief.

Act III continues the rising action of *The Seagull*, as more conflicts arise between the four main characters. It takes place several weeks later in the dining room of Sorin’s house where Masha, who has perhaps already had a few too many drinks, is using Trigorin as a confidante. She reveals that Konstantin has unsuccessfully attempted suicide, and she tells Trigorin that in order to “rip this love out of [her] heart” she is

going to marry Medvedenko (45). Konstantin has also challenged Trigorin to a duel, and because of this conflict, Arkadina wants to whisk Trigorin away to Moscow. Masha bids Trigorin farewell as Nina comes to the dining room.

Nina gives Trigorin a medallion “to remember [her] by,” with the name of one of his books, and a page and line number (47). The tension between them is broken by the arrival of Arkadina and Sorin. Arkadina tries to convince Sorin to stay in the country, both for his health and to take care of Konstantin. Sorin begs Arkadina to give Konstantin a bit of money to travel and buy new clothes. She refuses him, saying that she does not have enough money to provide for Konstantin and that her “costume bills alone are enough to ruin [her]” (50). Sorin gets so worked up by their argument that he faints, and Konstantin and Medvedenko rush in to take care of him.

Konstantin asks Arkadina to change his bandage for him. Konstantin claims Trigorin is a coward and “books make [him] want to throw up” (53). Arkadina attacks Konstantin’s writing and status and the argument devolves into petty name calling. The tension between the two is finally broken when Konstantin bursts in to tears over the hopelessness of his situation, saying “I’ve lost everything. She doesn’t love me, I can’t write anymore...I’ve lost all hope” (54). Arkadina reassures him that once Trigorin leaves, Nina will love Konstantin again. She makes Konstantin promise not to duel with Trigorin. However, before Arkadina and Konstantin can fully resolve their argument, Trigorin enters with his book and Konstantin flees so he does not have to see him.

Trigorin reads the passage that Nina indicated on the medallion; “If my life could ever be of any use to you, come and take it” (55). He begs Arkadina to stay one more day, telling her that he is infatuated with Nina and pleading with her to let him go.

Arkadina seduces him and, defeated, Trigorin agrees to go away with her. Shamrayev, Polina, and the others arrive to escort Trigorin, Arkadina, and Sorin off to the station. However, before they can leave Trigorin comes back to speak privately with Nina. She tells him that she has decided to run off to Moscow to become an actress, and Trigorin is thrilled that he will see her again soon. Act III ends with a passionate kiss between Nina and Trigorin.

Act IV takes place two years later in one of the drawing rooms of Sorin's house, which has been converted into a study for Konstantin. A storm rages outside the house, matching the foreboding tone of the evening's events. The act begins with Masha and Medvedenko looking for Konstantin. Medvedenko entreats Masha to come home where their baby is waiting for them, revealing that they have gotten married and had a child. Masha refuses and Medvedenko insists that he has to leave to take care of the baby. Polina and Konstantin have entered to make up a bed for Sorin. Polina confronts Masha about her depression and Masha tells her mother that it is easy to escape love; "Once love has dug its way into your heart, you just have to gouge it out again" (64).

Medvedenko, Dorn, and Sorin enter, talking about money problems. Dorn asks Konstantin to tell them what has happened to Nina, and he speaks about her affair with Trigorin, the loss of her child, and her failed career as an actress. He also tells them that Nina is in town, but Konstantin assures the others that she will not come to visit. Arkadina arrives from the train station with Trigorin, and Trigorin and Konstantin speak directly to each other for the first time in the play. They are both polite, but there is a clear animosity between them. The company sits down to play a game of lotto, during which they discuss Konstantin's writing, his newfound success, and Arkadina's

successful reception in Kharkov. After Trigorin wins the game, the company leaves to have dinner, and Konstantin is left alone at his writing desk.

In the midst of Konstantin's subsequent soliloquy about the difficulties of writing there is a tap on the window. Konstantin rushes outside to find Nina drenched in the rain and ushers her inside. Nina asks Konstantin to sit and talk. She refers to herself as "the seagull," and Konstantin comforts her as she cries. He confesses his undying love for her and his unhappiness with his writing. He begs her to stay with him or take him away with her.

Rather than reply to his request Nina begins to leave, but then stops and asks for a glass of water. She hears Trigorin laughing through the closed door and begins to talk about their affair. Despite her protestations that she is thriving, Nina reveals that she has failed as an actress. Konstantin, similarly, admits his failure as a writer. She impulsively embraces him before running out the door, leaving Konstantin alone. Chekhov tells us in his stage directions that "For the next two minutes, [Konstantin] silently rips up all his manuscripts" and leaves the stage.

The others return from dinner, and set up for another game of lotto when a shot is heard offstage. Dorn goes to investigate the disturbance and tells the company that a bottle of ether burst in his medicine bag. He then draws Trigorin aside and delivers the news that Konstantin has shot himself.

Given Circumstances

The given circumstances of the play, also often referred to as the playwright's setting or the world of the play, provide directors with a firm foundation for their playscript analysis. Francis Hodge's definition of the word is quite clear: given

circumstances cover “all material in a playscript that delineates the environment—or the special ‘world’ of the play—in which the action takes place” (Hodge 18). Both geographical information about the literal location of the play and socio-economic information about the characters can be considered given circumstances. This section of the study will examine the geographical location of Chekhov’s play and its effects on the characters, as well as the social, political, and economic environment of the play.

Geographical Location

The Seagull takes place in Russia on Sorin’s country estate, which is located some distance away from Moscow. The isolated nature of Sorin’s estate is perhaps the most important piece of information about the geographical location of *The Seagull*. Each of the characters in the play is trapped to one degree or another on the estate. Critic Richard Gilman states that Chekhov’s characters cannot escape to the big city with its distractions of “culture, careers, formal amusements, professional entanglements, politics, ideas” etc. (Gilman 79). Because the characters in Chekhov’s plays are deprived of the stimulation that city life offers, they “are pressed back on themselves and on each other” (79). The isolated environment of Chekhov’s setting forces characters to relate to each other in a “severely limited atmosphere;” Richard Gilman compares Chekhov’s enclave-like settings to those of Samuel Beckett’s (79). With limited distractions from the outside world in a secluded location, the characters focus on their inner life and their intimate relationships with one another. However, this isolated environment also breeds boredom, listlessness, and depression in many of the characters. For example, Sorin says, “I just want to wake up, if only for an hour or two, from my torpid existence...I’ve gone stale”

(Chekhov 49). The seclusion and limited amount of stimulation for the characters are the geographic reality of *The Seagull*.

Along with the isolation of Sorin's estate, the vast emptiness of the Russian landscape is part of the geographical given circumstances of the play, and certainly has an effect on the characters. Chekhov saw a conflict between Russians and the dreary, freezing, immense land that they inhabit. Polotskaya states that Chekhov said, Russian life is characterized by two extremes;

On the one hand, there is physical weakness, nervousness, early sexual maturity, passionate desire to live and find the truth, dreams of work which...have no boundaries; edgy analysis and lack of knowledge combined with the irrepressible flight of thought; and on the other hand – endlessly flat land, severe climate, a grey and severe nation with its hard and cold history, the Tatar yoke, bureaucracy, poverty, ignorance, rainy capitals, Slavic apathy, and so forth...Russian life beats the soul out of the Russian...In Western Europe people die because their space is cramped and suffocating. In Russia they die because the space is an endless expanse. (18)

This “passionate desire to live” contrasted with “man's impotence in such a vast and cold space” is part of the struggle of the characters in *The Seagull* (Polotskaya 18). The characters cope with the barren remoteness of the landscape in different ways. For example, Medvedenko tries to overcome the expanse by walking eight miles every day to court the indifferent Masha, while Dorn escapes to Europe to renew himself by walking through streets “seething with people” (Chekhov 67). Konstantin's suicide, Masha's depression, and Nina's naive idealism are all different youthful responses to the loneliness and gloominess of the vast expanses of Russia. The clash between Russian desires and the oppressive land affects the given circumstances of the characters in *The Seagull*.

However, Russia's landscape is also a source of inspiration and harmony in *The Seagull*. The action takes place "beside a lake of magic beauty, surrounded by big estates, where singing is still heard in the evening across the waters and something of the holiday atmosphere of more prosperous times still survives" (Bruford 170). Konstantin uses this beauty to his advantage when he stages his play with "No set of any kind. Open view on to the lake and the horizon" (Chekhov 10). Much like Konstantin's use of nature for his scenery, Chekhov evokes both the positive and negative effects of the Russian landscape on his characters.

Social and Political Environment

The Seagull is a play populated largely by characters from the Russian intelligentsia, only representative of a small part of the Russian population; therefore, the social environment of the play is wrapped up in the mores of that particular way of life. According to W.H. Bruford, the term intelligentsia is a Russian word that came to denote a particular social class, and by Chekhov's time meant those who "received a higher education, and entered a liberal profession" or anyone who had political and social views of the middle class, often with revolutionary political views (142). The term is subjective, however, and not all of the intelligentsia was dedicated to political aims, but were "people who consciously aim at creating and propagating new forms and ideals, all directly towards the increased freedom of the personality" (165). The artistic characters of *The Seagull* are part of the latter group. The ideas and social customs of the inhabitants of Sorin's estate are perceived as potentially dangerous by their neighbors. Nina has been cautioned to stay away from Sorin's estate by her parents; "They say it's too Bohemian...they're afraid I'll be infected and want to be an actress" (Chekhov 14).

However, Nina is enchanted by the free-thinking residents of Sorin's estate, and aspires to be a part of their social group. The characters in *The Seagull*, as part of the Russian intelligentsia, saw themselves as the "intelligence" of the nation, and "clearly felt an exceptional sense of apartness from the society in which they lived," which often led to dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Malia 443).

In pre-revolutionary Russia, society was plagued with the "unrealized individual aspirations" of a well-educated and yet powerless middle class: the intelligentsia (Polotskaya 19). Surely Masha wears black "in mourning for [her] life" at least partially to acknowledge how few opportunities she will have to better her life. Critic Emma Polotskaya links these thwarted ambitions to a Russian epidemic of suicide among the young, "which, by the end of the last century, had become almost commonplace" (19). Both Masha's melancholy and Konstantin's eventual suicide seem to be fueled by a sense of helplessness, and inability to actualize their goals, goals that were associated with their social class.

While the characters are members of the often radically political social class of the intelligentsia, they seem uninterested in politics. Bruford states, "there is no revolutionary talk among these artistic people" (171). While politics is certainly not their *raison d'être*, several of the characters have some political leanings. Konstantin says in Act I that his mother can "rattle off the whole of Nekrasov by heart" (Chekhov 10). Nikolay Nekrasov was a poet, and a venerated public figure for the intelligentsia who had set the "standard for self-sacrificial efforts on behalf of the oppressed" (Klioutchkine 45). Although we never hear Arkadina recite any of his work, we can assume that she has some radical political beliefs, or at least listens to the popular opinion of her social circle.

Trigorin expresses a desire to write about the anguish of the Russian people in Act II: “I’m also a citizen, you know, I love my country, I love its people; I feel if I’m a writer it’s my duty to talk about the people and their sufferings and their future and talk about science and human rights etcetera etcetera” (Chekhov 42). However, he goes on to say that while he does write about those things, the public reacts to him in anger, and his true talent is in describing landscapes. As a writer of importance he is a “fraud, and a fraud right down to the marrow of [his] bones” (43). Konstantin was kicked out of university, “apparently for political reasons,” although the text is not clear on this point, and he has a dedication to “an impersonal ideal” with his literary efforts to create new forms (Bruford 171). But, while part of a politically radical social class, the characters in *The Seagull* seem largely uninterested in politics.

Instead, the character’s “thoughts are entirely taken up with their own petty affairs,” whether thoughts of love or thoughts of artistic success (171). And therein lies the most important aspect of the social environment of *The Seagull*; while the characters are part of a larger social class and political group, they focus socially on the insular group of characters on Sorin’s estate. These relationships are intimate and intertwined, and many of them have developed over twenty years. During this time they have established habits, shared heartbreaks and joys, and developed strong opinions about those who surround them. The small social group of the residents of Sorin’s estate, while mainly concerned with their relationships with one another, are part of the larger middle class of pre-revolutionary Russia, more specifically, part of the intelligentsia.

Economic Environment

Money is a topic that is discussed a great deal in *The Seagull*, and Chekhov uses economic status as a way of organizing his characters. Some characters that have wealth include Sorin, Dorn, Trigorin, and Arkadina. For example, Arkadina is a popular actress with “seventy thousand in the bank at Odessa” (Chekhov 11). However, all of these characters, except for Trigorin, at one time or another cry poverty; Arkadina and Sorin assert they are unable to give money to help Konstantin afford new clothing.

For other characters in the play money is a constant concern. Chekhov presents two divergent views of poverty. For Medvedenko and Konstantin money is a symbol of survival and status while Masha and Nina hold a far more romantic view of poverty. Medvedenko constantly comments on his income and expenses throughout the play, while Masha rebuts him, saying, “You claim there’s nothing worse than poverty, but in my opinion it’d be infinitely simpler to be a beggar wearing rags than to...Not that you’d ever understand...” (Chekhov 8). Nina, who comes from a wealthy family, has similar romantic notions and claims that she would “live in a garret and eat nothing but black bread” in exchange for fame (43). Regardless of a character’s economic class or familial relationship, money continues to be a constant source of conversation and conflict throughout the play.

In conclusion, the characters of *The Seagull* are affected by the given circumstances within which they live. Geographically, they are affected by the isolation of Sorin’s estate and the gloomy vastness of the Russian landscape. Socially, they are members of the middle class, identified with the Russian intelligentsia. While they do not seem particularly political, they are greatly concerned with matters of money.

However, the characters are much more concerned with their day to day affairs. All of the characters are selfish “spoilt children of life,” except perhaps Medvedenko and, according to W.H. Bruford, none of them are “compelled by economic, social or religious considerations to bridle their unruly desires” (171). And this is a key point; the characters are well enough off that they can spend their time pining for one another, even more artistic success, and happiness and fulfillment that always seems to be right around the corner but never is.

Structure

In *The Seagull*, Chekhov subverts the traditional nineteenth century plot structure of the four-act, well-made play. Chekhov’s play does not follow a conventional climactic dramatic structure with an arc of consistently rising action leading to a climax and resolution, but instead presents a proto-episodic web of interconnected moments full of rises and falls. *The Seagull* unfolds before the audience moment-to-moment, each beat contributing to the total impact of the play. Critic Richard Gilman calls the play:

A seemingly structureless drama, it’s really all structure, if by that we mean, as we should, something inseparable from texture and pattern. The play isn’t an edifice laid horizontally yet rearing its “meanings” skyward, but a meshing of revelations, withholdings, recognitions, everything serving as clues to the whole. (100)

The Seagull is a play of interlocking moments between characters constantly going in and out of the action. As characters speak of the weather one moment and their fates the next, Chekhov presents both the trivial and the significant side by side.

Chekhov’s collage of day to day life and intertwining relationships is a play of speech and activity. While several moments of dramatic action occur in the play, Chekhov felt “that speech can be a good part, perhaps even most, of what ‘happens’ in a

play” (Gilman 95). Much of the “action” of *The Seagull* is dialogue; for example, Trigorin’s thoughts about writing enchant Nina in Act II. David Margarshack states this focus on dialogue moves Chekhov’s plays from “direct” to “indirect” action (177). However, a play of indirect action does not have to lack forward momentum or tension. Richard Gilman suggests that “ceaseless activity goes on, usually small, often casual seeming, an intricate meshing of gesture, speech, and idea” (99). Therefore, Arkadina parading around the lawn like a peacock, Masha pouring continual glasses of vodka for herself, and Trigorin ceaselessly writing in his notebook are all essential elements of activity pushing the play forward.

The Seagull is not without moments of significant dramatic action, but they are surrounded by the conversations of daily life, and cannot be separated from them. For example, Konstantin’s eruption at the end of the play-within-a-play and his cry to Yakov to lower the curtain is a life-changing moment for Konstantin. However, this climactic moment is followed by everyday conversation, including Arkadina’s remembrances of the lake in the old days and discussions about Sorin’s stiff legs. Similarly, Act II begins with a lengthy scene in which we see many of the characters reading on the lawn, enjoying a lazy afternoon together which culminates in a trivial argument about taking horses into town. These everyday conversations are directly followed by a decisive confrontation between Konstantin and Nina wherein he presents her with a dead gull, accuses her of no longer loving him, and tells her he plans to kill himself. Chekhov intentionally places the mundane beside the momentous to mimic real day-to-day human life. Chekhov once told playwriting students, “Things on stage should be as complicated and yet as simple as in real life. People dine, just dine, while their happiness is made and

their lives are smashed” (Rayfield 177). This observation is crucial to understanding the structure of *The Seagull*, which is built to feel like real life, a combination of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Since the daily activities and discussions at Sorin’s estate are the building blocks of the structure of Chekhov’s drama rather than scenes of traditional dramatic action, establishing the climax of *The Seagull* is complex. Act III of *The Seagull* contains several scenes of rising action, including the passionate argument between Konstantin and Arkadina, Arkadina’s seduction of Trigorin, and the prolonged kiss between Trigorin and Nina which ends the act. If Chekhov were writing the well-made play of Scribe and Sardou, his drama would have climaxed with their kiss at the end of Act III. However, these events do not answer the driving dramatic question of the play, and according to critic W. Gareth Jones the following events of Act IV reveal “that climax...in its contrived falsity” (17). J.L. Styan remarks that Chekhov complicates the traditional structure of the well-made play by leaving the four central concerns of the play in question: 1) Konstantin’s relationship with Nina, 2) Trigorin, Nina, and Konstantin’s dreams to succeed in their art, 3) the love triangle between Trigorin and the two women and 4) Konstantin’s relationship with his mother (72).

Therefore, the climax of *The Seagull* cannot be found at the peak of the rising action of Act III, because it does not set up the resolution of the dramatic action of the play. I believe that the climax of a play addresses the single driving question of the play. Chekhov provides two central dramatic questions within *The Seagull*: whether or not Konstantin and Nina will become successful artists and whether or not their romantic relationship will survive. The questions of love and art are equally important, as both are

plot and thematic focuses within the play. Both of these driving questions arise early within the play, and neither are resolved by Nina and Trigorin's kiss at the end of Act III.

Both of these interweaving questions are answered within Act IV, after a two year gap in the action of the play. Chekhov's decision to move the climax of the play from the traditional well-made play structure at the end of Act III to the denouement of Act IV shows his interest in the fallout of relationships between characters. Richard Gilman states that *The Seagull's* "climactic actions, some of the most passionately unfolding and swiftly revelatory in all of Chekhov," begin with Konstantin meditating on writing at his desk (92). The following climactic conversation brings together the play's two main themes, "everything having to do with art and love" (92). This final confrontation between Konstantin and Nina also ultimately address both art and love. Nina is revealed as an artistic failure despite her claims that she is a "proper actress," when she admits that she is acting where the "culture loving tradesmen will harass" her rather than on any legitimate stage (Chekhov 80, 82). Later, Konstantin admits that he is a failure as a writer when he says "I have no faith and I don't know what my vocation is" (80). The question of the survival of their love is answered when Nina confesses her love for Trigorin, exits the stage and Konstantin is left alone, destroying his manuscripts. Chekhov resolves both of the main dramatic questions of the play through Konstantin and Nina's fateful conversation. This final meeting of the two leads directly to Konstantin's destruction of the manuscripts. Therefore their confrontation—while understated and less traditionally climactic than the action at the end of Act III—is the structural climax of the play.

After this climactic moment, Chekhov provides a tiny bit of falling action when the others return from dinner, preparing for another game of lotto. Chekhov juxtaposes Konstantin's suicide with the final "boring game" of lotto, once again emphasizing how close the tedious events in our lives can be to the significant ones. Chekhov undermines the traditional well-made play structure in many ways, developing a series of moments between characters that unfold one after the other, each adding up to the whole. This interconnected structure was an attempt to show real life on the stage, with all of its complications, messiness, and unresolved endings.

Themes

An analysis of the structure of *The Seagull* reveals the play as a netting of cross-relationships with each moment building to a complete whole. The overlapping layers of dialogue, action, and character all contribute to the unifying themes and subjects of *The Seagull*. As previously stated, the central driving force of the play is longing. Each of the characters longs for fulfillment, happiness, success, and completeness in their lives. While this yearning can take on many forms, the majority of the characters are searching for success in art and love. *The Seagull* is not only "about" art and love as subjects, but, as Richard Gilman states,

the play quite literally surrounds them, providing those abstractions with the dramatic context or field in which they can come to life, working themselves out as motifs...Chekhov takes art and love *into* his writing, turning them from their disembodied state into dramatic energies. These are then deployed throughout the play, and in the process art and love necessarily assume new identities, since they are being written, not being written about.
(77)

The “energies” of love and art within the play are embodied in the characters, through their passions and longings. Each character is caught in the thematic web of love and art, and their longing to attain success in both of these creates the action of this play.

Art and Literature

Art pervades *The Seagull* in a multitude of ways. The play begins with a literal piece of art, Konstantin’s play, and talk of literature pervades the text, with intertextual references to *Hamlet*, Maupassant, and popular music. While these elements all contribute to the theme and provide opportunities for activity, one of the most intriguing aspects of art within the play is the emphasis placed on characters’ desire to create meaningful art.

The desire to create haunts characters who are not even artists by trade, including Sorin and Dorn who remarks, “if I’d been given the opportunity to scale the spiritual heights that an artist achieves at the moment of creativity, I think I’d have had nothing but contempt for my physical existence and everything it entails and I’d have soared into the stratosphere” (Chekhov 27). While Dorn romanticizes the act of writing, everyone’s opinions and philosophies of what makes great art are essential to the play. Even Shamrayev’s recollection of famous performances of his youth, played for comedy, contributes to this thematic discourse of the play.

Trigorin speaks about art more than any other character in the play, and rather than romanticizing the creation of art speaks as a weary professional author. He speaks at great length with Nina in Act II about the writer’s life, countering her “breathlessly romantic notions of what it must be like” with sobering comments to the contrary (Gilman 86). He speaks of his process as an uncontrollable need to write “non-stop, at

breakneck speed” which swallows up his own life (Chekhov 40, 41). Particularly, because he cannot stop “fixating on every phrase” that is uttered around him and adding it to his “literary stockpile,” in the form notes in a small journal (41). In this way, Trigorin exploits those people around him to create his art.

In addition to being dissatisfied with the way that he writes, Trigorin is unfulfilled by the kind of art he produces. While he longs to be a momentous writer like Turgenev, Tolstoy, or Zola, he finds himself to be only “charming and clever” (42). Commercial approval does not satisfy him. When Nina says he is “spoiled” by his success, Trigorin replies, “What success? I’ve never liked myself. I’ve never liked myself as a writer” (42). He concludes that while he has a strong desire to write about “the people and their sufferings and their future...and science and human rights,” these works get mutilated by the censors. And yet, his public expects him as a serious writer to explore these topics, and he feels as if he is a “fox hunted by a pack of hounds,” chased by both sides (43). In the end he feels that all he can do is “describe landscapes” and that in all other respects he is a “fraud” (43). His dissatisfaction with himself fuels his desire to create more meaningful art.

Chekhov wrote that “dissatisfaction with oneself is one of the fundamental qualities of every true talent” (Gilman 86). This implies that he would admire Trigorin’s self-critical nature. But, it seems as though he agrees with Trigorin’s assessment of himself, that he is just a “landscape painter.” David Margarshack uses Chekhov’s *A Boring Story* to explain Chekhov’s judgment of Trigorin. Margarshack states that Trigorin does not have “the courage to write” as he wants to, and so he covers “page after page with descriptions of nature for fear of being suspected of tendentiousness” (200).

Trigorin's "cowardice" infuses his other decisions in the play as well. Gilman concludes that Trigorin's words "may not precisely represent Chekhov's feelings and attitude" about writing "in every respect," but admires Trigorin for his self-criticism and skepticism of fame (86).

One of the more interesting explanations of Trigorin's "cowardice" comes from Richard Peace, in his study of the four major plays. Peace points out how difficult it was to write about the people, or peasants, of Russia's suffering, science, and philosophy in the 19th century in the face of editing and censorship (30). He remarks that Chekhov was also accused of what could be seen as a "lack of social commitment" in his writing (Peace 30). Therefore, Trigorin accurately expresses the point of view of a writer struggling to create meaningful art, but is instead mired in routine and spinelessness.

Unlike Trigorin, Konstantin speaks about writing in theoretical terms, and his point of view changes over the course of the play. In Act I, Konstantin speaks to Sorin about the theatre. He says, "...the modern theatre's in a blind alley" full of "petty, oversimplified" morals, and a "thousand varieties of the same thing, over and over and over again" (Chekhov 11, 12). He longs to write "new forms," and his play is an attempt to achieve this using symbolism.

Konstantin's play serves as an example of the type of artistic work he is trying to create. He wants to show life "not as it is, not even as it ought to be, but as you see it in your dreams" (Chekhov 15). Peace points out that Konstantin "stands for a more abstract art" than Trigorin, "not rooted in the problems of the moment, but concerned with the eternal and the future; an art of symbols and poetic diction; an art, not of reality, but of

dreams” (30). With these concerns and aims, Konstantin’s play can be strongly identified with the avant-garde symbolists of the 1890s (31).

Like Trigorin, he has a passionate desire to create art that he finds meaningful, but, unlike Trigorin, Konstantin’s philosophy of writing comes full circle by Act IV of the play. At this point in the play, Konstantin has achieved some success as a writer. As he looks over a piece that he has written, he says “I’ve said so much about new forms, but now I feel as if, gradually, I’m turning conventional myself” (Chekhov 75). He compares some of his description to Trigorin, wishing he had the same ease and methodology of expressing himself. Finally, after a pause indicated by Chekhov, he says “Yes, I’m more and more convinced it’s not to do with old forms or new forms, it’s what someone writes not even thinking about form, but writing what flows freely from his heart” (76). This revelation shows his growth as an artist from the young man who insisted on new forms or “nothing at all,” to a more mature writer who understands that what one writes is far more important than how one writes (12). Gilman suggests that for Chekhov “technique was always in the service of vision and experience, not the other way around, just as originality was a possible outcome and never a goal” (85). Perhaps this discovery would allow Konstantin to express the inner images he struggles to convey, or break him out of the cliché that he finds in his writing. However, Nina’s final intrusion into his life cuts short any further development of his dream to create meaningful art. And as he remarks to Nina at the end of their final scene together: “I’m still drifting through a maze of dreams and images, with no idea what use it might be” (Chekhov 80). Konstantin is still haunted by the abstractions and dreams of his youthful writing.

Symbolically, the tools of the writer are central images in *The Seagull*, which Chekhov uses to illustrate the life of the writer. Trigorin's notebook and his obsessive note taking throughout the play suggest his inability to connect fully to real life. He instead remains entrenched in the literary world of his writing. Similarly, Konstantin's soliloquy about revising his work, rather than his personal life, shows Chekhov's commitment to portraying the life of the writer. Finally, the choice to have Konstantin destroy his manuscripts in the climax of the play shows the importance of art to the story, and a focus on the physical tools of the writer.

In conclusion, through the characters of Konstantin and Trigorin, Chekhov "touches, often intimately, on his own concerns as a writer. He does not necessarily endorse any of them, he clearly disapproves of some, but he anchors the "debate" in animate personalities who have a stake in its outcome" (Gilman 84). Chekhov presents two very differing points of view on life as a writer, and the process of creating art, in the characters of Trigorin and Konstantin. He clearly shares both of their opinions in some respect, but leaves the audience to judge their actions without taking sides. While Konstantin represents the new, experimental side of writing and Trigorin embodies traditional methods of writing, neither is invalidated by Chekhov. After all, Trigorin says that all writers choose their own subject and write it to the best of their ability (Chekhov 21). However, Konstantin's discovery in Act IV that an artist needs to write from the heart seems to most closely resemble Chekhov's own views as a writer, and perhaps this is one of the ingredients to creating meaningful art.

Love

The other prominent theme in *The Seagull* is love, especially unrequited romantic love. If the play is about artists and writers, the play is equally about lovers. Richard Gilman compares *The Seagull* to *La Ronde* “in the way its characters link up in a chain of carnality or carnal aspiration, as well as in a skein of romantic longing,” though without *La Ronde*’s sexuality (89). The theme of unreciprocated love is revealed in the first few moments of the play when Medvedenko confesses his love for Masha, and she expresses her indifference. During the course of the next twenty minutes of the play, Konstantin tells Sorin that his mother does not love him, and then he is shushed by Nina when he confesses his love, and then Polina expresses jealousy over how many women love Dorn. Discussions of love fill the conversations of the play as much as talk of art. While the main dramatic question of the play concerns Konstantin and Nina’s fragile relationship, Chekhov seems to posit that genuine love is impossible in the world of the play.

Each of the characters is romantically involved in some way with another, except for Sorin, who bemoans the fact that he was never married. However, none of the secondary character’s romantic longings are requited, “and much of the play’s lower level...buzz and hum of conversation and musings is made up of their sense of injury or deprivation” (89). Whether because one of the parties desperately loves someone else (Masha) or simply cannot commit to one woman (Dorn), each of the minor characters is left wanting more from another. Like the secondary characters, Konstantin loves Nina desperately, but she only loves him until Trigorin calls her to the glamorous art world of Moscow. Meanwhile, Arkadina and Trigorin’s unhealthy relationship is based around her ability to control him.

While romantic love is a primary focus in *The Seagull*, familial love also plays a role. Particularly, Konstantin's desperate need for approval and love from his mother and her continual dismissal of him is one of the driving forces in the play. Their relationship does not progress throughout the play but the "neurotic deadlock...remains unbroken from the beginning to the end of *The Seagull*" (Jackson 11). In Konstantin's first appearance, he describes his adversarial relationship with his mother in great detail. He speaks first of her disapproval, knowing that even though she has not read his play yet that she will hate it. Konstantin explains that she hates him, because he "serves as a constant reminder that she's not young anymore" (Chekhov 11). Additionally, he feels painfully insignificant in her social circle, and it is clear that his play was written to gain her approval and love, convince her that he is a genius.

Arkadina, however, sees his play as a personal affront to her, rather than an attempt to please her. She says, "He wants to teach us how to write and what to act. I'm bored by all this. These continual sneers at my expense...[are] enough to try anyone's patience" (21). Robert Louis Jackson compares Konstantin's play to his own life journey. To this effect, Jackson compares Arkadina to the devil in Konstantin's play, his own "mighty adversary" who "shatters his magic lantern with some disruptive, sarcastic comments on the play" (Jackson 6, 7). Konstantin is so disturbed by her jibes that he calls off the play, saying that he forgot that "writing plays and acting in them is reserved for the elite" (Chekhov 20). His attempt to prove his worth as an artist and as a son has failed.

Their intense confrontational relationship continues with no resolution. Styan suggests that Konstantin "wants to be dependent on a loving mother, and in the play he

never breaks the cord, even though the adult in him sees through her weakness and is revolted by his dependence on her” (66). After their caustic fight in Act III, they forge an uneasy truce, though Arkadina seems to seek peace in order to convince Konstantin to call off his duel with Trigorin. Though they have little interaction in Act IV, Arkadina responds to Dorn that she has never had the time to read Konstantin’s work now that he has become a successful writer. He has still not gained the respect and love that he so desperately craved from her. However, despite their “permanent psychological duel,” Konstantin’s last words before he commits suicide are in worry for his mother’s feelings (Jackson 6). Even in his final moments, he is never able to break away from a hopeless search to gain his mother’s approval and love.

All of the failed relationships in the play seem to point out that love is impossible in the world that Chekhov has created, or is ultimately unsatisfying. For example, though Trigorin thinks that Nina may be the “youthful, seductive, poetic” love that he has been searching for, ultimately she disappoints his overly romanticized view of her (Chekhov 56). Chekhov echoed this sentiment when he said, “Love is either the remnant of something long past which is dying out but was once tremendous, or it is a part of something which in the future will develop into something tremendous; at the present time, however, it doesn’t satisfy, offers far less than one expects” (Chekhov, Jackson 12). In Chekhov’s view, at any given moment, no one is able to be fulfilled in their relationships, but is instead searching for a love that remains unattainable.

Perhaps the connective tissue to each of these relationships is, as Gilman says, the characters need for one another, instead of authentic love (90). The endless longing that infuses the play, carries over into the romantic and familial relationships of the plays.

Arkadina needs Trigorin on her arm to keep up appearances and save off loneliness, and he needs Nina to feed him artistically, both in terms of new material and what he believes with emotionally save him. Konstantin needs Nina to be his muse; writing is pointless without her. This extends to the secondary characters as well. Medvedenko is willing to endure cruelty and indifference at the hand of Masha, and Masha in turn is willing to suffer these for Konstantin. Polina has been begging Dorn for over twenty years to take her away from her tedious life. All the characters in the play depend on another to deliver them from their current state of unhappiness, whether this is creative stiltedness, poverty, or a miserable marriage.

Love then, as a thematic construct within *The Seagull*, becomes an unachievable goal that the characters strive for throughout the play. However deluded each is in their hopeless longing, they continue to hold on to the possibility of love in the face of rejection.

Thematic Synthesis of Art and Love

Art and love join together in *The Seagull*, and they converge in more ways than one. Trigorin pursues Nina in order to rejuvenate his writing, perhaps she will be the inspiration that he needs. Similarly, Nina seems attracted to Trigorin for the artistic success that he might bring her; the life of fame and glory she was looking for. The relationships between the four main characters are both caught up equally in art and love. While this is manifest many times throughout the play, one particular instance where the two converge is in the argument between Konstantin and Arkadina in Act III.

The scene begins in a gesture of motherly love, as Arkadina changes Konstantin's bandage. The physical image of Arkadina bent over Konstantin evokes mother and child

as well, as she babies him. He recalls happier times when she was affectionate towards him, and remarks that he loves her “as tenderly and devotedly” as he did as a child (Chekhov 52). Quickly, however, the talk turns to Trigorin and Konstantin’s disapproval and jealousy. They argue about how honorable Trigorin’s character is for a few exchanges, but quickly the talk turns to an argument about art. Konstantin throws out the first jab, stating that Trigorin’s books make him “want to throw up” (53). Arkadina accuses Konstantin of having no talent but only “pretensions,” and he counters that she and Trigorin have “snatched top spot in the art world” and tries to “suppress and silence everyone else” (53). He tells her to keep acting in her “pathetic, trivial plays,” which is an accusation that shocks and appalls her (53). The final blow in this argument comes when Arkadina calls Konstantin a “mediocrity” (54).

Ultimately, where they can hurt each other the most is to attack the artistic merit of their work, not their character. They attack each other’s art, rather than their selfishness or indifference. In an argument that is truly about Konstantin’s desperate need for her love, they can only communicate about art. Art and love are wrapped up so tightly within the characters that they cannot tell the difference between the two. Part of what is fascinating about this play is how Chekhov uses the characters to interweave these themes together seamlessly.

Character Analysis

Scholars disagree as to whether Konstantin, the young writer; Nina, the young actress; or both are the protagonist/s of *The Seagull*. The Baylor Theatre production focused on Konstantin as a protagonist for the story; however, this study includes scholarly material that uses both characters as protagonists. Their story is clearly at the

center of the play. However, there is critical disagreement about what aspect of their joint action in the play is most important. In general, critics like to focus on either Konstantin and Nina's artistic journeys or the story arc of their romantic relationship. David Margarshack, for example, insists that the play is about the "inner development of the characters of the protagonists" as artists and has "nothing whatever to do with their unhappy love affair" (189). Whereas Robert Louis Jackson, on the other hand focuses on Konstantin and Nina's search for love and their relationship with one another, rather than their artistry (13-15). Richard Gilman, however, notes that the themes of art and love "converge" in the "confrontation at the end between Konstantin and Nina" (91). Telling only one half of the story would be incomplete, and for this reason both thematic elements of their story are given equal weight in the following character analysis.

Konstantin

Konstantin is a young writer longing for fulfillment in love and art. He passionately desires to be a great artist, maintain his blossoming love affair with Nina, and win the approval of his mother. Konstantin's first entrance into the show is as a nervous, high-strung playwright, preparing for a performance, and all of his longings are revealed quickly thereafter. He expresses to Sorin his distaste for the modern theatre and his desire to create new forms, as well as his concern about his relationship with his mother. While Konstantin states that he loves his mother very much, he says, "she's anti-me, anti the performance and anti my play" (Chekhov 10). His desire to create significant art is partially wrapped up in the hope that he will no longer feel insignificant around his mother. When Nina arrives he declares that she makes him "deliriously

happy” and that she is his “dream” (13). His desire to create meaningful art and find contentment in love fuels all of his actions throughout the course of the play.

Konstantin is one of the protagonists of *The Seagull*, and, according to A. Shaftymov, the “most notable events” of the play “are centered on” him (76). J.L. Styan states that *The Seagull* differs from Chekhov’s other plays by “keeping a single character more in the centre of the action” (25). But, Styan notes that Konstantin is not a central figure in a traditional sense, but one of the “new anti-heroes of the modern stage” (26). Konstantin’s journey follows him from idealistic and ambitious writer with a bright future, to one who loses his faith and sees his dreams unfulfilled. This journey is intertwined with his love for Nina and his eventual loss of her.

At the beginning of the play, Konstantin expresses both his desires to be a writer, and to create works of significance. In Act I, he is eagerly awaiting the premiere of his new play. While he expresses that he feels insignificant, he also expresses his fervent desire to create new forms. When Nina criticizes Konstantin’s play for not having any “living characters,” he rebukes her, stating that theatre should show life “as you see it in your dreams” (Chekhov 15). He expresses confidence in his ideals, and rejects others ideas of what theatre should be. Konstantin also appears head over heels in love with Nina, and tries to express his love to her, despite her hesitance. Both his writing, and his love for Nina, remain in the forefront of his mind when he returns after his disastrous play. At the end of Act I, he shakes Dorn’s hand “warmly and impulsively embraces him” when Dorn compliments his play. But when Dorn begins to give him advice about writing, his thoughts immediately turn to Nina. After asking repeatedly where Nina has gone, he runs off after her.

The intertwining of the themes of art and his relationship with Nina continues in Act II when he presents her with a dead gull that he has killed in her honor. He then, childishly, threatens to kill himself soon in the same way. Konstantin blames their collapsing relationship on the failure of his play, stating that she now thinks he is “mediocre and worthless, just like everybody else does” (38). Despite his earlier confidence in his abilities, he admits to her that he completely understands her turning away from him. His disappointment as a writer and the collapse of his relationship are tangled together.

Konstantin’s writing remains wrapped up in his relationship with Nina, as well as his mother. In Act III he seems to have gained some of his cocky confidence back when he says to his mother, “I have more talent than all the rest of you put together if you want to know the truth” (53). However, by the end of the argument, he admits to his mother, “She doesn’t love me, I can’t write anymore...I’ve lost all hope (54). Throughout the play, he looks both to Nina and his mother for approval of his work and of his own self-worth.

Konstantin’s self-image depends on these other people to feed him praise of his work. Robert Louis Jackson attributes this quality in Konstantin as a need to appeal to fate, something outside of himself for direction (Jackson 7). His tragedy is that he fails to “recognize his essential freedom and to accept the responsibility that it implies” (8). Like the other characters in the play, he *needs* others to feel happiness, though they ignore him or abandon him. Konstantin’s complex and neurotic relationship with his mother is a large part of what holds him back, trapped forever at Sorin’s estate. Jackson describes Konstantin’s dilemma:

Konstantin cannot leave the illusory “magic lake;” he cannot step out of the magic circle of his life-hate relationship with his mother; he cannot cease being a child...Maupassant, he observes, “ran away from the Eiffel Tower which oppressed him with its vulgarity.” But Konstantin himself does not run away from the vulgarity of his world: he stays with it, sinks ever more deeply into it, with his rankling ambition and sniveling self-deprecation, his wounded pride and peevish vanity. (12)

His inability to move forward in his life, his crippling insecurity, and his entrapment in the past can be witnessed in Act IV in his final conversation with Nina.

Before Nina’s arrival, Konstantin has voiced his discovery that form is not everything in writing. What he believed so ardently about writing in Act I of the play has changed completely. During their conversation, this discovery will come to a head as he reveals his ultimate failure as a writer. And despite his pleas to the contrary, he will also lose Nina. Nina’s appearance, as Gilman states, is a “miracle” to Konstantin; “she’s come back to save him” (92). Konstantin speaks to her of his love for her, “trying to pick up the threads of the past, to reweave the old pattern” (Jackson 14). He confesses his weakness, that he does not have the “strength” to stop loving her (Chekhov 78). Additionally, while he has found success in his writing, it does not bring him happiness or fulfillment without her. Konstantin says, “Ever since I lost you and my work started to be published, my life has been unbearable” (78). He has realized that accomplishments cannot fill his *need* for her. Konstantin speaks of how trapped he feels, saying that he is as “cold as if [he] lived in a dungeon” (78). All of this culminates in him begging her to give him another chance with her, saying “Stay here, Nina, please, I’m begging you, or let me come away with you” (79).

The climax of the play occurs after Nina reveals her changed attitude towards life. Konstantin then confesses his complete lack of faith in anything, saying, “I’m still

driving through a maze of dreams and images, with no idea what use it might be. I have no faith and I don't know what my vocation is" (Chekhov 80). Margarshack calls this confession Konstantin's peripetieia, or reversal of fortune (193). Margarshack states, "What a change from the almost deliriously confident Konstantin of the first act! What a complete reversal his ambitions and hopes have suffered after he has put them to the test of practical experience as a writer" (193). Konstantin has realized that he is an utter failure as a writer. This realization is only one piece of the puzzle of his ultimate destruction, however.

Even after this confession he still tries to get Nina to stay, which she refuses. After confessing her desperate love for Trigorin, she remembers their fond past together and recites a passage from his play. The fact that she remembers his words and recites them so warmly must touch him deeply, but then she "impulsively embraces" Konstantin and runs out the door, leaving him alone (81). In the end of these short few minutes, Konstantin has lost both his art and his love. In the end, he is not brave enough to carry on despite these losses, but instead chooses first to destroy all of his work, and then to destroy himself.

Nina

Nina is a young actress, and some scholars would argue, the co-protagonist of *The Seagull*. She is an idealistic and naive dreamer, whose goal is to be a famous actress. Though she begins the play in a youthful relationship with Konstantin, she falls hard for Trigorin. Through the loss of her child, her relationship with Trigorin, and her potential acting career, she changes and matures, embracing the reality that while life is disappointing, one must simply endure.

Nina begins the play as a wide-eyed young girl searching for fame, art, and love. Richard Gilman remarks that her “remark about a play needing a “love interest” indicates that she’s not yet a serious actor, or artist, but in the preliminary phase of being stage-struck” (84). She seems to think that nothing matters other than fame, as indicated in Act II. First, in a soliloquy, she is surprised that the famous Trigorin and Arkadina are “just like anyone else” (Chekhov 37) Later, she asks Trigorin repeatedly what it is like to be famous, and praises him for his success. She then says to Trigorin, that to be an actress, “I’d live in a garret and eat nothing but black bread, and endure not being satisfied with my work and being aware of my own imperfections, but in return I’d ask for fame...real, spectacular fame” (43). For Nina it is not enough to be an actress, but she must receive fame and glory.

Nina’s father and stepmother have an enormous influence on her choices throughout the play, though are never seen onstage in *The Seagull*. When she first arrives in the play she is out of breath, having snuck out of the house. She has obviously been crying, and tells Konstantin that he cannot keep her for long. We discover that her parents have forbid her from coming to Sorin’s estate, because it is too “Bohemian” (Chekhov 14). Later, after Konstantin’s play is over, Nina “tearfully” leaves to go back to the estate where her father will be waiting for her. Arkadina then explains that while her parents are rich, she will not inherit any money, and Dorn calls her father an “out-and-out villain” (25). While an audience cannot be sure of how horrific Nina’s home situation is, surely one of the reasons she is “drawn to this lake as if [she] were a seagull” is to escape the cruelty of her father. In Act III, she tells Trigorin that she is leaving for

Moscow, leaving her father. Her choice to flee to Moscow must be strongly influenced by her desire to escape her brutal and overprotective father.

While Konstantin can never leave the security of his mother's nest, Nina does break away from the "stifling confines of her family" to become an adult on her own (Jackson 11). The two years away from her home have changed her immensely. She has matured into a woman, no longer the innocent child of the past. While Konstantin begs her to stay with him, or to take him away with her, she knows that she cannot return to the innocence of the past, as much as she would like to.

Nina's journey and maturation process is not kind to her. She saw their abandoned stage, "a melancholy reminder of their young ambitions and what they shared before they separated" (Styan 85). Nina acts incredibly strangely, repeatedly referring to herself as the seagull and rubbing her forehead. Styan states that it is "almost like a symptom of mental derangement of semi-delirium" (85). However, through all of this, Nina tries to remain positive. She excitedly tells Konstantin that they are both "caught in the whirlpool" of art and creation, but then remarks that she is going to be performing in Yelets and pestered by the local businessmen (Chekhov 78). The acting life was certainly not what she imagined when she dreamed of fame. She speaks with great pain of her unhappy affair with Trigorin and the loss of her child. Styan says that she "speaks like a dead thing" when recalling this part of her life (85).

However, despite all of this pain and sorrow, she tells Konstantin "what's important isn't fame or glamour, none of the things I used to dream about, it's the ability to endure. To be able to bear your cross and keep the faith. I do have faith, and it's not so painful any more, and when I think about my vocation, I'm not afraid of life"

(Chekhov 80). Though Nina is clearly a broken woman, she is able to find some shred of comfort in her knowledge that life goes on, and she must also go on.

Nina has won a very small victory in her ability to endure, although, it is unclear how fully she embraces her fate and how much she has sacrificed her dreams. Directly after she tells Konstantin that the ability to endure is more important than “fame or glamour,” she tells him to “come and have a look” when she becomes “a great actress” (Chekhov 80). Nina clearly has lingering childhood dreams which even the harshest reality cannot make her let go of completely. Nina has not found happiness yet, instead “she feels her loneliness deeply; she feels the destructive power of deceit and treachery in personal relationships.” (Katsell 32). She is still broken over the loss of Trigorin, saying she loves him passionately and desperately. She longs for her days of innocence. She tells Konstantin, “Wasn’t it good here in the old days, Kostya, do you remember? What a lovely, warm, joyful, pure life it was” (Chekhov 81). Nina now longs for the days of the past, though she knows she can never return to them, but must move forward.

However, before she leaves, Nina recites the opening monologue from Konstantin’s play. When Masha asked her to recite lines from Konstantin’s play in Act II she refused; she was ashamed of the play (Styan 86). But, now, when she recites,

Nina speaks the lines spontaneously and with an assurance we did not hear on Treplev’s stage in Act I. It is a new Nina. Before, her simpler, hesitant, mechanical rendering reduced the words to almost nonsense; now, the “cycle of sorrow” matches her experience as well as our sense of Chekhov’s mood, and, astonishingly Treplev’s supernatural portrait of a desolate world rings true. (86)

And not only do we begin to see Konstantin’s play in a new light, but we notice that she recalls every single line. She remembers this text from so long ago, and chooses to recite

it in the moment before she leaves Konstantin forever. Nina seems to be telling Konstantin that she loves him; that she has always loved him, but she cannot stay with him. She has to forge her own way, away from her childhood and in to the future.

Arkadina

Irina Arkadina is a popular and successful stage actress, and she is imbued with the cliché characteristics of actresses: selfishness, vanity, jealousy, and coerciveness. She serves as antagonist in the play through her continual feud with her son. Arkadina is always acting; there is a fine line between reality and the stage for her. She has an arresting presence, and acts as though the world revolves around her. While it is Sorin's estate they are staying on, she acts like she is the queen of the estate and the others are her subjects. She is strong, willful, and stubborn, but has moments of weakness that show through her thick façade. Arkadina is incredibly manipulative and uses her feminine wiles and acting talent to manipulate the men around her to get what she wants. She is selfish and often indifferent to the sufferings of others, especially her son who so desperately needs her attention. Ultimately, Arkadina desires to maintain her own happiness, both in her relationship with Trigorin and in her acting life; a large part of this is receiving praise and applause from others. While she might suspect that this happiness is false and fleeting, she clings on to it with all of her might. Although Arkadina wants to repair her failing relationship with her son, she ultimately abandons him because she cannot bear to be around him.

Arkadina's relationships with the men in her life revolve around her desire to control them, and it is precisely her ability to this that keeps her weak lover and son at her side. And while she consciously controls both Konstantin and Trigorin, she tries to deny

this quality in herself. This is never more true than in Act II when she is reading aloud, the “text describes the actions of a society women intent upon capturing and dominating a writer; “the rest is both uninteresting and false,” she asserts” (Katsell 19). The rest of the text, which she does not want to read out loud, describes the woman using the writer as a “social fixture of her drawing room” (19). Arkadina certainly sees herself in the character of a woman who must control and dominate those around her, which is why she does not want to continue to read out loud.

Additionally, Arkadina seems to see Konstantin’s desire to create art as a personal affront to her. When all of the characters have gathered for Konstantin’s play, she is impatient for the performance to begin. Gilman states that she is “disgruntled by her son’s having dared to step onto her territory” (82). She then reminds Konstantin of her importance as an actor by quoting Shakespeare. While Arkadina’s criticism that Konstantin’s play is “decadent gibberish” is accurate, she certainly goes out of her way to be cruel to him. Gilman states that Konstantin’s play “does give some evidence of anarchic talent and urgent ambition and this, rather than any reasoned scornfulness, lies behind Arkadina’s jibs, so jealous is she of what she considers her own fiefdom” (82). Arkadina feels threatened by the “potential for power-as-artist that [the play] might portend for Konstantin” (Katsell 21). This jealousy and fear makes us understand why she has never taken the time to read Konstantin’s stories, as she says in Act IV. Arkadina seems to think that Konstantin’s attempts to be an artist are treading on her territory, and it is one of the deepest sources of conflict between them.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Arkadina’s character is that she is always acting, influencing others with her acting skills. Konstantin, and certainly Trigorin, must

sense that she is acting in her own personal relationship with them. They have learned to accept her melodrama as real feelings, though how real they are is certainly up in the air. For example, Arkadina's desperate wooing of Trigorin at the end of Act III certainly does not come from the heart, but from a frantic need to keep Trigorin to herself. She wins him over by seductively complimenting his writing, telling him exactly what he wants to hear. While he worries that he is only mediocre, she assures him he is "the best writer in Russia...this country's only hope" (Chekhov 57). But, as soon as he has assured her that he will go with her, she says to herself, "Got him" (57). She has manipulated him into going with her by feeding his ego. Arkadina, through her acting, is able to glaze over the unpleasant things in her life and coerce others. However, it is difficult to tell if she is ever telling the truth.

Two years later, in Act IV, we see that Arkadina has not changed. Trigorin has returned to her. She seems blissfully unaware of how her son has withdrawn completely from her. Arkadina ignores the fact that her lover was having an affair with Nina. She is content to play lotto and discuss how well she was received in Kharkov. And because of the way Chekhov chooses to end his drama, we never get to see her reaction to Konstantin's death.

Trigorin

Trigorin is a famous popular novelist, though he longs to be considered one of the Great Russian masters. He tells Nina that his friends when they pass his grave will say: "Here lies Trigorin, He was a good writer, but not as good as Turgenev" (Chekhov 42). Trigorin is obsessed with writing, and talks at great length about it--"I write non-stop, at breakneck speed, and I can't seem to do it any other way" (Chekhov 40). Though he

speaks at great length about his insecurities, “I’ve never liked myself,” and his passion for writing, he is virtually silent around large groups of people. At the beginning of the play he only speaks when directly spoken to and only then about writing or fishing. Konstantin describes Trigorin as “an intelligent man, unpretentious, you know, melancholy. Pretty decent. He’s still nowhere near forty, but he’s already famous” (13). Trigorin seems jaded by fame and city life and is more at home in the country. He claims that if he lived in the country he would never write at all, but fish all day.

Trigorin’s objective seems to be a search for something that will bring him satisfaction in life. He is discontented by his work, unhappy in his relationship with the controlling Arkadina, and feels that he has never experienced true fulfillment. He believes that love for Nina could be the answer to his problems. She could be both a muse for his writing and deliver an innocent love that he has never experienced before. He tells Arkadina that love is “the only thing in this world that can make you happy! I’ve never experienced a love like this...I never had time when I was young, I was hunting the publishers, struggling with poverty...And now here it is, love, finally here, drawing me in” (56). Ultimately, Trigorin abandons Nina when he realizes that her love will not fulfill him. He callously abandons her and returns to “his former arrangements...Not that he’d ever let them lapse, but somehow, cunningly and spinelessly, managed to keep everything going at once,” as Konstantin reveals in Act IV (67). Trigorin does seem to be spineless, letting Arkadina to control him. In Act III when Arkadina begs him to stay with her he admits his faults—“I have no will of my own...I’ve never had a will of my own...Passive, feeble, always caving in—how can a woman possibly find that attractive” (57)? And yet, both Arkadina and Nina have fallen madly in love with him.

Like Arkadina, at the end of the play, we find Trigorin unchanged. We assume that he has not found the happiness and artistic fulfillment that he was seeking. He continues to have literary success, as he tells Konstantin that he is in the middle of writing several stories at once. Trigorin even wins the lotto game that they play before dinner. Arkadina remarks that he has “all the luck, whatever he does” (75). He cannot leave Arkadina or take responsibility for the disaster he causes for Nina and Konstantin. When confronted with the seagull that Konstantin shot, he feigns ignorance, saying “I don’t remember that. I don’t remember” (82). This statement is difficult to believe coming from the man who stores away every moment in his life for use in a future story. While he never speaks openly with regret, these denials of the seagull seem to imply that he feels some remorse for his actions.

Dorn

Dorn is a country doctor, who has been friends with the residents on Sorin’s estate for over twenty years. While he is not a literary type, he clearly enjoys the company of actors and writers. He serves as a dispassionate observer to all of the drama that unfolds at the estate, and balances out the “nervous tension of the others” in the play (Margarshack 202). While he can not fix the problems of the heart, as he tells Masha in Act I, he “quietly dispenses his valerian drops as a mild sedative to his “nervous” patients” (Pedrotti 242). Dorn is one of the few characters of the play that is generally contented with his life, so he often serves as an alleviating presence at the estate.

Dorn is one of the few characters in the play that has not succumbed to love, which makes him detached from the action happening around him. Loved desperately and jealously by Polina, Dorn refuses to commit to her. While he is not explicit about his

affairs with other women, he tells her that he has always been honest with her. When Polina asks him to keep his affairs out of her sight, at least, he tells her, “I’ll do my best” (Chekhov 36). He is kind enough to her, but does not indicate that any of her passion is returned. He also does not want to deceive her, but lets the truth hang in the air. Their affair has been long standing and Masha is his daughter, not Shamrayev’s.

In an earlier version of the play, Chekhov wrote a scene where Dorn discovers that Masha is his daughter (Margarshack 202). However, this was never mentioned again throughout the rest of the play, and Nemirovich-Danchenko convinced him to cut it. Margarshack claims that “Dorn’s aloofness, which is so important to the action of the play and to the consistency of his character, would have been gravely imperiled by such an unexpected development” (202). However, their closeness remains in the play. Dorn is the only one, after all, that Masha feels comfortable enough to tell about her love for Konstantin.

In addition to supporting Masha, Dorn encourages Konstantin in his writing. In the first soliloquy of the play, Dorn says “maybe I’m just ignorant or completely off my head, but I liked that play” (Chekhov 26). He tells Konstantin that he must continue writing, but he needs to have a “definite aim in mind” or he will get lost and his “talent may destroy [him]” (27). In these few words Dorn recognizes Konstantin’s talent, and foreshadows his untimely end. Dorn continues to champion Konstantin’s writing throughout the play, even when others discourage him. Dorn is compelled by artists, even though not one himself. He tells Konstantin that while his life has been fulfilling, he wished that he had “been given the opportunity to scale the spiritual heights that an

artist achieves at the moment of creativity” (26). Dorn supports and encourages the youthful characters of the play and their artistic endeavors.

Dorn works as a calming presence in the world of the play. Even at the last moment he allays the fears of the others by convincing them that the gunshot was only a bottle exploding in his medicine bag. While Dorn is soothing, and certainly tries to ease both Konstantin and Masha’s fears about their lives, he also fails to actually treat anyone. Though Sorin is ailing the entire play, Dorn refuses to give him more than valerian drops and quinine. When Arkadina suggests that Sorin might go to a spa, Dorn replies, “Well, he might do that. Or he might not” (Chekhov 32). Dorn seems to imply that the kind of treatment that either a spa or a country doctor could provide for Sorin will not slow down the inevitability of his impending death. This is a grim, and yet realistic, point of view for a doctor to have.

While Dorn seems like a stoic, detached, medical man we know that he gives in to excess. He is “spoilt by the ladies” and “has spent the savings accumulated during thirty years of practice in the course of a single foreign tour” (Bruford 158). He does what he pleases, and allows no one to make decisions for him. While he may come off as cold and disconnected, his affinity for the youth and his passion about Konstantin’s writing make him a likable and affable character.

Masha and Medvedenko

Masha is a young woman, with no particular talents or interests other than the pursuit of Konstantin. She has realized through her reading and with her half-educated, middle class upbringing that she will never have the kind of life that Arkadina and Trigorin have. She has no money, no opportunities, no job prospects, and the man who

she has loved for her whole love despises her. She has been stuck on Sorin's estate for her whole life, loving the artistic Konstantin to distraction, and has nothing better to do than sit around all day and pine for him. Masha does not quietly "mourn for her life," but rather dramatically flounces around in black and lets her appearance go. She proudly drinks in public and takes snuff in order to both show everyone how much pain she is in, and to deaden the pain. Despite all of these flaws, the schoolteacher Medvedenko loves her, and she finds him an affable companion.

Masha's only interest throughout the play is the pursuit of Konstantin. At the beginning of Act III, she vows to marry Medvedenko in order to rip the love out of her heart by the roots (Chekhov 45). She is deceiving herself that once she is married "they'll be no time left for love, all the old troubles will be blotted out by new ones. At least, you know, it'll be a change" (45). She is so bored by her never changing life that she marries a man she does not love. While this bodes some potential happiness for their relationship, she treats Medvedenko cruelly and keeps the flame burning for Konstantin. Her sardonic and biting wit turns simply brutal as she tells Medvedenko, "I wish I'd never set eyes on you!" (65). Masha ultimately seems content to watch Konstantin live out his life on the sidelines, rather than be parted from him for a second. She abandons both her husband and child to be near him, with no hope of him returning her love.

Medvedenko is similarly desperate in his desire to be with Masha, though he remains a sympathetic and likable character. Medvedenko is simply a poor schoolteacher, and he often complains about money or makes pedantic statements in large crowds of people. He only makes 23 roubles a month and has a large family to feed; money is a pressure that follows him everywhere. He walks four miles to Sorin's

estate every day to court Masha, who has no interest in him, but uses him to fill up her loneliness. Medvedenko becomes a sort of fixture of the place, often seen wheeling Sorin around on the estate with no Masha in sight. He is simple, likable, and truly in love with Masha. He allows her to use him in order to keep him around. Masha's parents and Masha seem to think that he is not good enough for her, and try to ignore him all together. In the end, he must walk four miles home to feed their hungry baby in a raging storm, and takes this suffering with few words of complaint.

Sorin

Sorin is the owner of the estate on which the action takes place. He is a retired civil servant, and Arkadina's brother. Sorin generally serves as comic relief to the main action of the story, whether in his stories about his life or in his self-deprecating comments about his life. Sorin lives with many regrets, which he constantly reminds everyone of. He suggests that Konstantin write a story about him called, "The Man Who Wanted," since he never achieved his goals of becoming a writer, a good speaker, or being successful in love (Chekhov 66). His sense of longing for a life that has passed him by permeates the play. While many of the characters have dreams for the future, Sorin dwells on the past and the life he could have lived.

Sorin also seems to function as a parallel to Konstantin within the play, and they have a close bond. At the beginning of the play, Konstantin reveals his heart to Sorin by discussing his problems with writing and his mother. When Konstantin finishes, Sorin says "Once upon a time, I had two passionate desires: I wanted to get married and I wanted to be a writer; didn't satisfy either of them. Yes. Would have been nice even to have been a minor writer, you know what I mean?" (13). When he was young, like

Konstantin, he had similar passions and desires, which he did not achieve. These longings still haunt him as he moves closer to death. Sorin cares very much about his nephew, and sees that Konstantin could turn out like him if he does not go out and experience life. He begs Arkadina to give Konstantin money to go abroad for that very reason.

Sorin, despite his constant complaints, still retains hope for the entire play that his life will turn around. He forces Arkadina to take him to Moscow with her, despite his failing health. He insists on smoking cigars and drinking sherry, in some attempt to live. He will continue to pursue life, while living nostalgically in his regrets. As the play goes on he becomes weaker and weaker, and spends much of his time onstage sleeping. Sorin looks for fulfillment and satisfaction in life that he has never felt, in the face of Dorn telling him that regrets are foolish. His humor and self-deprecation make him an incredibly endearing character, despite all complaints he may make. Sorin also serves as a warning to the younger characters that they should not let life pass them by.

Shamrayev and Polina

Shamrayev and Polina are married and run Sorin's estate. Shamrayev is an ex-military officer and a gruff and blustery man. He holds a tight grip on the domain that is Sorin's estate, and does not like anyone disturbing his territory. When Arkadina questions his authority and asks for horses, he blows up at her. He shows no affection to either his wife or daughter, who have both abandoned him. However, Shamrayev does have a softer side. He serves as some comedic relief in the play as he tells long stories about the good old days of theatre. He thinks he is hilarious, and the other characters just

find him obnoxious. Shamrayev also seeks to fit in with the upper class characters of Arkadina and Trigorin. He wants to feel as though he is a part of their world, and that his job is as important as theirs.

Polina seems to despise her husband, and spends all of her efforts trying to pursue the emotionally unavailable Dorn. Polina wants out of this life, like Shamrayev, and wants to move beyond her station. She fancies that Arkadina and her are close friends, and yet cannot stand when she sees Dorn around her. She is insanely jealous of anyone who gets near Dorn, and rips up flowers that Nina has innocently offered him. Polina also constantly nags Dorn, and tries to push Konstantin into having an affair with Masha. She has not accepted the life that fate has dealt her, and, like the other characters, urgently hopes for more.

Conclusion

Through skillful storytelling, Chekhov so thoroughly intertwines character, theme, and plot that they become equal parts of his drama. Chekhov deliberately places his characters in an isolated location, a Petri dish where they are forced to talk to one another. The themes of art and love pervade the drama for each of the characters, though especially within the characters of Konstantin and Nina. Finally, each moment of the play connects the one preceding, adding layers of meaning and building a web of interrelationships between characters and theme.

CHAPTER THREE

Production and Design Choices

After a thorough examination of the play's script, a director must use this research and analysis to develop a concept, or artistic vision, for the play, and share this vision with their collaborators. In the pre-production phase of a play, the director includes the designers in developing their concept. Through their teamwork, the director and designers translate these conceptual ideas into physical realities.

The process of developing my vision and design choices for *The Seagull* began with sharing my conceptual thoughts with the designers. The designers then offered their ideas and the collaborative process began, which culminated in our final design choices for *The Seagull*. Finally, the technical director, crew, designers, and I worked together to transform these theoretical designs into reality. This process began when I met with the designers in October of 2009 to present my conceptual ideas and thematic focus of *The Seagull*.

Director's Conceptual Ideas

When I met with the design team for the first time my goal was to articulate my conceptual and thematic focus for the production clearly to the designers through selected visual words, images, and colors. I wanted the design to be inspired by the image of paper, to utilize Konstantin's idea of theatre being like our dreams, and employ elements of expressionism to outwardly manifest the inner feelings and thoughts of Konstantin, and the other characters. Paper also physically represents the tools of the writer and

places conceptual emphasis on the writer's life. I created a presentation using PowerPoint to present my conceptual ideas coherently alongside visual images that inspired my vision for the play (Appendix A). My meeting was attended by the scenic designer, lighting designer, sound designer, costume designer, the designer's faculty advisors, the technical director, and the directing advisor.

I began my presentation to the designers with a detailed explanation of my overall vision for the production and my thematic focus using moments in the text, images, and broad design ideas. First, I listed several thoughts of what *The Seagull* is about, including longing, unrequited love, the creation and destruction of art, and identity and the search for self. These were the major themes in the text that influenced my vision for *The Seagull*.

Then, I spoke about two moments within the text that stimulated my thinking about the play. The moment that continually captivated me as I re-read the play was the climactic moment when Konstantin destroys his manuscripts before his suicide. Chekhov's stage direction reads, "For the next two minutes he tears up all his manuscripts and throws them under the desk." This moment was the climax of the story, connecting the themes of love and art to the conceptual idea and image of paper. Additionally, Konstantin's need to destroy his art before he destroys himself contributes to the search for identity in the play and Konstantin viewing himself as being inseparable from their art. The moment seemed so potentially powerful theatrically that I wanted to structure the entire concept of my production around it.

I told the designers that Konstantin's thesis of what theatre should be also captivated me. In Act I, before his symbolist play, Konstantin tells Nina, "You have to

show life not as it is, not even as it ought to be, but as you see it in your dreams.” These abstract images continue to haunt Konstantin, and his failure to rid himself of them causes his failure as a writer. Many of the other characters mention that their life is like a dream, or that they cannot tell whether they are sleeping or waking. I wanted to use Konstantin’s idea of the theatre as dreams to create visually symbolic images that suggested meaning beyond their immediate and concrete reality. The tenuous line between living fully in reality and living in a dream world influenced my conceptual ideas about the play as well.

Using these two moments in the text as a foundation, I next shared my initial concept with the designers. I wanted to frame the play with Konstantin’s paper ripping scene, and to make the story a part of Konstantin’s memory. I imagined that Nina had just left him alone and he had sat down to work again, wondering how he had gotten to this point. At this point I imagined that the stage for his tiny play appeared from out of the black with all the other characters in tableau behind the curtain. They would come forward to taunt Konstantin, perhaps using lines from earlier in the play. Characters would pick up pieces of his manuscripts and crumple them, maybe throwing some at him. This uproar would have been silenced by Konstantin ripping a single sheet of paper. This action would take us back in time to where Konstantin believes all of his troubles began, the night of his play. Konstantin would then be forced to relive the events leading up to his suicide, effectively making *The Seagull* into a memory play. I imagined that Konstantin would watch the action unfold from his desk, or elsewhere on the stage, only stepping forward when he was a part of a scene.

Another important aspect of my concept was fluid, visible transitions. I wanted them to feel like little symbolist playlets, or dreams in Konstantin's head about the action of the story. I was inspired by Konstantin's line in Act IV, "I'm still drifting through a maze of dreams and images with no idea what use it might be" (Chekhov 80). I saw the transitions as a way to express his wandering. Also, I was interested in August Strindberg's idea of symbolist plays, according to J.L. Styan, as "fantasies inducing hypnotic emotion, structured no longer as well-made plays, but by the laws of musical form" (43, *Modern Drama*). Strindberg's *A Dream Play* "expressed the inner states of the soul and the activities of the subconscious mind," which I sought to emulate through the transitions (43, *Modern Drama*). The transitions would visually remind us that we were going on Konstantin's journey. The designers needed to be informed, therefore, that all set must be easily moveable. Actors would be visually seen by the audience artfully moving furniture. I also wanted to incorporate the story of the play into the movement of furniture.

Since I wanted to place the production within Konstantin's head I wanted the design elements to be influenced by expressionism, or an outer manifestation of Konstantin's inner feelings. J.L. Styan states that an expressionist "insisted on conveying his private experience, his inner idea or vision, of what he saw. [...] The new expressionist was defiantly subjective, imposing his own intense, and often eccentric, view of the world" on his art (1, 2 *Modern Drama*). My hope was to present the emotional reality of the character onstage through design, rather than the physical reality of the play. Through the lens of expressionism I hoped to emphasize how Konstantin's identity revolves around his art through the design elements of the production. The

expressionistic image that I felt incorporated this idea was paper. While Konstantin was the main focus of this decision, the other characters also have similar obsessions with their art. Additionally, blank white paper, an empty canvas, seems to symbolize each of the characters lack of movement in the world, their stagnancy, as well as their fragility. I told the designers that every aspect of the design should be influenced by expressionism and the image of paper.

The general design aesthetic of the production, influenced by the image of a blank sheet of crumpled paper, is what I next presented to the designers. I imagined the set stark and clean, like a blank sheet of paper. I told the designers that I wanted straight, hard, angular lines as well as crumpled, soft, wrinkled lines. Some of the paper should look worn; I wanted folds, crumples and creases involved in both set and costume design. Even though *The Seagull* calls for a lot of detailed realism in design, I hoped to strive for a minimalist aesthetic for the design. The idea was to use as few set pieces, furniture, and props as possible to tell the story. Each piece of the design puzzle, be it furniture or costumes, should fit within one cohesive world. One of the ways I wanted to accomplish that goal was to narrow the color palette significantly, and use a stark palette influenced by the colors of paper. I insisted on primarily a bleak white; but also wanted to include other shades of paper, including off-white, cream, parchment, and brown. After discussing my overall conceptual ideas for the play and general design aesthetic, I spoke about what I was looking for from each of the design elements.

Set Design

First, I presented my broad thoughts about what I wanted from the scenic design of *The Seagull*, including color palette, use of the paper theme, integral set pieces, and

ideas about the landscape of the play. For the set I wanted to stick to a very stark color palette influenced by paper: white, off-white, cream, and parchment. While I knew that my conceptual design image was paper, I did not have an image of the ideal scenic design in my mind, but could have seen the set design going in several different directions. I was particularly interested in two different avenues; either an overall aesthetic that was accurate to the time period with furniture covered in paper, or a more abstract design with furniture that literally looked as though it was constructed out of paper. Additionally, I envisioned a world that could be filled with paper sculptural elements; perhaps a chandelier made out of pieces of paper, or a curtain for the Konstantin's play made out of paper.

In addition to the paper imagery, I saw Konstantin's desk as an important scenic element, and because I imagined Konstantin watching all of the action of the play, I thought his desk might remain onstage for the duration of the play. The image of the artist at work, the sounds of typewriter keys clicking along, piles of paper, and the smoke trails from a cigarette, were all evocative images for me. A typewriter seemed the appropriate tool for Konstantin's work; not only is it a machine that takes effort to use and makes emotionally effective noises, but because I imagined Konstantin playing the typewriter like a piano. The typewriter worked for me as a type of instrument; art can be produced from the machine like music.

Another important scenic element was the empty stage from the play-within-a-play, and I presented my thoughts about this component of the set to the designers. Even after Konstantin's play is over, the stage never gets taken down. Medvedenko, in Act IV, complains that it is as "bare and repulsive as a skeleton, with its curtain flapping in the

wind.” I thought perhaps the stage could be ever present, haunting the play. Perhaps Konstantin could watch the action of the play from the stage. Since we glean from Medvedenko’s line that the stage deteriorates over the course of the two years it has been standing, I imagined the curtains made out of paper and ripped as the play progresses. Therefore, for the play-within-a-play the curtain would be whole, but by the end would be a tattered mess. This mirrors the deterioration of Konstantin and Nina’s relationship, their artistic success, and their personal well-being. I was not sure how Konstantin’s stage would continue to remain onstage throughout the course of the play, but I thought perhaps it could break apart into parts and become furniture or other set pieces.

The last conceptual idea that I told the set designer at our first meeting was about the outdoor landscape I wanted to create. I felt that the outdoor scenes should feel beautiful, but stark and gray. The “magical” lake and the side yard could be non-realistic, but had to match the overall color palette of the design. I showed the designer several images of shadowy, gray trees against a white background that gave the sort of emotional feel that I wanted, starkly isolated yet beautiful. I wanted to suggest the outdoors as simply and emotionally evocatively as possible, without losing a sense of place for the audience.

Costume Design

Next, I presented my thoughts about costume design for *The Seagull*, comprised of my ideal color palette and use of expressionism within the costumes, unity within the costume design, and using paper elements within the costumes. With the costume design I wanted to expand my narrow color palette to include all manner of brown tones as well as black, especially given that Masha textually has to wear black throughout the play.

However, I wanted to use paper tones for the majority of the costumes, as well as the darker colors of butcher paper, graphite, and ink. While I wanted to work within a narrow color palette, I wanted each character to be dressed in a unique color within the spectrum. I visualized each character wearing a singular color throughout the play. Similarly to the scenic design, I pictured expressionistic color choices for the costumes. Like Masha wears black to show outwardly her depression, I wanted each of the costumes to reflect the character's inner life. To illustrate this point, I made a character color spectrum for the design presentation that spanned from Nina in white to Masha in black. Arkadina, Medvedenko, and Sorin were all in light colors, while Trigorin, Polina, and Shamrayev were on the darker end of the scale.

Like the scenic design, I wanted each of the costumes to feel aesthetically unified. I imagined them looking as though they were all cut from one enormous bolt of cloth, with the same texture and weight. Furthermore, I wanted each character to only have one costume, despite the fact that each scene takes place at a different time and place. As I imagined the costumes as being extensions of their inner psyches, they change very little over the course of the play. The only changes in costumes that I wanted would be minor, perhaps the removal of a jacket or a hat. However, I felt that both Konstantin and Nina needed multiple costumes. I wanted both of them to be in essentially white for the first act, to show their idealism, innocence, and hopefulness. By the end of the play, however, both of them have undergone a major change and lost their youth. Therefore, I wanted Konstantin and Nina to be dressed in much darker colors for Act IV: gray, charcoal, or black.

I also felt that the costumes should embrace the image of paper. I pictured period accurate costumes that had elements which looked like paper; perhaps a bustle that looked like crumpled paper, or a jacket with a paper hankie. I also very much wanted Nina's costume for the play within a play to look like it was made out of crumpled paper.

Lastly, to add another expressionistic element, I wanted many of the props and set pieces to feel like extensions of the character's costumes, or extensions of themselves. For example, I wanted Nina's costume for the play-within-a-play to feel like an extension of the stage, which I imagined covered in crumpled paper. I imagined that Trigorin's notebook would look like a part of his suit, and similarly, Masha's snuff box would match the color and material of her dress. Most importantly, however, I wanted to see Konstantin in white behind a white desk with a white typewriter. For Konstantin and Trigorin, the objects of creating their art, whether a notebook or typewriter, are simply extensions of themselves.

Lighting Design

Then, I spoke to the lighting designer and used images to convey essentials I wanted in the design. Most importantly, I wanted to use bare, white lighting with little to no color. I showed the designer several images, including soft white light shining through curtains, harsh down spots and stark up lights. I informed the designer that I was interested conceptually in using film noir lighting, with large expressionist shadows. Shadows would both create the dreamlike world I imagined, and give the characters extraordinary height. I knew that I wanted to create silhouettes of the characters as well, to achieve a similar effect. Additionally, I imagined film noir shadows creating texture on characters faces, like slats from windows or leaves from trees. I felt that using texture

would give the lighting some variety, since I wanted a restricted color palette. I felt gobos could be used to suggest this texture, particularly in the outdoor scenes to suggest trees.

I was also intrigued by the possibility of using amber colored practicals for the show, such as paper lanterns, desk lamps, and candles. Another idea that excited me was the use of visible old theatrical lighting, for example: footlights, lime light, or aged electrical lighting.

Sound Design

In concluding, I spoke briefly to the sound designer about the type of music I wanted within the show. I wanted piano and orchestral music from the time period for the transitions. I suggested both Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky and Sergei Rachmaninoff as jumping off points for the designer's research. The style of the time was sweeping, romantic, and lush, which seemed to align with the theatrical style with which I wanted to stage the transitions.

After my presentation, the designers seemed interested by my conceptual ideas and images. One of the designer's faculty advisor remarked that I had given the designers a lot of material to work with, which I was pleased about. Following my presentation, the designers were given several weeks to digest my thoughts and develop their own ideas about the play and the design elements. As I began to meet with the designers and discuss our ideas about the play, the collaborative part of the design process commenced.

Design Collaboration

After the designers were given time to formulate their own ideas about *The Seagull*, I met individually with each designer to discuss their design ideas. This began the extensive pre-production process of design work and collaboration with each individual designer. At the beginning of each week, the results of these meetings were discussed in production meetings attended by the entire design and technical team of *The Seagull*. Any changes or major decisions made in individual design meetings were shared with the entire team at these production meetings, whose purpose is to facilitate communication between the different elements of the production. The majority of the design decisions for *The Seagull* were made in during this collaborative pre-production process, both in production meetings and design conferences.

Conceptual Ideas

After additional consideration and discussions with advisors, I adapted my concept for the production. Advisors felt that by making *The Seagull* a memory play I would be altering Chekhov's story, making the play a tragedy with an obvious ending from the start. Additionally, they felt that I was complicating an already intricate play by placing it within a frame story. While I agreed that the memory aspect of my concept needed to be eliminated, I still wanted to begin the play with a reference to paper in some way. One of the advisors suggested that I begin the play with a paper image involving Konstantin in some way since I wanted to focus on his character. Running with that idea, I thought that it would be interesting to begin the play with Konstantin writing the play-within-a-play. This inclusion introduced both the theme of paper, and the image of the writer, but did not suggest that the play was going to end tragically. The idea of opening

the production with Konstantin writing the play-within-a-play developed more fully over time, and was fully realized as an introductory dream sequence during the rehearsal process.

Another aspect of my initial concept that changed after my presentation to the designers was the image of the typewriter, which I had felt was a powerful and appropriate image for the play. The directing advisor believed that a typewriter would seem of a different time period and that it would confuse audience members. After a bit of research I concluded that while it certainly was possible that Konstantin could have owned a typewriter in the 1890s, given his family's wealth, it would have been an uncommon possession. And though he was a writer interested in new forms, and potentially new technology, he would have had to go to great lengths to procure a typewriter. Another faculty member also reminded me that even if I found an appropriate typewriter, getting it to work correctly and make the sounds that I wanted seemed unlikely. While conceptually I was very interested in the image of the typewriter as an instrument for Konstantin to write on, I made the decision to have him write with an early metal fountain pen. While I struggled with this decision at the time, the image of ink became integrally inspiring to me. The decision to use ink rather than a typewriter would inspire Konstantin's costume, other costume and scenic elements, and much of the promotional materials of the show, as I will discuss more fully later in this chapter.

Set Design

In my initial meetings with the scenic designer, he shared his ideas about the show with me and showed me images that he found inspiring for the design of *The Seagull*. He seemed enthusiastic about my conceptual ideas, particularly the images of

paper and typewriting. Since the play takes place in four different locations, the scenic designer needed to create four different looks—two outdoor and two indoor. In our first meeting the set designer described his idea for the interior set: incredibly tall walls and two sets of windows that would tower over the actors, all organized around a focal point of giant French doors. I was fascinated by his ideas, and felt that it supported my thoughts about the prisonlike qualities of Sorin's estate. A towering set would imply that the characters were trapped within a massive structure, like mere ants against a monolithic opponent.

While I had continually used the word stark to describe what I wanted from the set, I had also asked for the paper elements to seem crumpled and worn. The designer liked the idea of the interior set for the play having a worn, aged look, rather than a bleak, new one. He envisioned the walls of Sorin's estate being covered in scrunched and ripped paper, which would provide the aesthetic he wanted. Additionally, the designer wanted to play with using printed text and writing on the walls. He showed me an influential image of writing, which contained both typewritten words and handwritten words overlapping; some of the words were upside down, some in a foreign language, and there was no real organization to the writing. Utilizing this type of approach would make the writing more of a pattern, instead of a distraction that the audience would try to read throughout the show. The scenic designer wanted to use writing to highlight various parts of the set and give it some texture, as well as support the concept.

One preliminary concern I had with the design for the interior set was how we would differentiate between the two scenes that take place there. Both of those acts are technically set in different locations within Sorin's home. Act III takes place in the

dining room and Act IV takes place in the drawing room which Konstantin has converted into a study. Although two years have passed between the acts and the characters talk about how Konstantin has converted the room, I was unsure about only using one interior set. But, ultimately, I decided that the radical changes that we were going to implement between acts would make the change clear to an audience. One of the main differences, besides furniture, between Act III and IV was the placement of the shutters. The giant windows would be open in Act III, in order for the lighting designer to show the sun shining through them, indicating the time of day. In Act IV, the enormous shutters would be closed against the storm. This would specify nighttime, as well as give the lighting designer the opportunity to play with lightning against the shutters.

Additionally, the designer expressed in our first meeting that he wanted to use the moat that wraps around the thrust stage of the Mabey theatre for *The Seagull*, which often gets covered up for productions. While I was interested in the unique architectural lines that the moat gives to the stage, I was unsure that the remaining stage area would give me enough room to stage the play. At that time I had not decided how much furniture I was going to use, and I assumed that I would need several large pieces. However, there were several advantages to using the moat, including being able to use the steps to create levels and interesting staging, the jagged line that the edge of the stage creates, and creates a definitive stage within the performance space. Later, I decided on the specific pieces of furniture that I needed, and I determined that I would have enough room to stage the play with the moat in place.

We also discussed preliminary ideas for the outdoor scenes at our first meeting. The set designer envisioned that the curtain for the play-within-a-play would mask the

large interior set for the first two acts of the play. He was inspired by my desire to use silhouettes, and therefore wanted to use a sheer Chinese silk for the fabric of the curtain. He also showed me picture of pampas grass that he wanted to use for the outdoor scenes. Pampas grass is a lovely cream, brown color and they look like plants that would grow near a lake. The designer anticipated that we would build clumps of the pampas grass that would be portable, to create different configurations. These changes would suggest the change between Act I and Act II. He wanted all of the stalks of the pampas grass to tilt in a specific direction, as though blown by the wind, in order to indicate that we were approaching the design in a stylistic manner, not a realistic one.

My concern with the initial approach to Act I was my knowledge that the curtain for the play-within-a-play needed to be raised and lowered several times throughout the scene, which would be impossible if it was being used to mask the large set behind it. This was a textual concern not an aesthetic one, as raising and lowering the curtain is mentioned several times throughout Act I. I also felt that utilizing a large curtain for the play-within-a-play would suggest that Konstantin had constructed a much larger theatre than he would have needed for a play with only one person in it. I instead suggested that we needed to create two curtains, a larger curtain to cover the set, and a smaller curtain for the play-within-a-play. I thought we could employ the larger curtain as a type of cyclorama that could have light projected on it to create landscapes, including the lake, clouds, and the moon. However, this complicated the design for the interior set, and meant that we would have to construct two curtains instead of just one. This additional cost could have been prohibitive given our budget. Over many conversations, the solution we came upon was to build the interior set on large wagons that could be pushed

upstage for the first two acts and then rolled downstage during intermission. A large muslin curtain would be built to cover the interior set during the first two acts, and a smaller curtain would be created out of a thin, light, transparent fabric for the play-within-a-play.

After my initial meeting with the scenic designer, I spent several days re-reading the script and thinking about the logistics of the design he proposed against the needs of the play. Act IV was a particular problem because the text requires three separate entrances to the room. The designer had only one large set of French doors in his original design, but he quickly added a second single door on stage right of the windows. Even with this addition, I knew I needed a third entrance to the room that would lead to the exterior of the house for Nina's final entrance and exit. I was hesitant to use the vomitorium as an entrance, because I felt that it would seem radically different than the other more realistic entrances to the scene. However, after discussions with both the scenic designer and the directing advisor I decided that using the vomitorium for Nina's entrance was the best option.

While we did not discuss furniture at our initial meetings, the set designer and I both wanted the furniture to be a part of the unified design. While, at first, the technical director thought that we would spend a lot of the set budget buying period furniture, we decided to take another approach to the furniture design. In order to incorporate the furniture into the larger design and keep a cohesive look for the set, the scenic designer suggested that we cover the furniture in the same white tissue paper that was going to coat the large interior set. All of the furniture pieces would then be an integral part of the larger paper world that we were attempting to create. In addition, we also wanted each

piece of the furniture to include writing as well. To keep the writing cohesive with the interior wall, we decided to use the same pattern of handwriting mixed with typed words. Due to the heavy amount of alterations that were going to be made to each piece of furniture, I picked out pieces of furniture quickly for each scene. I wanted to keep the space clean and use the minimum amount of furniture; rustic benches for the exterior scenes, a dining table with chairs and a medicine cabinet for Act III, and a desk, sofa, and card table and chairs for Konstantin's study in Act IV.

As the meticulous design process continued, the designer and I began to make more detailed decisions about the scenic design. For example, the designer was unsure of how he wanted to paint the floor. Because I wanted it to be consistent with the rest of the set, and therefore a very light color, there was concern that it would become scratched and discolored over the rehearsal process. We also needed a look that could exist in both an outdoor and indoor setting. Eventually the designer decided on a painted floor which would look like old, worn, floor boards. They would be painted on an angle and given texture to look like wood grain.

At the same time, the designer was working on adding detail and texture to the rather stark interior set design. The doors and windows were outlined by textural details that looked like rope, which would be covered in paper. Above the windows, a massive truss would stretch from one end of the set to the other. This was common in Georgian architecture, and would have been present in Russia during the time period. He also gave the French doors an intricate, beautiful, and decorative, wooden cornice that would perch above the doors and be covered in paper. It was also decided that the windows would both have window seats, which would provide additional seating for Acts III and IV.

Costume Design

After the initial design presentation, the costume designer spent several weeks researching clothing of the period and we began meeting frequently to discuss costume designs. We both wanted to keep the costumes “accurate” to the time period, though I did not want to feel constrained by what people would have worn in Russia specifically. Therefore, we decided to explore a more general late nineteenth century look for some of the characters, which may not have been present in Russian fashion at the time. Our first meetings were spent talking at length about the characters and what was needed for each of them individually, as well as examining the many research photos the designer had brought in. These meetings worked like collaborative brainstorming sessions. For example, I mentioned that since Arkadina is an actress who spends a lot of money on her clothes that she needs to stand apart from the other characters. The designer quickly said that perhaps some large mutton sleeves would serve to showcase Arkadina’s extravagance. Or I brought up that Medvedenko was a nerdy schoolteacher, and the designer suggested a bowtie and glasses.

During these initial meetings the designer and I spent time discussing basic lines and styles that we wanted for the costumes. The women, for example, would have simple silhouettes and would not wear bustles. Additionally, the designer wanted the women to wear blouses and skirts instead of dresses, because it was more accurate to the time period. The costume designer and I spoke about how we wanted high necks for most of the women’s costumes, except for Nina and Arkadina. We discussed suit style for each of the men as well; for example, we thought that the older characters, like Dorn and Sorin, should wear longer coats and the younger men, like Medvedenko, should wear

shorter jackets. Although, we both wanted Konstantin to wear a full tuxedo, complete with vest and bowtie, for both the first and the last acts. This meant that although he is a younger character, he would still wear a long coat.

The designer and I spent a great deal of time discussing color, as I was very specific about what I wanted. I was adamant that everyone blend with one another, without actually wearing the same hue. Each of the shades needed to resemble a color of paper, graphite, or ink. I also felt each should have a signature color for the majority of their costume, rather than wear multiple colors. Although I was open to having the details (vests, ties, suspenders, etc) of each costume fall within a wider color spectrum. The color choices remained inspired by expressionism ranging on a scale from white to black. Nina and Konstantin would begin the play in white, with their idealism and optimism intact, and end in graphite and black, after each of them had lost their innocence. The characters that remained positive despite hardships, or remained blissfully ignorant of their unhappiness, would wear lighter shades of brown and cream; whereas those who were in mourning for their life would be dressed in dark browns and black. The decision of where exactly to place each character on the color spectrum was sometimes difficult, as each character is complicated and resists categorization. Trigorin was particularly troublesome, as I wanted to highlight the complexity of his character that is too often played as a one dimensional villain. We decided to put him in a pinstripe suit with a lighter background and dark stripes, which would suggest both a secure outer shell and inner turmoil.

While the initial costume meetings were very productive, the decision I made to cut the typewriter from my concept inspired a large part of the final costume designs for

The Seagull. While we had wanted to keep the image of paper at the forefront of our design choices, this idea had translated mainly in the form of color and fabric choices. The only costume that was going to be actually made out of paper was Nina's skirt for the play-within-a-play.

However, the decision to cut the typewriter actually opened up a new creative avenue for incorporating the paper concept into the costume design. In the absence of a typewriter, I knew that Konstantin would be writing during the play with a pen and ink. This rather clumsy and painstaking process was something that really inspired me, and I thought a lot about the procedure of writing with an old fashioned ink pen. The pens of that time were messy and often leaked ink all over the hand of the writer using them. I imagined that a writer would often have a hand covered in black ink, and I began to picture Konstantin this way.

Then, as a natural extension of the expressionism I wanted to achieve with the costumes, I imagined that the ink that covers his hand would begin to spread into his clothes, eventually covering him completely in ink. I had always felt Konstantin should begin the show in all white and end the show in all black, and the addition of ink made the change in color gradual. This modification was an outward expression of his inner change over the course of the show. Therefore Konstantin's writing hand would be covered in black ink from the first moment of the show, and he would gain more ink each time he came onstage. This complicated things for the costume designer for many reasons. First of all, it doubled the amount of costumes that we would need to build for Konstantin, as we decided to make a costume for each act. And additionally, I wanted him to remain in the same exact suit for the entire play, so it would appear as though his

white suit was actually getting covered in black. This meant that several versions of the same pieces needed to be built for him, including jackets and pants.

The addition of ink covering Konstantin's clothing caused us to think about the rest of the character designs in a new way. We could add paper elements to the costumes simply by the addition of ink or writing. Like the scenic design, we did not want the writing to overwhelm the costume design in any way. The writing should not be distracting, but look more like a pattern on the clothing. We spent several meetings deciding which characters would have writing or ink on their costumes and in what manner. We felt that characters that were not involved in the arts, like Dorn, Sorin, Polina, and Shamrayev, should not have any writing on their costumes. While Dorn and Sorin express regret at having never become a writer, neither one of them have a true connection with writing. One of the characters that I was torn about was Arkadina. While she is an actress, someone closely associated with the arts, I was not sure that she should have writing on her costume. Arkadina seems dismissive of both Konstantin's writing and, to a less degree, Trigorin's as well. We know that she hasn't even read anything Konstantin has written. As an actress, she isn't creating text, but rather interpreting what other people have already written. Also, with her ties to traditional forms of theatre, she does not seem dedicated to creating new theatrical work. While she is a popular and successful artist, we decided to not add writing to Arkadina's costume.

I knew that I wanted Trigorin, as our other writer, to have both writing and ink on his costume in some way. We discussed having his cuffs, lapels and tie covered in writing and potentially making an entire suit for him covered in writing. Our eventual decision was to create the pinstripes on his jacket out of writing. The writing would be

straight and orderly, a pattern of neatness; this mirrored his own writing style, which was methodical and disciplined. The writing on his jacket would also immediately associate him with writing in the mind of the audience. I want him to be quickly recognized as Arkadina's kept writer that Konstantin has already spoke so much about before Trigorin enters the stage. We wanted Trigorin to have ink on his costume in some way as well, though not nearly as messy and suffocating as Konstantin's ink. Since Trigorin loves fishing and fancies himself a man of nature, I thought it would be appropriate to have his pants look as though he has been wading in ink. The ink would swirl up just enough to make him look as though he had been fishing in a marsh. If the ink symbolizes a sort of inner torment and darkness of some kind, then Trigorin is somehow able to suppress this darkness and keep it at bay. We see his depression at the edges, but he manages to keep these darker feelings under control.

Masha was another character that I felt needed writing on her clothing. While she is not a writer herself, she is much enamored of Konstantin. What she seems to be attracted to about him is his poetic qualities, and I imagined that she is one of the few people who read his writing. According to Chekhov's text, Masha always wears all black. Since Konstantin always writes in black ink, and Masha's large attraction to him is his writing, I thought that the blackness of her dress could be Konstantin writing all over her. He has marked her forever, and she carries the imprint of him, and all the other books that she has read, around with her. Originally, I wanted her entire dress to be covered in graphite writing. However, the costume designer thought it would be less distracting to only cover part of her dress. Eventually, we decided that the bottom of her dress and her cuffs could be covered in silver writing, which would look like pencil.

To mirror Masha's costume, I knew that Nina should have writing on her second costume. Similarly to how Masha was covered in ink, I wanted Nina to be covered in graphite, as though Trigorin had written all over her with his pencil. I was very specific that the dress had to look like lead, but not be a shiny silver color. The costume designer and I decided that Nina would have black writing along the bottom of her skirt and on her cuffs. At this point in the play Nina has lost her innocence, and a large part of that transformation is the influence of Trigorin. It seemed only appropriate, then, that she goes from being a clean, white sheet of paper, to being covered in lead.

The final character that I felt needed writing on his costume was Medvedenko. While he is not a writer, or an artist, his profession has a profound hold over him. Throughout the play, Medvedenko remarks what a difficult life a schoolteacher has, and how he makes so little money. Yet he continues to teach, which makes me believe that he has a passion for teaching. His many didactic statements throughout the play only reinforce that idea. Because of this, we decided to turn Medvedenko's vest into a chalkboard, or penmanship pad, that you might find in his classroom. The effect would look like penmanship paper, and the vest would be covered in the alphabet. This would create a horizontal pinstripe pattern, and also be immediately recognizable to the audience.

Lighting Design

Lighting is the element of theatrical design that I feel least comfortable with, so I was worried about how to communicate in appropriate terms to a lighting designer; however, I pushed past these concerns and began meeting weekly with the lighting designer. *The Seagull* is a challenging show for a lighting designer, because she had to

design lights for both indoor and outdoor settings, as well as use a limited color palette. I had also asked for practical lights (footlights and lanterns), massive film noir shadows, and texture to indicate location. In my first few meetings with the lighting designer, we spent time talking about the given circumstances for each of the four acts and what was required from the lighting.

Act I takes place by a lake on Sorin's estate. Konstantin's stage has been set up, and states that when the curtain raises the beautiful view of the lake will be the "scenery" for his play. As previously stated, the scenic design was going to indicate that Act I took place outdoors with the use of pampas grass, though I wanted to create a view of the magic lake that could be revealed during Konstantin's play. The lighting designer and I decided to use gobos to create the texture and look of water and a rising moon projected on the large curtain, behind the smaller play-within-a-play curtain. The idea was not to create a realistic looking lake and moon, but to stay with a stylized, gray, shadow look that would continue throughout the play. In addition to creating the look of the "magical" lake, the lighting designer needed to create an evening outdoor look for Act I. Konstantin remarks that everything is getting dark and other characters speak about the moon rising, therefore we discussed the lighting getting darker as Act I progresses.

Another element that we discussed including in the Act I lighting was the use of paper lanterns. Since this event was particularly important to Konstantin, we thought that perhaps he would use paper lanterns to line the path to the performance, creating the look of luminaries. Additionally, we wanted to use paper lanterns as foot lights for the play within a play, lining the edge of the stage. These would simply serve as mood lighting for Konstantin's play. At these initial meetings I told the lighting designer that I thought

we could use paper lanterns for the red eyes of the devil for the play-within-a-play as well. The idea was to create a pole of some kind with two red paper lanterns on the end that Yakov could swing over the stage as the devil approaches.

Act II takes place on a separate part of Sorin's estate, closer to the house. Chekhov indicates in the stage directions that it is noon, and that it is hot outside. Once again, the scenic elements were going to be minimal, simply the pampas grass and a bench. Therefore, the job of creating the landscape fell to the lighting designer. Once again, the designer and I wanted to use gobos to cast shadows on the back curtain to indicate time and place. She decided to create an afternoon sky using a cluster of clouds. We also determined that this particular area of the lawn had clusters of trees, and we wanted to indicate that by creating the texture of tree branches and foliage on the ground with gobos. Additionally, the designer had to create an overall warm afternoon look for the scene by using brighter, amber lights.

Act III takes place indoors, in the dining room of Sorin's house. Once again, the scene takes place during the day. The scenic designer and I had decided that the large windows were going to be open for this act. The lighting designer wanted to use back light to cast a long shadow of the large windows on the floor of the dining room. This gave the impression of sunlight spilling into the room, and gave the act a sense of warmth and brightness. We also discussed that Act III required an overall look for the scene which evoked a sense of pleasant warmth, as well as indicate that it was the afternoon of a sunny day.

While the placement of furniture was the only aspect of the set that changed between Acts III and IV, the lighting design needed to clarify the large difference in the

mood and tone of these scenes. Act IV takes place two years later, in the evening, and during a fierce storm. The designer and I discussed how the windows were going to be closed for this act; however we wanted to use back light to create lightening for the storm. The lightning, ultimately, would shine through the slats and create interesting textures on the actors and the floor. While the lightning would be quite effective in creating the correct foreboding mood for Act IV, the lighting designer also had to create an overall moody evening look for the scene. The designer and I also wanted to use practical lights for this act to shine amber light on the actor's faces; for example, a desk lamp for Konstantin, a candelabra for the lotto table, or candles that could be carried around. Act IV also contains the paper ripping sequence where paper fell from the ceiling, which was the only non-realistic sequence in the play that was not in a transition. The designer and I agreed that when the paper fell we needed to transition into lighting that matched the dreamlike feel of the transitions. In addition, in the paper ripping sequence, I wanted to use footlights to shine up light on Konstantin's face and cast a large shadow of his form on the back wall of the set.

As well as determining the lighting choices for each of the four acts, the designer and I spoke about what was needed for the dreamlike transition sequences between the acts. At that point, I did not really know what each of the sequences was going to contain as far as blocking or story. However, I knew that I wanted footlights at the edge of the stage in order to use up light during the transitions, especially for Konstantin at the top of the play. This lighting would mirror the moment that we saw in Act IV, right before he was about to rip the paper. The lighting designer talked about creating transitional lighting that would feel different than all of the other scenes by using blue. While I did

not want to use any color in the play, I felt that a light blue would add to the mood of the transitions and separate them from the rest of the play. Furthermore, we discussed isolating Konstantin in a very small down spot, a pool of light that would separate him from all that was around him. Another tricky lighting design element for the transitions involved the opening sequence of the play. At my design presentation I talked about using the play-within-a-play curtain as a means to create a silhouette in the opening sequence of the show. Being able to create this tableau meant that the play-within-a-play curtain had to be backlit in some way, which was another project for the lighting designer.

Sound Design

After the initial design presentation, I met with the sound designer several times to discuss what was needed for the show. However, I changed my mind conceptually about the music several times over the course of the design process. As previously stated, my initial concept was to choose piano and orchestral romantic music of the period: Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, or Prokofiev specifically. I knew I wanted piano music, because Konstantin plays the piano in the fourth act when he is “depressed,” and I wanted the music to come specifically from Konstantin’s head. But, then, I realized that in Konstantin’s search for new forms that he would have rejected the large, passionate, romantic music of the period for something more modern. Also, I initially believed that I was simply going to use the romantic music for the transitions, but then began to think that I wanted to use a similar style of music for Konstantin’s playing the piano in Act IV.

Therefore, I decided that the music of the show should be much simpler, and just piano. Creating a repetitive motif by using the same piece of music throughout the show

tied each of the transitions together, and related to Konstantin's path as a writer. I wanted to frame the story with the music, using it as both inspiration for his writing and haunting him from his past. In this way, the music became an integral part of the expressionist vision for the design, because it articulated Konstantin's mania and obsession throughout the show. With these thoughts in mind, I had the designer search for melancholy piano waltzes. Over the next week, she began sending me links to piano waltzes for me to listen to. I spent a lot of time listening to each of them, but one of them grabbed me right away; the "River Waltz" from the movie *The Painted Veil*. I liked many things about the song, especially the repetitive nature of the melody, the soothing and yet haunting quality, and the build and swell of the piece. Another thing that struck me about the piece that seemed useful was that there were two different versions, a piano solo and piano with strings. I felt that if I wanted to use the same piece of music over and over again, having some variation in the instrumentation would be an effective change. The two versions have distinctly different feels; the one with strings builds to a frenzied climax that ends abruptly, whereas the piano solo ends quite peacefully and quietly. I was excited by the range that the "River Waltz" could bring to the production. However, I was not positive that the "River Waltz" was the best choice for the production, and the sound designer continued to send me different songs to listen to. After we considered many other pieces, the sound designer and I settled on using the "River Waltz" for the production.

Even after we decided that "River Waltz" was the song we were going to utilize, and even though the song already had two different versions, I was unsure that one song would provide enough variety. The idea of repetition as an expression of Konstantin's

emotions intrigued me, but I was not sure that the “River Waltz” would provide enough diversity. The sound designer took the song and made several different adaptations of it by speeding it up, slowing it down, and varying the pitch. While I was not sure what these different versions would ultimately be used for, I decided that we would have enough variety and that we would only use the “River Waltz” for each song in the production. While I wanted to use the music in the transitions, I thought there would be a nice payoff when Konstantin literally plays the song in the last act. The repetition of the song should not only bring the audience directly into Konstantin’s mind, but also become the song that Konstantin literally plays when Polina says he is depressed.

Another one of the sound projects that the designer and I discussed was the use of live sound effects that Yakov could use during the play-within-a-play. The sound designer did some research and brought back ideas for different instruments including crash boxes, thunder sheets, wood blocks, and even a thunder run. She said that there were several different ways that we could make these various instruments with help from the technical director and scenic crew.

And finally, the sound designer and I discussed ambient sound and interior sound for each of the acts. In Act I we discussed marsh sounds including crickets, frogs, and other appropriate evening outdoor noises. We also hear music being played from across the lake at a party in Act I, and I wanted to use the “River Waltz.” However, the sound designer needed to place an effect on the song in order to make it sound as though it was playing far away. For Act II, since the lighting designer and I decided that the lawn was surrounded by trees, the sound designer and I decided that the sound of birds would be heard throughout the scene. Since Act III takes place indoors, we felt that no noise was

needed to indicate the place or time, as in Acts I and II. Act IV, however, takes place during a storm. I met with both the lighting designer and sound designer to discuss what moments within the scene I wanted lightning and thunder. I felt the addition of thunder and lightning would contribute greatly to the dark and melancholy mood of Act IV. Additionally, Konstantin plays the melancholy waltz twice from offstage during the final act. Because of this, the sound designer wanted to locate speakers from where Konstantin's piano would be placed.

Conclusion

At the beginning of *The Seagull* design process, I met with the designers to give them my ideas about what I wanted from the design of the show. They had time to digest my ideas over a few weeks. Then, over the course of several weeks I met with each of the designers separately and together during design meetings. During this time, we made decisions on what the ideal design for *The Seagull* would be. However, during the actual build process of the show many changes and concessions were made to the design. I will discuss the final product of the design elements in *The Seagull* in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process of *The Seagull* revolved around my work with the actors, which began with casting in November. My character analysis helped me determine what I needed from each of the characters and guided my casting decisions. After the show was cast, I spent four weeks in rehearsal with the actors working with the text, constructing character, staging the show, and developing scenes (Appendix B). This chapter follows my work with the actors throughout the rehearsal process, from auditions to the culminating performances.

Auditions and Casting

My casting strategy for *The Seagull* was to use my character analysis to determine what I needed from each of the characters, and find actors who could truthfully portray these qualities. Like many directors, my process of casting varies based on the play I am directing and other conditions surrounding the production. For example, my production's rehearsal period overlapped with a concurrent production of *Macbeth*. Therefore, both production teams needed to hold auditions at the same time and discuss all casting decisions.

The decision to hold auditions at the same time as *Macbeth* determined what material I asked the actors to prepare for the auditions, as well as the method in which the general auditions were run. Directors usually ask actors to prepare either a short monologue in the style of the play or cold readings from the text. While both audition

methods have their advantages, the director of *Macbeth* and I chose to ask the actors to prepare monologues for several reasons. Firstly, we needed to audition a large group of actors in a short time, and secondly, because monologues demand that actors prepare a memorized and rehearsed piece. Furthermore, while some directors ask for monologues in the style of the play, I asked actors to prepare a piece from *The Seagull* in order to immediately see the actors as one of the characters from the play, using Chekhov's dialogue.

One of my goals in casting *The Seagull* was to communicate clearly and efficiently with the actors auditioning. In order to begin achieving a goal of effective communication, I sent out a note to those auditioning to inform them of the process and what I was looking for from each of the characters. In the note, I asked the actors to read the play before auditioning and take care to understand the context of their monologue within the play. I then stated some of the qualities I was looking for in casting, including actors who understood the text and could communicate that text to an audience, actors who infused their characters with passion and vitality, and those who made bold choices, yet could take direction and make adjustments. I then offered a brief description of each of the characters, focusing on qualities that wereactable. For example, I noted that Arkadina is a manipulative woman who uses her acting talents to get what she wants. I wanted to offer actors a clear and concise picture of what I was looking for in the auditions, as well as inform them of the process.

As stated above, my casting strategy for *The Seagull* was to use my character analysis as a guide to determine what qualities I needed in the characters, and find the actors who were the most truthful to fill those roles. Additionally, I was looking for

actors with skill and experience to bring their talent to the roles. More specifically, I was looking for six male roles, four female roles, and a small male servant role. The story revolves around four main characters: Konstantin, Nina, Arkadina, and Trigorin. For Konstantin, I was looking for someone who could play the idealistic, passionate, creative, energetic, neurotic, nervous Konstantin of Act I, as well as the completely withdrawn, deadened, and reclusive Konstantin of the end of the play. Konstantin needs to be emotionally bold and outgoing in the first three acts, and yet, hardened and emotionally numb by Act IV. He needs to seem youthful enough to play one of the youngest characters in the show, though still old enough to seem like an adult. Konstantin also has to be believably the actor playing Arkadina's child.

An actress who plays Nina must be young, innocent, naïve, idealistic, as well as sweet and charming. However, the most difficult part about the role is that Nina must undergo an enormous change between Act III and IV. The actress playing Nina must be able to convey her newfound heartbreak and resignation. She must also be convincing in her erratic, almost manic outbursts throughout the scene.

The actress playing Arkadina must have an arresting presence, and be able to take control of any room she enters. The actress playing Arkadina must be captivating and entertaining to watch. She must believably seduce and manipulate others with her acting skills. An actress playing Arkadina must be believably cruel, vain, and yet, show an audience moments of weakness and vulnerability. The actor playing Arkadina must look believably old enough to have a son and a younger lover. The actor playing Trigorin must be intelligent, charming, and attractive; however underneath the surface he is incredibly dissatisfied with his "mediocre" success. While outwardly attractive and well-

adjusted, an audience should be able to see a great depth underneath the façade. He must appear older than the idealistic Nina and Konstantin, though still younger than the older characters in the play.

The secondary characters include the doctor Dorn, Arkadina's brother Sorin, the manager of the estate Shamrayev and his wife Polina, their daughter Masha, and the schoolteacher Medvedenko. An actor playing Dorn must be attractive, as he has always been a ladies' man. He must be charming, well-spoken, and social, but also capable of being distant from others. Dorn has two distinct sides to his personality, and an actor playing him must portray both his encouragement and championing of the younger characters and his callous and cold treatment of Sorin and Polina. The actor playing Dorn must be able to convey his age, as well as possess the gravitas of a doctor, though still remain rather lighthearted and positive about life.

An actor playing Sorin must be charming, endearing, and capture the self-deprecating humor and hopeful nature of a man approaching death. However, he must balance these qualities with an increasing bitterness that arises from his regrets about the past. The actor playing Sorin must believably convey Sorin's age and continually debilitating illness, as well as his continual weakening throughout the play though his movement and voice.

An actor playing Shamrayev must portray his gruffness and military indifference, as well as coldness to his wife and daughter. He must have an air of self-importance and righteousness throughout the play. However, an actor playing Shamrayev must also serve as comic relief in the play by telling long, random, rambling stories that annoy the other characters, but should entertain audiences. An actor who plays Shamrayev must

convincingly play one of the oldest characters in the play without seeming false or phony. He must convincingly be the actress playing Polina's husband and the actress playing Masha's father. The actress playing Shamrayev's wife, Polina, needs to capture the desperate, clutching, jealousy that Polina feels throughout the play, and her nagging, needy nature while remaining sympathetic. She must have a believable relationship with the actor playing Dorn. Polina must look as though she could believably be the actress playing Masha's mother, Shamrayev's wife, and Dorn's lover, and must be filled with the tiredness and world-weariness that her character requires.

The actress playing Polina's daughter Masha must at times proudly display her depression and lovesickness, like a badge of honor. However, she must be able to use sardonic irony and strange self-deprecating humor to cover up her sadness, and be able to laugh at her own folly. The actress playing Masha must also be able to play drunk convincingly, as she drinks in public throughout the play. While she must look younger than Shamrayev and Polina, Masha should look world-weary, or perhaps move like someone older than she is. She must genuinely have a connection with Medvedenko, even though she does not love him. Masha must be able to play her lovesickness and yet keep herself together throughout the play.

An actor playing Medvedenko must be likable, often quite funny, simple, straightforward, and optimistic despite all his complaints. He must have believable chemistry with Masha, both before their marriage and afterwards. Medvedenko must seem younger than the older characters on the estate. The audience should be quite sympathetic towards him, and the actors playing Medvedenko should inspire compassion.

The above qualities were the main traits I was looking for in the actors during auditions, based on my original character analysis. Additionally, I was looking for actors who were experienced, believable, and acted with truth.

General Auditions

The general auditions took place on November 10, 2009, and one hundred actors signed up for individual audition times, one per five minutes. Actors performed both their *Seagull* monologue and a one minute Shakespeare monologue. I asked some actors to make an adjustment to their monologue to see how they respond to direction and if we communicate well. For example, I often gave women auditioning for Nina the direction that Trigorin made them both excited and nervous. Many of the actors I was considering for Nina were young, inexperienced, or I had not worked with them, and this helped me determine if they could make alterations to their performance. The director of *Macbeth* also asked some actors to make changes to their monologues, and I often learned about their acting from hearing their Shakespeare monologues as well. Rather than take extensive notes during auditions, I simply made a list of the actors that I could imagine in each of the roles. At the end of the evening I reviewed each of the auditions with the directing advisor, and made a callback list using my previously stated casting criteria to inform my decisions.

Creating the callback list for the female roles was fairly straightforward, which mainly involved narrowing down my original list. I was surprised and delighted by the wide array of talented women, and since each of the female characters in *The Seagull* is so different, I rarely called back women for multiple roles. For example, there was a veritable plethora of incredibly strong actresses for the role of Arkadina, who all had

poise, charm, and gravitas. Similarly, there were a wide variety of actresses that I felt fit the role of Masha, and each of them brought something unique. However, I had difficulty deciding who to call back for Nina. I felt that there had not been a lot of skilled actresses who had the appropriate innocence and youth for the part. Those who I did call back were mostly green actors that had won me over with their monologues. Still, I was concerned that none of the actresses I called back would have the skills or experience to fill the large, demanding role of Nina.

Creating a callback list for some of the male roles, however, was more difficult. I had many choices for the younger roles of Konstantin and Medvedenko, and called back a variety of options for these roles. However, four of the male characters in *The Seagull* are older, and the majority of the men who auditioned looked quite young. Therefore, I called back several younger looking men for characters that they did not fit in terms of physical type because they acted with truthfulness and honesty.

Callback Auditions

Callback auditions allow a director to see a smaller group of actors audition for specific roles for a second time. Generally, directors will ask actors to prepare cold readings for callback auditions. Cold readings are specific sections of the text, or sides, that actors have had little time to prepare in advance. Cold readings allow a director to see actors in different combinations, in order to determine how they interact with one another, and how well they can portray a character. I chose specific sides for each of the characters and asked the actors to prepare them for callbacks.

I prefer callbacks to be well organized, efficient, and allow each of the actors to get a fair reading for each of the roles. I scheduled my callbacks meticulously, usually

calling back actors for two characters at a time. I asked actors to arrive ten minutes early in order to be assigned a partner that they could rehearse scenes with. While I wanted to stick to my schedule, I also wanted to give each of the actors an equal chance to read for each role. Sometimes these two goals conflicted, and I found myself torn between the two.

This conflict was only one of the difficulties I faced during callbacks. I felt nervous, and unsure of how to run callbacks in the best way possible. I wanted to provide all of the actors helpful direction after each of their scenes, though often had to move forward because of time constraints. I had invited several faculty members to assist me in callbacks, but found myself feeling intimidated with so many advisors in the room watching me. I felt that I needed to ask their opinion after each of the actors had read, though the directing supervisor told me later that was not the case. Regardless, I felt a huge amount of pressure to run callbacks “right,” which caused unnecessary stress that crippled my creative process in the callback auditions.

I began the evening with the smallest character in the show, Shamrayev. I encouraged actors to make bigger choices to capture the bombastic, blustery quality that I was looking for. Ultimately, there were two actors who were able to capture these qualities along with the age that Shamrayev requires. Additionally, I was pleased that both of the actors I was considering were quite tall, which meant I could cast a tall woman to play his wife.

After I had seen all of the potential Shamrayev’s I looked at actors for the characters Masha and Medvedenko. I asked actors auditioning for these roles to read two contrasting scenes, in order to see their playful relationship as well as their unhappy

marriage. After hearing the initial readings from the actors auditioning for these roles I read some of them again. I struggled to give some direction to them, with minimal results. One of the advisors suggested that I was not giving the actors actions to play, but rather things to “feel.” In response, I told the few actors that I had reading the parts again to play the first scene as though it were a game they were playing of who had the worst life. I told them it should be fun and that they should have a genuinely good time. The couple which was able to take this adjustment and run with it, as well as who had the best chemistry, won the roles.

Next I saw the actors reading for the parts of Polina and Dorn. I had actors called back for these roles read the two scenes that these characters have alone together, without anyone else watching them. At first I was not pleased with any of the reads for Polina. No one seemed old enough, and everyone seemed too harsh, not worn down enough by years of being rejected. After giving some direction to a few actors, I got some readings that were closer to what I was looking for in the part: an almost calm sense of despair, a sense of having heard his rejection a thousand times. Dorn was equally problematic, as the majority of the men called back for the role seemed unable to capture the age and gravitas that Dorn requires. Two of the men managed to capture these qualities as well as give Dorn a pleasant and likable humor.

Then I had actors read for the part of Sorin, Arkadina’s older brother. I had Sorin read a page from Act IV where he complains to Dorn about his lack of accomplishments in life. After hearing the men read for the role, I encouraged many of them to take the whole scene lighter. Two of the actors were able to make adjustments to their first reading and capture the humorous self-deprecation and stillness that Sorin’s age required.

I next saw actors reading the bandage scene from Act III with Arkadina and Konstantin. This scene has a lot of stage directions and props in it, which made most of the readings awkward. Few of the actors really seemed to be connecting or listening to one another. I tried to give some direction to each of the couples, but they seemed to make little or no progress. I was not able to make any decisions about the roles from reading this scene, and was only able to eliminate a few actors from the callback pool. I was frustrated that I had not gotten what I needed from Arkadina, and one of the advisors suggested that I give them a very specific direction for the next scene. I told them that Arkadina is a manipulator, and that the next scene they were reading was entirely about manipulating Trigorin to do her will.

This direction proved to be illuminating for the roles of Arkadina and Trigorin. I had couples read the scene in Act III where Arkadina convinces Trigorin to stay with her. Immediately, one couple stood out as having the most chemistry and following the direction most closely. The actress reading for Arkadina used her sensuality and skills as an actress to truly connect with Trigorin and seduce him. Conversely, the actor reading for Trigorin allowed himself to be taken in by Arkadina and believably fall under her spell. The reading between these two actors was one of the strongest of the evening, and ultimately won these actors the roles.

Next, I read two scenes between Nina and Trigorin. I needed Nina in these scenes to be innocent, idealistic, and ultimately, thrilled to be talking to Trigorin. One of the actresses stood out as truly understanding the given circumstances of the scenes and her relationship with the other character in the scene. She was literally shaking with excitement as she offered the medallion to Trigorin, waiting to hear what he would say in

response. Both her emotional level of involvement in the scene and her effective listening were reasons why I ultimately cast her in the role. Two different actors reading for Trigorin rose to the forefront: the one previously mentioned, and another actor. These two actors were also my first two choices for the role of Dorn. One of them read the scenes with a more light and humorous take on Trigorin, and the other read Trigorin as a more complex, introspective Trigorin. I spent a long time talking to the advisors about these two actors, and saw the pros and cons of casting each of them in the role.

The last scene that I read was the longest and most important scene in the play, the climactic scene between Nina and Konstantin in Act IV. Many of the men reading for Konstantin played the scene with very low stakes. The actresses reading for Nina tended to read the scene overly weepy and sentimental, or with little to no emotion. I was able to narrow down the actors reading for the role of Konstantin to three different actors who each had their own strengths for the role. Additionally, they were all talented and experienced actors. One had an inherent neurotic, nervous quality which made him physically appropriate for the role, but he gave flat readings of the scene, with little depth behind his words. One of the actors gave solid readings of the scene, but seemed both too old and well-adjusted to play Konstantin. The final actor, and the one who eventually was cast, had the most understanding of the given circumstances of the scene, played the scene with the highest stakes, and seemed both youthful and appropriately neurotic for the role.

One of the characters I struggled with casting was Trigorin. Ultimately, I had two strong, viable choices for Trigorin. There were advantages to both actors. The first Trigorin had more of a light, shallow quality that brought humor to the scenes, and he

seemed more cocky and confident in his reading. However, the other potential Trigorin brought more chemistry and romance to his scenes with Arkadina and Nina. He also brought an intelligence and deeper quality to his Trigorin; one could believe that he was storing up every word you said in his literary stockpile. Ultimately, this depth was what I was looking for in Trigorin, as I wanted to make him a sympathetic character. I was still unsure of which actor I was going to cast as Trigorin when I watched *Macbeth* auditions, however the director of *Macbeth* wanted the former Trigorin for a larger role in *Macbeth*. This helped me make the final decision to cast the latter actor. However, while *Macbeth* casting gave me the final push to cast this actor, I feel that he was the stronger choice for the role because of his experience and skill, and how he aligned with my character analysis.

Another difficult decision I faced in casting was the role of Polina. During the callbacks I was most impressed with one actress's reading of the role. She was able to be desperate for Dorn's love and remain soft at the same time. The women reading for Polina had a tendency to get strident and intense. However, after much time spent thinking after the audition process was over, I decided that a different actress had many of the qualities that made her better for the role. Her maturity as both an actor and as a person, grounded quality, and classical look made her a better choice for the role of Polina. While she physically did awkward things with her body in callbacks and seemed too harsh in her readings, she overcame these obstacles to become a great Polina.

My greatest fear going in to the audition process was that *Macbeth* would need the men that I wanted to cast. However, *Macbeth* caused no casting problems for me. The director of *Macbeth* and the directing advisor were generous to allow several actors

to be cast in both *Macbeth* and *The Seagull*. Even though these actors presented a scheduling conflict, I found that my biggest fear about the casting process was unfounded.

Though the week of casting was perhaps my hardest week of my graduate school career, I am both confident and happy in my casting choices. What I learned the most from this process is that there is no on “right” choice for a role, and that each actor brings their own unique qualities for a role. A director must shape their ensemble by choosing actors that bring the right qualities to the table for their particular production. I feel that ultimately I chose a solid ensemble, full of skilled and talented actors.

First Rehearsal

I had my first rehearsal in December, before all of the students left for semester break. I wanted to make sure that the actors had an introduction to the script before they left, and to encourage them to begin learning their lines. From the beginning of the process, I wanted to encourage actors to act with honesty and truthfulness at the core of their performance. This guided me to use the methods of other directors who were devoted to developing realistic performances. Therefore, I opened the first rehearsal with what director Marshall Mason calls “Establishing Principles” in his book *Creating Life On Stage: A Director’s Approach to Working With Actors* (65). Mason suggests that at the first rehearsal establishing a sense of purpose for the rehearsals can “kindle a remarkable response” in actors and be “refreshing stimulating, and liberating” (66). He also suggests that the articulation of principles can develop a sense of ensemble and trust amongst the cast (66). Therefore, I wanted to begin the rehearsal process by giving the actors a sense of importance for the rehearsals and the project. I spoke to the cast then

about the relevancy of *The Seagull* and how these characters are fresh, vibrant, and want the same things that we want, including love, success, happiness, and to create lasting works of art. I talked about how the characters struggle against incredible odds to find happiness in a bleak world, and how many of them manage to maintain some amount of hope even when their dreams are shattered. I said that *The Seagull* still matters today because we still fall in love with people who do not love us back. We still write plays so that our mothers will love us more. I once again reiterated that we are these characters, and that Chekhov reaches to us over a hundred years to hand us this engaging script about a group of artists and their story.

I also wanted to remind the actors about the importance of the theatrical medium, and why we create theatre. I spoke about how we were going to take dead pieces of paper and fill them with life, bringing the characters and story alive. And then on opening night our creation will flicker quickly like a flame, intensely, and then disappear forever. Because theatre is a medium that can only exist with the presence of an audience to bring it to life, contributing in the creation of the story.

Lastly, I wanted to give the actors confidence and establish that they all deserved these roles, while communicating the importance of working as an ensemble. I said that I did not take the process of casting lightly, and that they are all quite good and merit the roles they have been given. I assured them that they should have faith in their abilities and focus on the project ahead of us. I told them that each of them was an integral part of the process, and that *The Seagull* only worked if the ensemble was working effectively. After establishing the principles of the rehearsal process, I wanted to prepare the actors for what I expected from them in rehearsals. I set up some general ground rules about

rehearsals, including showing up on time and being prepared to work while they are there.

The next task of the first rehearsal was to communicate to the actors the themes that we were going to focus on in our production of *The Seagull*, as well as the concept for the production. I told the actors that the seed of the play was longing, which applied to all of their characters. Then I talked about the themes of art and love within the play, and how they applied to each of the characters. I explained my concept for the show and showed them the model of the set, and how it tied thematically into the conceptual ideas of the production.

The next goal of our first rehearsal was to thoroughly read through the play. Traditionally in a first rehearsal, everyone in the cast and the production team sit around a giant table and read the script out loud to each other. Sometimes they stop to discuss a particular moment or scene, but then jump back into the reading. However, as a director who focuses on staging and the physical placement of actors, I wanted the actors to immediately begin to notice where they were onstage and who was onstage with them in each scene. I also wanted them to be active in making physical choices immediately and get on their feet. Therefore, I set up two rows of chairs for the actors and told them that the space in between was the stage. When they were onstage they had to be somewhere in that space, and when they exited they could go sit down in their chairs. I encouraged them to make bold choices, be alive, take in their acting partners, and to take their time. This method threw the actors into the play and forced them to pay close attention to the script, who they were talking to, and where they were onstage.

After each section of the play I stopped and talked to each of the actors in the scene, very briefly, about what their character is experiencing and what their objectives are in the scene. The text is quite complicated and I wanted the actors to understand every reference, relationship, and scene within the play. I also encouraged actors to ask me questions about the script during pauses.

I felt that the read through method was effective, as the actors had to think quickly on their feet and dive into the play. Some of the actors made interesting, bold choices with their blocking. For example, the actress playing Nina climbed on a chair in different ways during the play-within-a-play, which immediately made her realize how physical that moment in the show was. Several actors made discoveries throughout the process, particularly realizing who they were speaking to on a given line or which other characters they needed to be physically close to in a scene. The directing advisor was at the read through and said that he felt it was an interesting and exciting way to begin work on the play.

Character Analysis and Improvisation

Throughout the rehearsal process I asked the actors to participate in several improvisations, aimed to develop character and deepen character relationships. Marshall Mason defines improvisation as a “free and uninhibited exploration of experience, arising from belief in a set of imaginary circumstances” (117). While I have not worked extensively with improvisations in the past, I felt that unscripted interaction between the actors would lead actors to a sense of truthfulness in their characters. Because we were striving for realistic relationships in *The Seagull*, I felt improvisations were appropriate. Francis Hodge, in his textbook *Play Directing* says that improvisation:

becomes a device enabling an actor to discover his relationship to another actor on an intimate level; to establish a relationship to another character...to discover dramatic action...to feel the decorum of a character in a given circumstance...and to find the extent of movement and body behavior under specifically delineated circumstances. (65)

Hodge also states that improvisation can “open up a play’s mysterious moments,” or accomplish a myriad of other goals (65). Therefore, I felt it was appropriate for *The Seagull*, and I used improvisations to accomplish several goals.

Early in the rehearsal process, I asked the actors to participate in an exercise in character building. Particularly, this improvisation guides an actor to develop how a character moves, their past experiences, as well as how they feel about and interact with other characters. I call this “Group Therapy,” an exercise that I was taught while I was at Playwrights Horizon’s directing workshop. I essentially begin by asking the actors to physically become their character, and explore how their character moves. I asked the actors to walk around the space aimlessly. Then I asked them to think about how their character would walk and asked them several questions about this. What body part does your character lead with? What does that say about the way they behave? How quickly or slowly does your character walk? What gestures does your character use while they talk? I asked them to try different things until they felt comfortable with the physicality they were adopting. I told them to continue to focus on their physicality throughout the following character analysis exercise. After they had “become” their characters I asked them to join me in the therapy circle that I had set up for them.

I told them that they had all been required to attend group therapy to sort out their issues with one another. However, they would be hypnotized during the process which meant two things: they had to tell the truth and they would not remember anything that

was said during the session after it was over. I then asked a variety of questions to the different characters. I tried to ask everyone a fairly equal number of questions, even Yakov. Many of my questions were asking characters what they really felt about another character, and I asked them to offer specifics. For example, if you hate another character I asked them to give me sensory specifics that bothered them—“They smell terrible. They never look clean. I hate the sound of their voice, etc.” I asked characters about their relationships with one another; for example, “Trigorin, how did you meet Arkadina? How long have you been together? Did you fall in love at first sight?” I asked characters about their professions, particularly Medvedenko and Dorn. I gave the other characters a chance to respond to the accusations that characters leveled against them, but at the early point in the rehearsal process everyone was rather timid. I think if I had repeated the exercise later in the rehearsal process I would have gotten more aggressive responses from actors.

During this exercise I was not interested in the specifics of their answers, particularly, but just wanted to jumpstart their thought process about the details of their characters. This exercise encouraged the actors to consider their personal identity as characters and develop a factual biography, including specific details. I found that the exercise encouraged the characters to examine their relationships with each of the characters in the play, not only the ones who they directly interact with frequently. I feel like the Group Therapy exercise stimulated their thinking about their character, how they act physically in the world, and their personal history that led them to this story.

Later, I developed several improvisations aimed at deepening the relationships between characters, and allowing them to experience specific emotional moments in their

relationship together. Marshall Mason gives advice on how to set up an improvisation, which I used when developing these exercises. He says that each improv should begin by proposing “public circumstances” to each of the actors participating (121). For example, I told Dorn and Polina that I wanted to explore a happier time in their relationship, many years in the past. I told them that they had finally been able to find some alone time for a romantic evening. However, Mason suggests that after the public circumstances of an improv have been announced, that a director should pull each actor aside to “assign private circumstances” (122). These private circumstances would lead to “surprises the actors experience as if it were reality” (122). For example, I told Polina that she had just realized that she was pregnant with Masha, and that she was planning on telling Dorn that evening in the hopes that they could run away together. However, I told Dorn that he was going to tell Polina at dinner that he was leaving for Europe tomorrow, and that he was going to be gone for six months. Each of the actors had a secret from each other, which when divulged would lead to a “real” experience.

In addition, I set up several other complex improvisations for the other characters to act out, and I will describe a few cases here. For example, the actress playing Nina had been struggling to understand her feelings towards Konstantin. She knew that she loved him and care about him, but she knew that she could not experience the same feelings for him that she had for Trigorin. She knew that she was attracted to him because he was a writer, but she was also embarrassed by his play. I took the actor playing Konstantin aside and told him that he had finally finished his play and he was going to take Nina down to the lake to show her where the play was going to be performed. He was also going to tell Nina that he had written the play for her to star in,

and ask her if she wanted to work on the play with him. Then I took the actress playing Nina aside and told her that while her father had always been cruel, he had never hurt her physically. But that today was the first time he had threatened her with violence. She then ran to talk to Konstantin, because she had to get away from her father.

I also set up an improv between Masha and Medvedenko. I told Masha that she had just found Konstantin had shot himself and that she thought he was dead. I told the actress playing Masha that she had fled into the woods outside to get away from everyone. I told Medvedenko that he had gone to find Masha and comfort her as best he could. I also told him that during that conversation he had to ask Masha to marry him.

After each of the improvisations had played out all of the actors were anxious to talk about their experiences in the improvisation. The feedback was fantastic; the actors felt that they learned a lot about their characters and enjoyed the experience of the improvisation. Particularly, the actors playing Nina and Konstantin felt that the improvisation informed their characters. Nina understood more fully why she was in a relationship with Konstantin, and what he offered to her. Not only was Sorin's estate a safe haven away from her parents, but Konstantin was gentle, kind, and protective of her. He was inspired by her and wrote a play for her. She saw that she was running away from a difficult home situation into a place where she was loved and accepted.

The actors playing Masha and Medvedenko also particularly felt that the improvisation changed the way they viewed the characters. The actress playing Masha fully understood why she decided to marry Medvedenko, and how she loved him when she said yes to him. Both of them felt that the improvisation made them understand their relationship on a much deeper level. They got engaged when they both thought

Konstantin was dead. This made Masha's acceptance of his proposal make sense, and helped her understand why marrying Medvedenko was the logical choice for her at the time. Each of the actors felt that the improvisations were worthwhile, and they hoped that we would be able to incorporate more into the rehearsals. They felt that they gave them a much deeper connection to both their character, and the characters around them.

In an ideal world, I would have liked to continue to explore improvisations throughout the process. However, because we only had four weeks of rehearsals, our time needed to be spent working on the text. However, much later in the rehearsal process, I led the characters through one more improvisation. The goal of the final improvisation was to explore the given circumstances of the life before the play.

Marshall Mason relates that when he directed *The Seagull* they began each rehearsal by improvising the dinner that precedes the opening scene, and I was anxious to give the actors that experience (125). We were not able to be in the Mabey and so I felt that an improvisation would be an effective use of our rehearsal time when we were out of our space. I set up Theatre 11 like a banquet table with candles burning and music playing in the background. I brought a modest dinner of fruit, crudités, meat and crackers. Mason speaks about the importance of using real props, like food, in improvisations, so that an actor can experience the "reality of doing" (120). I had the whole meal set up for the actors when they arrived. I thanked them for coming to Sorin's estate on the night of Konstantin's play, and that dinner would be served shortly. I gave many of them specific instructions. For example, I told the actors playing Konstantin and Yakov that they were down by the lake putting the finishing touches on the play. I told Dorn that he had just arrived and that Medvedenko had walked three miles to get there, as usual. I had Polina

set up the plates and cups for the dinner. All of the actors dispersed, and drifted in to dinner one or two at a time. After they had all arrived, dinner was served.

What followed was completely different than the “Group Therapy” exercise at the beginning of the rehearsal process. These actors now fully understood how their characters reacted in social situations, who they would sit next to, and what they would talk about at the dinner table. The frustrations, anxieties, and personal problems that each of the characters felt were subtly revealed over the course of the dinner. Trigorin rarely spoke a word unless asked a direct question. Shamrayev annoyed everyone, and Polina defended her daughter against Arkadina’s attacks. After the first dinner, I gave them a short break to discuss their feelings about the improvisation.

After the break I told them they were going to improvise the dinner in Act IV which happens offstage after the lotto scene. The mood was immediately much darker. Masha and Polina were withdrawn. Sorin looked quite ill. Dorn was still fuming that he had lost the lotto game. Shamrayev told the same stories that he had told at the first dinner, and this time he did not even get pity laughs. Despite everyone else’s different demeanor, Trigorin and Arkadina remained positive. Trigorin spoke gregariously at this dinner, and Arkadina seemed thrilled to discuss her reception at Kharkov to the whole table. Once again the actors had a lot of feedback about the session, saying that they felt much more comfortable in their characters than they had in early rehearsals. They were happy to get to play out the offstage scenes, saying that it helped them understand the given circumstances of the play a bit better.

As previously mentioned, due to a lack of time, I was unable to spend more time on improvisation for character development. Since we had to spend most of our time in

rehearsals working scenes, I devised an exercise to keep them thinking about character development. I had each of the actors write a letter in character to one of the other characters about a particular moment in the play. Not only did this help the actor who had to write the letter, but also the actor who received the letter. Sometimes being forced to put your thoughts into writing can help you articulate something that you were not able to say aloud. Some of the actors treasured the letters and reread them when preparing for specific moments in the play. For example, the actress playing Nina kept the letter that Trigorin wrote her about why he was leaving her to read before the final scene of the play.

Overall, I think the improvisation exercises implemented throughout the rehearsal process were successful. They allowed actors to develop the histories of their character, discover their decorum in certain situations, and significantly deepen their relationships with the other characters in the play. While I had not used improvisations in the past, I found them an incredibly useful tool throughout the process and would like to use improvisation in further projects.

Staging Rehearsals

Staging the movement of the play, or blocking, was the goal of the first week of our rehearsal process of *The Seagull*. While directors like to tackle staging in different ways, I prefer to come to rehearsals prepared with pre-blocking notes for each scene. However, I had decided that I was going to attempt to stage the show organically with the actors because I wanted the staging to be clearly connected with the characters' objectives in each moment. Most importantly, I did not want to work as I had in the past, simply telling actors where to stand at each moment of the scene, but rather to keep

changing the blocking as the scene evolved. As the process progressed, staging became a combination of what the actors did naturally and what I suggested to create stage pictures to compellingly tell the story. Additionally, one of the most important aspects of staging a play in the Mabey Theatre is adapting the blocking to suit the thrust stage. Throughout the rehearsal process, I watched the scenes from many different angles to be sure each audience member had an appropriate view.

I began the staging with the top of the play and worked my way through. I had made a very strict schedule for myself, as I have a tendency to work slowly and focus on the details of a scene when I need to be thinking about the whole picture. On the first day of rehearsal I told each of the actors that they should simply play around with the scene, and focus on their objectives and the given circumstances of the scene, rather than on movement. I was hesitant to offer any suggestions to the actors at first. I felt that if any of the movement did not come from them at first, then I was not working organically enough. But, as the evening progressed and we moved on to the scenes with more people in them, I began to offer direction if I had an idea that I thought might be interesting or suited what was happening in the scene. Particularly in the middle of Act I when everyone enters to watch the play I gave the actors a specific seating arrangement and helped develop their movement throughout that section of the act.

As the week of staging progressed, the process began to feel more like collaboration. I used the actor's natural movement and shaped it to effectively tell the story of the scene. Often, I will use staging to illustrate power relationships within a play. For example, Arkadina physically overtook Trigorin when she seduced him at the end of Act II, rather than simply seducing him with her words. Also, Polina knelt at

Dorn's feet when begging him to go away with her, lowering herself into a supplicant position. These stage pictures communicate clearly who is in power in these relationships.

Another technique of staging I use is to utilize furniture as obstacles that the characters must work around in order to shape a scene. Francis Hodge states that actors "can sense actions much more quickly and keenly with a physical obstacle between him and the opposing force represented in another character than he can when there is no obstacle" (73). A table or chair gives them something to work around and struggle over when they have opposing intentions. For example, I staged the highest point of the argument between Konstantin and Arkadina around the large dining table, using the table as an obstacle. They stood on either side of the table to express their opposing views, but this became too static. The actors and I had discussed the scene as a rubber band snapping, a sort of continual war of attack and retreat. Therefore, I encouraged more movement around the table, with Konstantin chasing his mother and then vice versa. The scene came to a climax when they both stepped in front of the table and Arkadina slapped Konstantin, the space between them broken by physical contact. Using both obstacles and power relationships, the actors and I were able to tell the story of a scene and the characters' intentions through movement.

Sometimes, however, I used stillness and static blocking to illustrate the story. For example, I used stillness as a tool to indicate a change in Konstantin's character. At the beginning of the play, Konstantin is quite animated and moves around a lot. In the opening scene with Sorin, he even jumped on benches to illustrate some of his points. However, in Act IV he remained quite still, only moving when absolutely necessary. He

barely moved to relate the story of Nina to those around him. I wanted to emphasize that he had lost all of his hope and idealism, and was now numb and deadened to what was going on around him.

While each moment of *The Seagull* was carefully staged, a few moments in the show required choreographic precision and went through several incarnations to get to their final state. These elements were the play within a play and the transitions between scenes. The play within a play was a work in progress for much of the rehearsal process. The first couple of rehearsals we spent working on the play within a play specifically were unproductive, since I had not brought any pre-blocking to the table. The actress playing Nina was looking to me for guidance, and I was asking her to make choices on her own.

At first, I felt like we had not captured the spirit of what the play should be. I had Nina comically playing things badly, with huge indicative gestures and stumbling over her lines. It became apparent to me right away that the actress playing Nina looked as though she was faking bad acting. I decided to take a different approach, which was to have the staging be bizarre, but interesting. I wanted Nina to execute Konstantin's blocking well and fully commit to the strangeness of the piece. Rather than playing "bad" acting, the actress playing Nina instead had to fully commit to doing this outlandish little play. Nina became more of a performance artist and less of an actor trying to get laughs.

We broke the play down into tiny bits and developed each section independently, bit by bit. While Chekhov does not suggest this in his stage directions, I wanted to incorporate the character of Yakov into the play, by giving him sound effects to perform,

movements, and props to move around. The actor playing Yakov was quite creative and was constantly inventing more sound effects to add to the whole.

Like the blocking of any scene, I wanted the staging to tell the story of the play. I had Nina begin the play in her opening pose, which Konstantin would repeat later in a transition, and take in the audience. She began the play nervously, but gained confidence as she progressed. The beginning few moments were strange modern dance movements, as she named all of the different species that had gone extinct. Yakov played a triangle after each animal that Nina mentioned, and we developed a bit where she had to tell him to be “silent” twice. I also particularly loved a moment where she “showed” the audience the pantomimed starfish and microscopic creatures she had picked up.

She then “died” after she named all of the animals that had gone extinct. I had her remain “dead” for several moments, as the audience members shifted in their seats. She was revived with a loud intake of breath, which was also mimicked by Konstantin in a later transition. She then rose to take in the moon, which is still shining in Konstantin’s apocalyptic world. Nina then proceeded to do a strange dance, punctuated by Yakov’s duck calls and tambourine shakes. Nina then had three repeated sections of dialogue, which built into a frenzy pounding the floor accompanied by loud noises from the crash box.

For the climax of the play-within-a-play, I wanted to place Nina in a power position. Therefore, I had Nina lifted up by Yakov to exclaim that she was the universal soul. She delivered these climactic lines sitting on his shoulder with her arms in the air. Once again, this movement was repeated by Konstantin in a transition later in the play, though he would be tormented and not elevated.

In the following section, I juxtaposed several serious moments with the comedic bits, because I did not want to discredit Konstantin entirely as a playwright. For example, a moment where Nina stood stock still and delivered a plaintive and believable cry that she was alone was interrupted by Yakov operating the pale fires behind her. Similarly, in the following build to the devil's red eyes appearing I had Nina stand stock still pointing at Dorn. This allowed the actor playing Dorn to have a moment when he was truly affected by the play, which he professes later. This still and serious moment was interrupted by Nina running along the length of the front row moaning about the "horror" to come, and then screaming in Medvedenko's face.

Other than the play within a play, the most complicated bits of staging were the transitions. I used the transitions to express externally what Konstantin is experiencing throughout the play, and fueled them with Konstantin's own ideas of theatre. He believed that theatre should be like we see the world in our dreams. Additionally, he claims to be plagued by dreams and images running through his head throughout the play. The staging of the transitions were meant to align stylistically with Konstantin's ideas of the theatre, almost like little symbolist playlets. I sought to communicate the main events of the play through Konstantin's point of view, and to tell the story with him as the focus. The transitions also allowed me to show parts of the action that do not appear within Chekhov's text, and clarify character relationships to the audience. Throughout the transitions I used repeated staging, tableaux, and shadows to suggest a dreamlike world and tell the story.

I began the play with Konstantin writing the play within a play, and dreaming of the successful reception that the play would receive. The lights came up on Konstantin

sitting at his desk, frustrated and unhappy with what he is writing. He then stopped writing and began to sing the “River Waltz,” which would be featured in each of the transitions as both a source of inspiration and of neurotic obsession. The song then began to play, inspired him, and he began frantically writing.

Then, the other characters in the play appeared in a shadow tableau behind the curtain, and when the curtain was raised appeared cold and unfeeling. I was inspired by both shadows and the image of a daguerreotype. Shadows are illusory and dreamlike and do not give a true image of reality, and similarly, daguerreotypes are one dimensional portrayals of reality in black and white. I wanted it to be clear that these were dreamlike visions of the characters. The characters then began clapping for Konstantin and moved into spotlights across the stage, shouting “Bravo” and other kind words.

Then Nina approached Konstantin and he twirled her around and waltzed with her, which is an image that would be repeated in a later transition. Suddenly around him, the set for the play within a play began to be built. The other characters carried on the benches, pampas grass, and lanterns for opening night. He took in the play suddenly materializing around him, as his dreams became reality.

The second transition took place after Act I of the show. Konstantin returned to the site where his play had just failed, as the fateful waltz filled his head. However, this time the waltz was not inspiring, but rather a soul crushing reminder of his failure. This transition featured another element of shadow play, as Arkadina mimicked Nina’s movements from the play-within-the-play behind the curtain. Konstantin approached her, thinking she was Nina, and held out his hand to her, in a repeated image from the first

act. Once again, the shadows disguised the reality of the situation, as well as allowed an interesting parallel between Nina and Arkadina.

The transition then featured a moment meant to mimic the play-within-a-play where Konstantin is lifted up by the other characters. He assumed the opening pose from his play, and then began struggling against them. His mother, clearly disapproving of his play, then took aim and shot him. He threw his papers up in the air, foreshadowing the paper ripping scene of Act IV, as he was slowly lowered to the ground. As he was “dead,” like Nina in the play-within-a-play, the other characters gathered up his manuscript and held it out to him. He was revived, similarly to Nina with a large intake of breath, and began to grab all the pages back from those around him. He then knelt in the darkness and struck a match to burn the manuscripts.

The final transition in the first act of our production of *The Seagull* took place directly after the end of Act II, and featured repetitive images from previous transitions. The characters formed the same tableau from the top of the show, advancing on Konstantin with the music. The next section of the transition served to illustrate what each character had been experiencing in the first act as one by one, the characters broke off from the stony faced tableau. For example, Polina was seen fighting with Shamrayev and then joining Dorn. While Dorn embraced her at first he then abandoned her onstage by herself. Finally, Nina ran to Trigorin and he twirled her around, in the exact image that had taken place between Konstantin and Nina earlier in the play. Trigorin then left with Nina and Konstantin was left alone with the gun. He prepared to shoot himself, but looked up in the final moment before the gun fired.

The final transition of our production took place directly after Act III, and served mainly to indicate the passage of time and the events that had passed during the two years between acts. For example, I staged the wedding between Masha and Medvedenko. The large doors opened revealing Shamrayev and Masha. Konstantin crossed to the other end of the stage, as if waiting for them at the end of the “aisle.” The idea was that the audience might think that Konstantin was going to marry Masha, but at the last second Medvedenko appeared to take over. As Masha and Medvedenko kissed, several actors brought chairs over their heads in a sort of celebratory wedding dance.

The next section was to indicate that time was passing Konstantin by and he had become too numb to take in the world around him. A couch was brought on, which Konstantin sat on as other pieces of furniture began to be moved. Konstantin stared straight ahead while Sorin, Polina, and Yakov all tried to speak to him. Simultaneously, the action was revealing what was happening for Trigorin, Arkadina, and Nina in the story. Trigorin and Arkadina appeared embracing each other. Then Trigorin was seen happily with Nina, walking around the couch with Konstantin.

Suddenly the waltz music sped up and Yakov appeared with a sign that said, “Time Passes.” This sign mirrored the time and place sign that he had for the play within a play which read, “200,000 Years From Now.” The characters appeared all moving very quickly. Many of them moved furniture, or had small interactions with each other. Konstantin wrote page after page of manuscripts which he handed off to the characters around him. Medvedenko and Masha appeared to be fighting over one of Konstantin’s stories. Shamrayev moved angrily away from Shamrayev. Sorin and Arkadina took a walk together. When all of the furniture had been set for Act IV, Yakov turned the sign

around to reveal the other side which said “Two Years Later.” All of the other characters scurried away, and Yakov slowly exited, bowing on his way out.

I developed the transitions as Konstantin’s dreams and thoughts throughout the show, in the style of his theatre. They served as fluid and exciting scene changes, and as a way to allow to audience to experience some of the events that happen offstage in the play. I also used them as a way to make the action of the play and relationships between characters clearer, while appearing to the audience in a stylistic way.

Scene Work and Run Throughs

The majority of rehearsal time for *The Seagull* was spent working slowly through the scenes, shaping and fine tuning them. I generally use the vocabulary of Konstantin Stanislavsky to communicate with actors, especially when working on a realistic piece where we are aiming to achieve truthfulness. I like to begin the working process with a thorough discussion of the given circumstances of the scene. Most importantly, I am interested in characters having a strong “moment before.” A moment before is where a particular character has been previous to their entrance into a scene. Having a clear moment before allows a character to enter a scene with purpose, and in the appropriate emotional state. For example, the actor playing Konstantin and I spent a long time discussing his moment before the seagull scene in Act II. I wanted him to be able to enter that scene with knowledge of why he had shot the seagull, how it had happened, and why he was coming to show the seagull to Nina.

Other given circumstances of a scene can be important to discuss as well. For example, since so much time has passed between Act III and IV of the play, many of the actors wanted to clearly define their new relationships with the other characters. The

actors playing Dorn and Polina, for example, decided that their troubled relationship had finally come to an end. This decision fueled the way they interacted with one another in Act IV.

After the given circumstances of a scene had been clearly defined, I often talked to actors about their objectives for the scene. An objective is what a character wants in a particular scene. Often, defining an objective can clarify a confusing action that a character makes. For example, the actress playing Nina and I discussed what Nina's objective was in Act III when she gives Trigorin the medallion. We decided that she wanted Trigorin to tell her to come away to Moscow with him, but she was too embarrassed to tell him how she was feeling directly. She had to give him the medallion to deliver the message that she could not in person. This knowledge gave her a bashful and nervous quality as she delivered the medallion to Trigorin.

After we have discussed the given circumstances and objectives of each scene, then I like to develop the smaller parts of each scene, or beats. I often called this the arc of the scene, or the rise and fall of the scene. I believe that each scene has a shape, and we must discover this outline in rehearsals. Oftentimes a scene will have a climactic dramatic structure. For example, a scene will have rising action that builds to a climax. A lot of the work spent in rehearsals is clearly defining tactics for each moment of the scene, especially for the "rising action" of a scene. A tactic is an approach that a character will use to achieve their objective. One good example of the use of tactics to make rising action truthful is the scene between Trigorin and Arkadina in Act III. Trigorin desperately wants to pursue a relationship with Nina and he wants Arkadina to let him go. He uses several tactics to achieve this objective. He begs her, shouts at her,

tries to seduce her, and flat out ignores her in an attempt to get his way. Ultimately, she overcomes his objective using her own tactics. Arkadina uses her acting skills and sexual appeal to force him into staying. As work on the scene progresses, I often point out that I think a certain section should be the climax, or high point, of the scene and that everything else should build to that moment. Often I will try to accompany the climax with strong physical action, for example, the slap in the argument between Konstantin and Arkadina in Act III, or Sorin's fainting spell earlier in the act.

While every scene received a lot of attention, one scene that we spent a lot of time on was the scene between Nina and Trigorin in Act II. The end of Act II was not only going to be the end of our "first" act, but also contained the longest monologue Chekhov ever wrote. The actor playing Trigorin was terrified of the monologue, and we went through a process of experimentation to glean what Trigorin was trying to achieve by telling the story of his writing to Nina. Nina's objective was clear; she wanted to connect with Trigorin and find out about his life of fame. Her tactics were clear as well; she used flattery and compliments to approach him.

Trigorin's motivations, however, were more difficult to deduce. We knew that Trigorin was not much of a talker in social situations, given how quiet he is in the first act and Sorin's accusation that he never opens his mouth. But, we also knew that Nina had to inspire him to pour out all the details of his life as a writer. While Trigorin first tries to leave the scene, we discovered that his impetus to stay was her genuine compliments of his writing, and her truly authentic desire to hear about his life. His objective then is to satisfy her desires to hear about his life, while denying her romantic notions of fame. This discovery unlocked the rest of the pieces of the scene.

The moment to moment work unfolded as followed. We decided that Trigorin has a social presence where he can casually discuss himself and his writing in a self deprecating and humorous manner. He uses the tactic of humor to keep a wall up separating those around him from seeing his real dissatisfaction. We decided that during this scene with Nina he often allows his guard to drop, revealing the truth behind the showing off and jokingly putting himself down. However, we decided that as soon as he noticed himself revealing this true self to her that he would put his wall back up. But, during the climax of the long speech, he would let his guard down and tell her the way he really feels about himself. This is when he admits that he is a fraud, and yet, she is undeterred. Her innocent and untarnished views of the world and fame are what ultimately attract him to her in the scene.

Sometimes I would give the actors a particular mission for a run through of a scene which would lead to the freedom to make new choices. I remember a run quite late in the rehearsal process when I told both of them that the entire scene should be about their connection and flirting with one another. This opened them up to discovering new moments and keeping their focus on each other, rather than internally. The actor playing Trigorin found it particularly helpful to be able to experiment and not be locked down into a one interpretation of a moment. This scene continued to grow throughout the rehearsal process, and never felt stagnant. The actors both managed to find new moments each time, and really take each other in through each moment.

Technical Rehearsals

During the last phase of the rehearsal process, a director must shift their focus from working intimately with the actors to adding the technical elements into the show.

Additionally, throughout the technical rehearsals the director hands the reigns of the show over to the stage manager (See Fig. B.2.). This was the first large scale technical rehearsals I had experienced for a show I directed, and as such I felt quite intimidated. My strategy throughout technical rehearsals was to rely on the stage manager to guide me, and to make decisions as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Lighting

Technical rehearsals for lighting began with paper techs. This is when the stage manager, myself, and the designer got together to discuss each of the cues in the show, what they were, and when they were supposed to happen. While paper techs are generally for the designer to communicate the cues to the stage manager, my role was to adjust when I felt certain cues should be called throughout the show. For example, I wanted to adjust the timing of several lightning and thunder cues.

The next phase of technical rehearsals is dry techs. Dry technical rehearsals involve going through each cue of the show in the theatre space, without the actors. Instead, the run crew of the show acts as stand-ins for the actors onstage. In a dry tech, a director looks at each of the lighting cues of the production and states what they want to be changed. I was nervous, because I had never had a dry technical rehearsal for a show that I directed. I found it difficult to make decisions about whether or not I was pleased by a particular lighting cue. This was particularly true for the transitions, because I could not see the movement of the actors when making decisions. However, with the reassurance that we could always change things later, we moved slowly through the lighting cues.

Additionally, there were several lighting elements that had not been focused properly and needed to be redone, which meant I could not see them. And some lighting effects did not work as I thought they would, for example, the backlighting for the play within a play curtain. Since the large curtain was directly behind the play within a play curtain, the lighting designer was trying to use down light to achieve the effect we wanted. However, this did not give the silhouette effect we were looking for. I suggested that I would not mind placing birdies behind the play within a play curtain, in order to get the lighting effect we wanted. Birdies are small stage lights that are often used as footlights. The lighting designer's advisor suggested that we hide some birdies in the pampas reeds that were already going to be onstage. I agreed with the idea, hoping that when disguised the birdies would not be noticeable.

I was also unhappy with the up lighting for Konstantin's desk. The beam of light hit the desk, which meant that Konstantin had to be in a very specific position to get his head and neck completely in the light. The lighting designer told me that she would work on fixing this element as best as she could.

By the next day of techs, several of the lighting problems had been solved, but there were still some things that needed to be refocused. For example, in Act III the lighting designer and I wanted to have long shadows of the windows spilling across the floor of the dining room. These had proved difficult to focus, and still were not finished.

Sound

During dry technical rehearsals, a director must listen to all of the sound cues in the show and decide whether to approve. Often a director and a sound designer will set the level, or volume, of the cue at this time as well. Like the lighting cues, there were a

few sound cues that needed to be redone. The sounds of birds that I had requested for Act II had other noises in them as well, including cars and other animals. The sound designer thought I wanted bird noises to underscore the entirety of Act II, like I had crickets under Act I. However, I wanted sporadic bird noises throughout the act of about ten seconds each. So, in addition to finding new cues, the sound designer also had to cut them. Also, I wanted one of the transition cues cut slightly differently to make the beginning smoother. The next day, the sound designer brought in new sound cues. The sound designer had brought in several new bird cues for me to hear, which were much improved.

Costumes

On the second day of dry technical rehearsals we held a costume parade, where the actors try on their costumes for the first time under the stage lights. The director and costume designer then discuss any problems that need to be fixed before dress rehearsal. The costume parade took place early in the evening. Each actor tried on his or her costume and showed it to the designer and me under the stage lights for the first time. The costume designer and I then discussed the things that needed to be corrected or added to each costume; this included items like shoelaces, suspenders, hems, collars, and other little items. However, there were a few larger costume issues that arose during costume parade.

I had seen the large majority of the costumes, at least on hangers, before the dress parade. I had been keeping in close contact with the costume designer throughout the process, and had frequented the costume shop during the building process of the show. However, Konstantin's tuxedos had been rented, because I wanted them to look exactly

alike. This meant that I had not seen them before costume parade, since they had been ordered from a rental shop. The rented tuxedo looked far too new and contemporary, and made him look like he was going to a high school prom. The fabric was polyester, which did not feel appropriate for the time period, and the vest and shoes were a shiny white. We all agreed that we had to get together the next day to pull new costumes for him from the costume shop.

In addition, there were several problems with the dying of his costume. Rather than dying the white fabric black, the color faded from a grey to a purplish-blue color. The costume designer had decided that she was simply going to spray paint his costumes with fabric paint, since she could not get the dye to produce the inky black color that we desired.

The only other large costume piece that needed to be redone after costume parade was Trigorin's pants. Trigorin's jacket was a light khaki color, and the costume designer had chosen light khaki pants for him to wear as well. I had seen these on the actor playing Trigorin in the costume shop before dress parade, and had expressed that I did not like how close the colors of the two items were. I felt that the suit needed to match exactly, or we needed to find completely different colors for the two pieces of the suit. At the costume parade I still felt the same way, which meant the costume designer needed to buy new khaki pants for Trigorin and dye the bottoms of them black.

Finally, while I had seen Nina's final costume in the shop, I had never seen it on the actress. She looked adorable and smart in a cropped jacket. However, during the last scene of the play we wanted her to look anything but cute. I was concerned that she would not look bedraggled by the elements enough, so I considered cutting the jacket for

the final scene. In the end, the fact that she was soaking wet changed the overall look of the jacket. The puffy sleeves fell down and she looked much more run down and pathetic.

Cue to Cue

We attempted a “cue to cue” with the actors on Friday evening. This meant that we worked through the show from beginning to end, focusing on working each cue individually. The actors were present during this slow moving process. The main purpose of a cue to cue is for the stage manager to get a feel for calling the show, especially sequences that require several cues to be called in a row. However, during the cue to cue we were still making large adjustments to the lighting and sound cues. The show is quite long and we moved slowly, which meant that we fell behind schedule.

Additionally, some of the actors had to be included in the removal of the curtain for the play-within-a-play, which they had never had to do before. Moving the curtain actually took three actors instead of two, which meant I had to re-stage a bit of the transition to accommodate for losing another actor. Teaching the actors to move the curtain actually took quite a long time, and sucked up a lot of our rehearsal time. However, it was a necessary part of the technical rehearsal process.

Similarly, the run crew had to be trained on how to do the large changeover during intermission. Almost every single element in the show had to move during the transition, and it was a lot to accomplish in fifteen minutes. The run crew also had to be trained on their other jobs, including dropping the paper in Act IV.

Final Technical Rehearsals

Because of the length of the show, and the fact that we were already behind, we had an incredibly full Saturday tech, four days before opening night. The actors had to attend an early rehearsal where I re-staged several of the transitions. After two hours of staging they had a quick lunch and then we returned to finish our cue to cue of the show. We knew there was no way that we could be able to do two full runs of the show in the evening, which would be a typical technical rehearsal schedule.

Since I had re-staged several moments in the transitions, and one full transition, early that afternoon, the lighting designer had to write several cues. Luckily, the actors returned to similar positions from cues early in the show, so only a few lights had to be completely refocused. However, building these cues took a lot of time out of our already busy day. We were still making other large changes to light cues, as well as adding and cutting cues. This added up to a lot of changes for the stage manager on the day of techs. Additionally, the window lights in Act III still had not been focused properly. However, the birdies had been added to the Act I lighting, which gave the silhouette feel that we wanted for the transition moments of the show. While our Saturday techs were long, I felt a lot of progress had been made towards the final goal.

On Sunday, three days before opening night, we had another long day because of the length of the show. We had a final technical run, then a quick break, and a return for the first dress rehearsal of the night. All of the lighting elements were finally focused, each of the final sound cues were in place, and no more large scale changes were being made to the cues. The stage manager could finally focus on calling the show with all of the cues in place.

Dress Rehearsals

By the time we got to the first dress rehearsal for the show, all of the actors were exhausted. The weekend had been long, and they had already done a run of the show earlier in the day. But, everyone was excited to finally get into costumes and makeup for the show. We had a small makeup and hair crew, even though there were a lot of hair and makeup elements in the production. Most of the actors did their own makeup, including old age makeup for many of the men. Because getting into costume and makeup took longer than anticipated, as it always does, we began the run late.

The first dress rehearsal of the show went fairly well. A few lighting cues got called wrong and some levels needed to be reset, but nothing of major importance. However, I took a lot of notes about the costumes and what needed to be fixed before the final dress rehearsal. After the run, the costume designer and I had a long meeting where we discussed the items that still needed to be finished before opening. The majority of the larger items had been taken care of, including Konstantin's new costumes. However, there were a lot of little costume items that still needed to be tweaked including buttons, ties, suspenders, shoelaces, dying Konstantin and Trigorin's costumes, and some of the final writing on the costumes.

After the costume meeting, I met with all of the technical staff to discuss any problems with the run. Only then was I able to talk to the actors and give them notes. I first allowed them to bring up any costume or makeup issues they may have had. Then, I gave them notes. It was quite a late night and everyone was exhausted by the end of the day.

Final dress rehearsal for the show went a lot more smoothly than the first. The costume and makeup crew had settled into their jobs, and the actors had received the majority of what their final costume for the show would be. The actors had settled into the show with all the technical elements, and no longer missed their spots, which they had in earlier rehearsals. While everyone was exhausted from the whirlwind weekend, I felt confident about the final run of the show before opening night.

Conclusion

The bulk of my work on *The Seagull* took place with the actors in rehearsal. After casting, we began with staging rehearsals that transitioned into working rehearsals. I relied mostly on Stanislavsky's techniques and improvisation in my work with the actors. There were several scenes that had difficult and intricate staging, which developed over the course of the process. We then spent several days in technical rehearsals, adding each of the design elements into the show. Afterwards we had two dress rehearsals before the opening night of the show.

CHAPTER FIVE

Critical Reflection

The Seagull ran from February 9-14, 2010, and had a run of seven performances. All of the performances were sold out except for the Saturday matinee, which was added late to the schedule and was still almost full. These few performances were the culmination of months of research, playscript analysis, conceptual and design work, and rehearsal with actors.

I believe a director's role is to develop an imaginative and cohesive vision by examining the text, and to subsequently lead a collaborative team of artists towards the realization of that vision. To accomplish this goal, a director must be a courageous and creative thinker, an effective communicator, and a generous collaborator. In this final chapter, using these criteria, I will critically assess my work and growth as a director throughout the process, and appraise both the strengths and weaknesses of *The Seagull*. Through this chapter, I will examine my overall conceptual vision for the production and the execution of that vision, my work with designers and final product of each design element, the staging of the production, and my communication with actors and their final performances. As part of my post-production analysis, an evaluative meeting with the Baylor Theatre faculty was held to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of my production; critiques and comments about the production throughout this chapter came from that meeting.

The Concept

The intention of this high concept production of *The Seagull* was to tell the story with a focus on Konstantin and the theme of writing, using elements of expressionism to articulate his inner emotional life. The production employed the image of paper as a metaphor and design theme, to symbolize the life of the writer. Additionally, the production used highly theatrical transitions in an attempt to enliven the text, appeal to younger audience members, create fluid transitions between scenes and focus on the story of Konstantin. Through this next section I will unpack the efficacy of each of these choices in the final production of *The Seagull*.

The choice to focus on Konstantin was central to my concept and was a choice that was supported by the text. I agreed with critics Styan, Shaftymov, and others that the action of the play centers on Konstantin's story. Additionally, the two major themes of the play I wanted to highlight in my production, art and writing, coalesce in Konstantin's journey. While *The Seagull* is not only a play about Konstantin, this production would prioritize his story. Several goals motivated this choice: 1) to create an exciting and theatrical climax in the paper ripping scene; 2) to enliven the text with a new point of view and appeal to younger audiences with exciting transitions; and 3) to reveal the psychological inner life of his character expressionistically using external features of the production design. However, this choice of concept was problematic for some faculty members who believed that the focus on Konstantin did not stay true to Chekhov's story and that it came at the expense of other characters. I maintain that the choice to emphasize Konstantin is fully supported in the text, however the execution of this concept was flawed.

Konstantin's destruction of his manuscripts in Act IV of this production was partially successful on an emotional, aesthetic, and conceptual level, but there were problems with the length of the scene. The moment did provide a powerfully emotional and thematically satisfying climax to the play, through the falling paper, music, and the actor's performance; however, the duration of the sequence was too long to be completely effective; many people detached from the action as it continued to unfold over several minutes. My purpose was to force Konstantin to rip the paper for an uncomfortably long time, so that the audience would feel pity for him, still struggling after minutes to rip his final sheets of paper. Chekhov, after all, indicated in his original stage directions that the sequence should last for two minutes, a very long amount of stage time. But critiques of the thesis production indicated that the paper ripping continued so long that the audience's sympathy was lost by the end. What was needed was a more appropriate balance of the theatricality in order to avoid self-indulgence.

Additionally, the moment right after the paper ripping caused difficulties in staging and performance. Because the room was covered by the falling paper, the actors coming back from dinner had to react. Though, in rehearsal, I tried having the characters ignore the paper, clearly delineating that this was a surreal moment, but it did not seem in keeping with the rest of the play. Neither the actors responding to the paper's presence or disregarding it was never fully satisfying. Because the final scene is so short, I was never able to get the play back on track. However, because of the paper covering the floor we were able to create some interesting emotional moments, including Yakov scooping the papers up and Masha holding the ripped pieces of Konstantin's manuscripts. The tension of the moments before the gun shot was also elevated by the character's sense of

foreboding. Nevertheless, I wish I had experimented more to try to create a better sequence of events. The characters return from dinner should not be laughable. While I am not sure what the solution is, I wish there could have been a way to have both the papers falling and a fully realistic return to the world of the play.

Another part of the concept was the use of dreamlike transitions between scenes, which focused on telling Konstantin's story and providing a glimpse of offstage action in between scenes. These segments had many goals, including the desire to make *The Seagull* more relevant to our younger audiences through theatrical and interesting sequences, to make the scenic transitions more fluid and seamless, to allow some of the action that happens offstage to be seen onstage, and to offer a view of Konstantin's inner life and thoughts. In my original conception of these moments, these transitions provided glimpses into the journey of Konstantin, using symbolic and dreamlike imagery from within the play. They were incredibly non-realistic and involved repetitive seagull and shooting imagery. Additionally, they heavily foreshadowed events to come, especially Trigorin and Nina's failed affair.

However, from feedback from advisors over the course of the rehearsal process, I began to think about the transitions from a more objective point of view. I adapted and changed the transitions away from the symbolic and dreamlike towards a more realistic approach, involving multiple characters. I continued to change the transitions throughout the process, and a few days before opening night I completely restaged some of the transitions. I attempted to reduce the heavy symbolism and much of the foreshadowing. Particularly, I used the new transitions to increase the focus on characters other than Konstantin. Through these changes, the transitions also became more realistic, furthering

the story rather than simply expressing symbolic ideas about the story. For example, the transition at the end of Act II changed into a scene concerning each of the character's inner emotional states, rather than just a moment about Konstantin, Nina, and Trigorin.

One transition that changed throughout the process, but that in hindsight needed even more development, was the transition after Act I involving Konstantin and Arkadina. Parts of the transition were too heavy handed. Having his mother shoot him foreshadowed his death too much, and while the visual image of lifting him up was one that I loved, it did not match the rest of the staging of the show. I wish I had adapted this more symbolic transition to match the others. Overall, I feel that the central purpose of the transition, to show how Konstantin felt about the reception of his play, could have been portrayed in the simple gesture of Konstantin burning his manuscript, which was shown at the end of the transition. The biggest problem with the transitions was their lack of unity. While there were a few unified elements, some transitions expressed inner emotions and thoughts and some transitions felt more centered around events. I wish that I had changed the transitions earlier in the process, to make them fully coherent within the production.

While I wanted the expressionist world of the transitions and the realistic world of nineteenth-century drama to coexist side by side, some of my critiques indicated that the juxtaposition was stylistically jarring. The transitions were meant to feel like breaths of fresh air, and blend seamlessly with the action, but instead the two different stylistic worlds created focus problems. While the intention was to highlight two styles, the result was that the production lacked stylistic unity. The transitions gave a jolt of energy and depth to the production, but an unintended consequence was a degree of disjointedness.

The lesson learned is that drastic stylistic shifts within a production can jerk audiences out of the story.

Usually once I have made a major directorial decision about an element in a production I tend to go forward, but the process of *The Seagull* taught me that you have to be able to evaluate your own ideas critically at every step. There is a fine line to walk when creating a highly conceptualized vision for a production. The key to success is effective self-editing. For example, some of the costume choices made for Konstantin were too distracting and heavy. While I believe that these choices stayed true to my expressionist vision for the play, they unfortunately resulted in some of expressionism's characteristic self-indulgence. Additionally, as discussed above, some of the staging choices made in the transitions were too weighty. My tendency in directing veers toward the highly emotional, and I need to recognize that tendency and learn to look at choices I make throughout the process with a critical eye to change. Constant editing and revision is necessary for successful artistic achievement. After overcoming my resistance to cutting the transitions, I made major changes which ultimately improved their effectiveness. I also held on to Masha's moment that did not work in Act IV, but ultimately realized that it was not serving the text and needed to be modified. In subsequent productions I will experiment more with conceptual ideas throughout the process, rather than feeling tied to my original ideas.

Design Elements

Overall, the actualized design of the production fulfilled the intentions that the designers and I discussed over the course of the project. While certain elements were changed or abandoned along the way, the design elements of the production aligned with

our conceptual ideas. One strength of the design elements of the show was the unity of the visual world of the play (Appendix C).

Set

The execution of the scenic design was completed with almost no alterations to the original design, and served the show well with few exceptions. There were many complex elements within the large and detailed set, which caused some problems in construction. Many of the elements of the design proved to be time consuming, particularly papering the entire set. However, all of the papering was completed before opening night. Another problematic element of the interior set was the shutters. They were made out of a thin luan and so they had a tendency to bend after they were painted. While they had to be remade several times, the final product looked clean and polished. Since we were covering all of the furniture in paper we did not want to purchase any new furniture. To solve this difficulty, the scenic designer took industrial looking chairs and replaced the backs and seats to make them look like Victorian era chairs. These are just a few examples of the problem solving skills and massive amount of work that went into creating the beautiful set.

While there were some building difficulties, the set was an incredibly striking and cohesive design element. The colors all blended quite nicely, from white, to parchment, to black. The simplicity of the design of the first two acts was aesthetically pleasing, but still suggested the outdoors. The massive interior set towered over the actors, making them seem tiny and helpless. The set was striking, though felt somehow worn with age. The writing detailing of the set seemed more of a pattern than words you could read, which was what we intended. Each piece of furniture was a cohesive part of the design,

covered in paper and writing to varying degrees. The chairs that were transformed into Victorian chairs were gorgeous, though fragile and unevenly weighted.

However, I remained dissatisfied with a few minor areas of the set. The large curtain used to hide the set in the first two acts of the show hung unevenly, causing a gap in the bottom. The technical designer used extra muslin to plug the gap, but I was never truly satisfied with the way it looked. Additionally, there were several aesthetic problems with the floor of the stage. When we decided to choose an all white floor I knew that the floor would end up scratched and somewhat messy by the end of the run. However, before they painted the floor they attempted to cover up the cracks in between the boards of the stage. When painted over the cracks were even more noticeable than before. Also, glue from the papering dripped down onto the floor and caused large black blotches on the floor. Many of these were mopped up, but some stayed. This gave a sloppy look to an otherwise very clean design.

While the scenic designer's work was executed well, I realize that more work could have been done to accommodate for the thrust space of the Mabey. The vast interior set was completely visible from most areas of the audience; however, some audience members in section five could not see the windows or action taking place on the window seats. Because I discovered this sight line problem early in rehearsals, I chose to place a minimum of action in the window seats. However, section five had a periphery view of some of the most interesting lighting effects, since they could not see the windows directly. This was a problem that I realized during rehearsals, but only after the set had already been built.

Additionally, because of the large set needing to be covered during the first half of the show, we made the decision to place the play-within-a-play curtain center stage facing downstage. This, once again, afforded part of section five a view behind the curtain for the play-within-a-play. However, this did allow them to see the faces of all the “audience” members for Konstantin’s play, which many of the other sections could not. Another way that the set seemed designed for a proscenium house were the long sections of pampas grass placed around the stage. The intention for these pieces was for them to all be bending the same direction in the wind, which made the long thin design a logical choice. However, creating more circular mounds for some of the reeds, particularly the ones around the “proscenium” of the play-within-a-play stage, could have created a more sculptural look to the design.

Overall, however, the scenic design of the play was a success. Our intention to create cohesive scenic elements using paper to create an expressionistic and aesthetically accurate design was achieved. The design conveyed the paper aspect of the concept particularly well, and suggested the vast emptiness that we were trying to achieve.

Costumes

The fully realized costumes for *The Seagull* conveyed the purpose of the design, and created a unified aesthetic. The intention of the costume design for *The Seagull* was to create a cohesive collection of costumes that fit within the world of nineteenth century Russia, but also were influenced by the idea of paper, ink, and writing. The costumes were supposed to express outwardly what the character was feeling inwardly through color and texture. The design was also limited in color to suggest the idea of paper and ink. While there were concessions that had to be made over the course of the project, and

some elements did not turn out as planned, overall the costumes were successful. I particularly liked the array of colors that were represented in the costumes, and while everyone fell within a palate of earth tones, each person had a different shade. I really wanted the group of characters to look like a cohesive whole, and I think that was accomplished with the slight variances in tone of the costumes.

Part of the success of the costumes was the collaborative relationship that I had with the costume designer. I was actively involved with choosing all of the fabrics for the various costumes, as well as picking out the suits and jackets that we bought online. I was adamant that everyone have a different shade than the other, which meant that some people ended up with darker or lighter shades than we had originally anticipated that their character would have. However, nothing strayed too far from the original design of the character as far as color was concerned. Ultimately the only fabric that I was slightly dissatisfied with was Arkadina's dress. I had wanted her in a taupe champagne color or a creamy parchment color. Before the holiday break the costume designer brought me one scrap of fabric and said that if I did not choose that one that Arkadina's dress could not be built over the break. While I felt that the fabric was too gold, I chose it anyway so that it could be built over the holiday. Ultimately, the dress did look like parchment, though a much more golden color than I would have chosen.

Another element of the costumes that I felt translated well was the writing elements. Particularly the writing on Trigorin's jacket felt very appropriate to the character and fit within the thematic content of the show. While I wish that the writing had been slightly different in character, I felt that the writing as pinstripes worked really well. Similarly, I enjoyed the writing on Medvedenko's jacket and Masha and Nina's

skirts as well. These elements conveyed something about the characters wearing those garments, and yet did not seem distracting to the audience.

While we paid a lot of attention to detailing in the costumes, there were some things that slipped by both the designer and myself. For example, Dorn was the only one given a hat, because his hat was mentioned in the text and no one else's was. However, during the time period the majority of the men would have worn a hat outdoors. This was an oversight on my part, which never seemed odd to me, but stuck out to some Baylor Theatre faculty. Additionally, while the costume renderings of the suits were accurate to the period, my costume designer decided to purchase suits for several of the characters. This meant that a lot of the suits seemed more modern than they did in the original designs. There were other minor changes in design that I was unhappy with, including Medvedenko having a full tie instead of a bow tie. But, these issues were minor elements of the overall costume design.

The most problematic costume in both execution and design was Konstantin's pieces. While the intention of the production was to highlight Konstantin and focus on him as well as emphasize the more eccentric aspects of his personality, his overall costume design was distracting and caused the wrong reaction to him in the audience.

The first problem of the design was that I wanted him to wear a full white tuxedo that transitioned into a full black tuxedo, complete with tie and vest. Because I wanted them to be identical, the costume designer rented them from a store, and we did not see them until just before costume parade. They were shiny and incredibly modern, which made Konstantin look like he was going to prom. As a result we scrapped those completely and decided to pull new clothes for him from the costume shop. That meant

that he would not be in either matching suits throughout the show or a full white suit in Act I. However, the white linen pants and vest that we pulled for him looked excellent and appropriate for a character who cannot afford new clothes. I also loved the black tuxedo jacket that we pulled for him, which was actually almost one hundred years old. While finding these elements was difficult, and it strayed from the original design, it was definitely the right choice to make.

While the solid white and all black costumes for Konstantin worked in Acts I and IV, the heavy expressionistic costumes for the other two acts were distracting more than they were helpful to the character. The partially ink covered clothes, combined with his exaggerated hair, made him a character that was some audience members found hard to take seriously. While I was intentionally trying to isolate him from the other characters in his design, the expressionistic elements went too far in his case. I imagined him being straight out of his symbolist play, but this clashed with the realistic characters around him and alienated him from some audience members. If the design had utilized text on his costume, in a similar way to Trigorin, I think that it would have been more subtle and effective. The conceptual idea of the bleeding ink was interesting to me, but became a heavy distraction to the detriment of his character. Additionally, while the conceptual idea was interesting, attempting to give him an eccentric artist look with his spiky hair, the stylization was too much in comparison to the other characters.

Lighting

One of the design elements that I was most pleased with was the lighting design of *The Seagull*. While the dry technical rehearsals were difficult and arduous, the lighting accomplished almost all of our goals. Each act was clearly delineated with a

different look, indicating both the location and time of day. In Act I the lighting designer was able to indicate the scenery of the moon and the lake with lights in a stylistic, simple, spare, and beautiful way. She was also able to give the audience the feeling of an outdoor evening, and the sensation of nightfall with lights that continued to dim throughout the scene. The only element of the Act I lighting that I was not completely satisfied with were the lanterns. While they looked nice once they were finished, they had a tendency to fall apart, and were not quite how I imagined they would be. I will discuss this element further later in this chapter.

I was particularly pleased with the Act II lighting of *The Seagull*, especially the gorgeous clouds projected on the back curtain. They gave the scene an inviting quality, which matched the simplicity of the lighting against the curtain in Act I. The amber lighting of the whole scene indicated the heat of the afternoon, and the appeal of spending your afternoon on Sorin's side lawn. Since we particularly wanted this scene to feel like Arkadina's domain, I think the warm and elegant simplicity really suited the scene. Similarly, the Act III lighting was uncomplicated, but effectively communicated that it was a sunny afternoon. I particularly liked the light streaming in from the windows, making patterns of shadows on the floor. This effect was difficult to achieve, and I was pleased when the lighting designer was able to make it work.

The lighting in Act IV certainly indicated the darker mood of the stormy evening, without being so dark that no one could be seen. The lightning worked as a constant reminder of the storm raging outside the house and added a moody eeriness to the scene. While the Act IV lighting was effective, I wish we had been able to use more shadows in the act. Not only did we want to project large shadows of the actors on the back wall, but

we also wanted to get textural lighting on the actor's bodies and faces. We were originally going to rely on footlights to supply some of these effects, but we decided they would be too dangerous to the actors, who would have had to navigate them to make entrances and exits. I was also never fully happy with the up light at Konstantin's desk. Some of the light inevitably hit the desk, and so part of his face was often in shadow. However, ultimately the simplicity of the lighting of Act IV was effective in indicating the time and place and setting the mood.

Finally, the lighting of the transitions was effective. The lighting designer used blue to differentiate them from the scenes. In my original discussion with the lighting designer, I told her I wanted Konstantin in a down spot to begin the show. She took this idea of tightly focused down spots and used them in each of the transitions. The down spots became a lighting motif to isolate each of the characters in their own worlds. I felt that it was an appropriate way to indicate the theatricality of the transitions, and suggest the loneliness of the characters in space.

Since the design element that I have the least experience with is lighting, I was nervous that I would not be able to communicate effectively with a lighting designer. However, it became one of the design elements that I was the most pleased with. The basic design of each of the acts was engaging to audience members, and effectively contributed to the world of the play.

Sound

The sound design of the play was one of the most effective design elements of the production, and I was particularly proud of my effective working relationship with the sound designer. The sound designer's faculty advisor remarked that he felt our

collaboration had been one of the most effective ones he had seen between a sound designer and a graduate student. The two major fundamentals of the sound design were the use of environmental sound and the music that filled the piece.

While we had to go through several different versions of some of the environmental noises, the final choices contributed greatly to establishing the time and place of the scenes they were in. Particularly, the crickets established that we were both outdoors and that it was evening without being distracting to the audience. I enjoyed the bird noises in Act II, particularly the fact that they came from different places, but I felt that some of them were too loud. Though I asked repeatedly to take down the level of the birds, a few never got to a level that I was comfortable with. The thunder in Act IV worked particularly well to establish the tone of the scene, and to constantly remind the audience of the storm raging outside. We also used thunder and lightning quite effectively to draw attention to particular moments from the scene, for example Medvedenko's final exit.

The strongest element of the sound design, however, was the use of the music within the production. By using the same song throughout the piece, we created a sort of growing mania in the audience that mirrored Konstantin's. One of the Baylor Theatre faculty remarked that the music became like text in the production, an integral part of telling the story. I connected the song directly with Konstantin's inner life, which is why I had the show begin with Konstantin singing. I used the singing as a frame: first the song inspires him to write the play within a play, and then the song causes him to destroy his work. Each use of the song became an indication of Konstantin's state of mind, and the music was used as a theme that haunted him. This became particularly clear when we

hear Konstantin literally playing the melancholy waltz on the piano offstage. We distorted the song in various ways, including making it sound like it was playing at a far away party, and speeding it up when we skipped ahead in time. The song became an integral part of the storytelling of the play, which evoked an emotional response in the audience. I received several e-mails from people looking for the music, saying how much it had affected them. Additionally, I heard comments from some of the Baylor Theatre faculty saying that there had been a strong response from their friends to the sound design of the show.

Props

The process of designing and creating the props for *The Seagull* was one of the most difficult aspects of the production. Though of the props were finished before opening night, through the arduous process of creating the props for this production, I learned that a director needs to facilitate communication between designers, and stay in contact with each of the people working on the production regularly. The production did not get a props master until rehearsals had already started, and he did not get a crew to help him until several weeks through the process. There were several difficult and complex props that needed to be made, including the seagulls, the lotto set, and the red eyes of the devil. Additionally, we had several paper flowers that got destroyed at every performance, cigarettes that needed to be hand rolled, and a sign that needed to be hand painted. Additionally, we needed several easily obtained props: glasses, boxes, bandages, suitcases, etc.

While there was a lot to be accomplished in a short time, which would have put stress on any props master, there were several crossover projects that became problematic

throughout the process. When I discussed the lanterns and red eyes of the devil with the lighting designer, I thought that lighting was going to handle the building of those elements. However, lighting wanted the props crew to build the lanterns, but never provided the props crew with designs to build either of the projects involving lanterns. I should have seen this communication issue arising, and taken steps to proactively deliver designs to the props crew myself. Or, I should have facilitated better communication between the lighting designer and the props master in order to alleviate some of the last minute stress that was incurred by building props at the last minute.

I blame myself partially for the difficulty in building other props as well. I put the responsibility to design the props and execute them entirely in the hands of the props crew. However, I should have raised a flag at the beginning of the process about the more difficult props, because, as a result of waiting, the seagulls were not finished until the very last minute. The scenic designer graciously volunteered to build the seagulls, and had a crew devoted to just building those two props in the last few days. In the last week of rehearsals, everyone was scrambling to finish the props. One of the actors stayed after rehearsal into the late hours of the morning painting a sign, and then spent the afternoon of opening night painting another one. I purchased paper myself for the paper ripping scene, because the scene designer was unhappy with the color of paper that the props master had bought. As a result of all of the last minute building, the props crew did not have time to make the lanterns, so the lighting crew had to build them anyway. This meant that the lanterns fell apart on several occasions and had to be fixed after each performance.

What I learned from this experience was that while a director can place faith in their designers and crew to execute things, they need to ultimately keep checking up on their progress. And it is a director's job to point out any potential problems or difficulties in design so that everyone is aware throughout the process. In future productions, I hope to point out potential difficulties in design early in the process, as well as facilitate the communication more effectively between different members of the design team.

Staging

One of the elements I am proud of in *The Seagull* is the staging, though there were definitely areas of my staging that needed improvement. I created beautiful and effective stage pictures throughout the production. I am particularly fond of the staging of the play-within-a-play, which went through several variations until it reached the final product. I worked well with the actress playing Nina, and we developed coalescing staging and acting of the piece. There were elements of staging throughout the show that really captured the relationship between characters, including the tender moment on the picnic blanket between Dorn and Polina, and the argument around the table between Konstantin and Arkadina. The staging of the transitions was very beautifully done, and mirrored many of the storytelling moments from within the show.

However, feedback from the faculty indicated that my staging was created too much for proscenium. When I walked around and saw the show from each angle I was satisfied to allow those in section five to see the profile of some of the actors if they could see the faces of others. And while that is generally a fine rule to follow, there were several moments that I could have changed the staging to easily accommodate section five. The transitions are the most telling example of this problem of proscenium staging.

I always imagined the transitions as old photographs or as symbolic dreams. Therefore I always saw them in my head as being quite flat. However, within those moments, I had the most opportunities to allow my actors to face whichever direction I pleased. While I am interested in symmetrical, flat staging, the Mabey offered me an opportunity to use sculptural staging. I realized, after hearing the feedback from others, that I think pictorially rather than sculpturally. I always imagine what something looks like from front and center and try to create one image, rather than imagining a three hundred and sixty degree space. I know now that I need to continue to develop my skills in staging, particularly in non-proscenium performance venues.

Another staging moment that was pointed out to me as unbelievable to the audience was the staging of Trigorin and Nina's scene in Act II. They both walked around the seagull prop nonchalantly, and then Trigorin finally "noticed" the seagull at the end of the scene. While I knew that this was a problem throughout the rehearsal process, I thought that I could get away with leaving the seagull on the ground. While audiences do have to suspend their belief to some degree, I realize that I should have found a solution to alleviate the problem, rather than just saying that the audience would accept it. However, I am still not sure how I would have hidden the seagull from Trigorin at the beginning of the scene. Perhaps Nina could have hidden it intentionally, or I could have kept Trigorin far away from the seagull for the entire scene. Either way, this experience taught me that I cannot ignore any nagging problem, but try to find a solution. It also made me realize that while I feel skilled at staging, I am not as effective in dealing with props. My tendency is to pick pieces that have as few props and pieces of furniture as possible, so I have fewer props to place and use properly. Rather than sorting

out that particular problem I just tried to ignore it because a solution did not immediately present itself. I know now that anything that does not feel right needs to be dealt with instead of ignored.

Work with Actors and Final Performances

Directing a production of *The Seagull* allowed me to grow as a director in many ways. However, I am the most proud of the continued development of my skills working with actors on their moment to moment acting and building character. I am particularly proud of my work with the actors playing my four largest roles, and our process building complex and multi-layered characters.

Through close work with these four actors, we created compelling and three-dimensional characters. For example, the intention of the production was to allow Trigorin and Arkadina's actions to become as understandable as possible, rather than portraying them as the villains of the piece. Nina was played with warmth and sincerity, an innocent girl longing for fame. The change in her in Act IV was palpable, and she was not portrayed as merely a victim of Trigorin's cruelty, but someone capable of making her own decisions about her life. Konstantin was portrayed as an enthusiastic idealist in Act I, whose eccentric passions and romantic notions are deadened into numbness by Act IV.

One other goal of the production was to develop realistic and meaningful relationships between characters, and I am proud of the depth that I felt we were able to achieve. Konstantin and Sorin had a sweet mutually protective relationship, which truly felt close and familial. The actors playing Dorn and Polina had a believable relationship, complicated by years of secrecy. I enjoyed the easy friendship that Masha and Trigorin

developed, as well as the more playful relationship between Masha and Medvedenko at the beginning of the play. Most importantly, I felt that the relationships between the four main characters of the play were all full of depth and believable throughout the production. I spent the most time and energy focused on those four characters and their connections with one another.

I am most proud of the final climactic scene between Konstantin and Nina. The scene had a high level of nuance and moment to moment work, which was exemplified in the actors performances. During the rehearsal process we spent a lot of time working through Nina's neuroses and wildly conflicting feelings. Her fall from grace, her desperate love for Trigorin, and her deep desire to convince Konstantin and herself that she is going to be alright, were all things that influenced the varied and heartbreaking performance of the actress playing Nina. We also experimented with Konstantin's arc throughout the scene, and ultimately kept him as emotionally deadened as possible throughout. Ultimately, the performances of the actors in this scene provided a strong climax to the production.

While my work with actors is the element of the show that I am most proud of, there were still several moments and performances that did not fulfill their potential. One of the most difficult things about directing *The Seagull* is building a consistent ensemble that feels as though they are all from the same universe, and I do not feel that I was entirely successful in that regard. Productions have often been criticized for each of the actors seeming as though they were from different worlds, and through some of the stylized choices that I made in production, this felt true of a few of my characters. While I worked well and specifically with each actor in the particular moment that they were

engaged in, I realize that I was not looking at the large picture of the performances. Most of the actors fit stylistically into the realistic world that I tried to create during the scenes, but I encouraged some actors to make bigger choices that did not fit in with the others. For example, Masha is a character who wears her heart on her sleeve, wearing all black in show of mourning for her life. However, while Masha is depressed and makes a theatrical show of her sadness, she often states how easily she will move on from her love with Konstantin. I steered the actress playing Masha, most specifically in the final act of the play, to play her subtext instead of holding everything inside. Not only was this contrary to the text, but the audience lost sympathy for her in this section of the play. While I was initially resistant to changing this moment of the play, I talked to the actress after final dress about Act IV. And while I feel that the ultimate moment was better than in rehearsals, I wish I had changed the moment earlier in order to refine her performance further.

I was also never fully satisfied with was the fight between Shamrayev and Arkadina. While I knew that the scene was not working, I was never able to bring the scene to a place that I was happy with. Shamrayev needed to feign politeness, while brimming with anger just below the surface. I was never fully able to get the actor playing Shamrayev to that place; but rather received all anger or all kindness from him. Part of the problem with the scene was that it involved Shamrayev playing something very different than the rest of the show. He is usually a comedic presence, trying to regale others with his stories. While I gave him as much direction as I was able, I was never fully able to communicate effectively what the moment needed.

However, despite these problematic acting choices, I am proud of my work with actors in this process. One of my weaknesses as a director had been working moment to moment with actors in a scene, which I feel I made major strides to improve in this project. Being forced to work on a project that revolved around developing complicated characters and their relationships allowed me to focus on improving the way I communicate with actors. Overall, I was incredibly pleased with the performances from the actors.

Conclusion

While I was hesitant to direct *The Seagull*, I am grateful that it was the play that I ultimately selected for my thesis production. I was producing the play in a venue where I could make risky choices and risk failure in some areas. I was completely supported from all sides, and had an effective laboratory for experimenting and creating a successful piece of theatre. I learned much from the process of working on the show, and I feel that I have grown exponentially. Most importantly, I have made significant strides in my communication with actors creating moment to moment work and developing interesting and realistic characters. *The Seagull* has given me the tools to dive into my next venture with a critical eye of everyone's ideas, and to constantly continue to strive for excellence in production.

The high concept Baylor Theatre production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* utilized elements of expressionism to provide a glimpse into the inner emotional life of the writer, Konstantin. The production was centered on the themes of love and art, which coalesce in the characters of Konstantin and Nina. The characters long to create meaningful art and struggle to define what meaningful art is, and the process of directing

The Seagull mirrored this conflict. Konstantin discovers in Act IV that what matters in creating art is not what form you use, but simply writing from the heart. The process of directing *The Seagull* came from the heart and proved that with hard work one can create meaningful art.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Director's Design Presentation Slides



Fig. A.1. Title Slide



Fig. A.2. This Play is About...

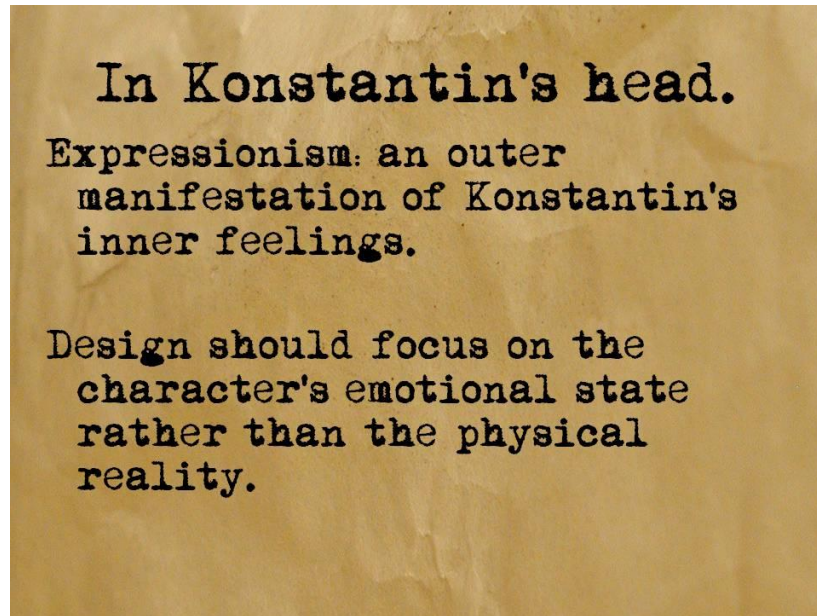


Fig. A.3. Expressionism

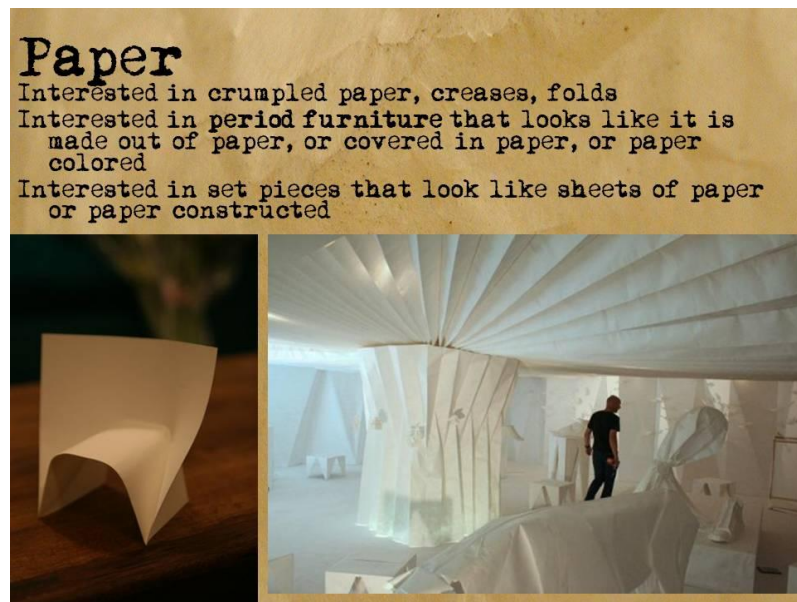


Fig. A.4. Paper in Scenic Design



Fig. A.5. Costume Color Palette



Fig. A.6. Texture in Lighting Design

APPENDIX B

Production Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10 1 st Day of Rehearsal 6:30-10:30 (1.0-1.6)	11 1 st Day of School 6:30-10:30 (Therapy, 1.7-1.95)	12 6:30-10:30 (2.1-2.9)	13 6:30-10:30 (Char. Work, 3.1-3.4) No More Conflicts!	14 6:30-10:30 (3.5-3.9)	15 6:30-10:30 (4.1-4.7)	16 6:30-10:30 (4.8-4.93, Acts 3-4)
17 6:30-10:30 (Transitions)	18 6:30-10:30 (1.0-1.95) MLK (no class)	19 6:30-10:30 (2.1-3.1, Transitions)	20 6:30-10:30 (3.2-3.9)	21 6:30-10:30 (4.1-4.92, paper, 2.8- 2.9)	22 6:30-10:30 (4.5-4.7, 4.92, Acts 1-2)	23 6:30-10:30 (Acts 2-3)
24 6:30-10:30 (Secret Missions, Acts 3-4)	25 6:30-10:30 (Transitions, Act 1)	26 6:30-10:30 (1.1, 2.6- 2.9, 3.6-3.7)	27 6:30-10:30 (4.8-4.92, Acts 4, 1) Macbeth reh. starts	28 6:30-10:30 (Acts 1-2)	29 6:30-10:30 (Acts 3-4)	30 6:30-10:30 (Trouble spots) *In Th. 11 Load-in
31 6:30-10:30 (Trouble spots)						

Fig B.1. *The Seagull* Rehearsal Calendar, January 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 6:30-10:30 (Run)	2 6:30-10:30 (Run)	3 Dry Tech: 4:30-7:30 Rehearsal: 7:30-11:00	4 Dry Tech: 4:30- 7:30 Cost. Parade: 4:30 Rehearsal: 7:30-11:00	5 1 st Tech: 6:00-11:00	6 2 nd Tech: 3:00-11:00 With dinner
7 Tech/Dress 3:00-11:00 With dinner	8 Dress 2 6:00-10:30	9 Performance 6:00-10:30	10 Performance 6:00-10:30	11 Performance 6:00-10:30	12 Performance 6:00-10:30	13 Performance 6:00-10:30
14 Performance: 12:30-4:00 Strike	15	16	17	18	19	20

Fig. B.2. *The Seagull* Rehearsal Calendar, February 2010

APPENDIX C

Design Photos



Fig. C.1. Photo featuring Act I



Fig. C.2. Photo featuring Act II



Fig. C.3. Photo featuring Act III



Fig. C.4. Photo featuring Act IV



Fig. C.5. Photos featuring Konstantin's costumes from each act



Fig. C.6. Photos featuring Nina's costumes in Act I and Act IV



Fig. C.7. Photo featuring Arkadina's costume



Fig. C.8. Photo featuring Trigorin's costume and notebook



Fig. C.9. Photo featuring Medvedenko and Masha's Costume

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