

THE SEAGULL:
A CHARACTER STUDY OF NINA ZARECHNAYA AND THE
ROLE OF WOMEN IN THEATRE

Honors Thesis

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By

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Honors Thesis Proposal:
The Seagull – A Character Study

Overview

As a BFA Theatre Performance student, my senior project will consist of an in depth character study of Nina Zarechnaya from Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. The initial research and script analysis will be done over the summer and will continue into the fall, with rehearsals taking place throughout the fall semester, leading to the final performances which will take place from December 1st, 2016 through December 11th, 2016. The goal of the project is to explore the inner life of Nina, and compare my own discoveries to the discoveries of other actresses who have tackled this character. By doing so, I hope to explore the universality of this playwright, and discover how the role and the role of women in the theatre has changed over time. My final project will consist of a prompt book (as altered to an actor's journey), as well as a final performance in the Callan Studio Theatre, in which honors and theatre faculty will be invited to attend. Professor Peter Sampieri, a theatre faculty member, will advise me through the process until he leaves for sabbatical in the spring of 2017, at which time Professor Bill Cunningham will continue to advise me.

The Play

Title: *The Seagull*

Playwright: Anton Chekhov

Translation: Tom Stoppard

Cast: 7 men, 5 women (Salem State University cast listed below)

Arkadina: Krystal Hernandez

Konstantin: David Picariello

Nina: Olivia Dumaine

Trigorin: Tristan Burke

Sorin: Adrian Peguero

Shamraev: Alex DaSilva

Polina: Delaney Jenkins

Masha: Macey Jennings

Dorn: Chris Kandra

Medvedenko: Francis Norton

Yakov: Peter Keefe

Housemaid: Jazmine Mateo

Synopsis: Set on a country estate in Russia during the late 19th Century, the play follows the Nikolaev family and their neighbors as they fall in and out of love over the course of a summer. Konstantin (a young writer) is in love with Nina, who wants to be a famous

actress. Arkadina (Konstantin's mother) is a famous actress and returns home with her new lover, Trigorin, who is a famous writer. Over the course of the summer, relationships are tested both romantically and artistically – Konstantin and Arkadina argue over the values of their own art; Nina and Trigorin fall in love; Masha laments her unrequited love for Konstantin; and Sorin becomes increasingly ill. The final act of the play takes place two years later as the family returns once again to the estate. Arkadina and Trigorin have stayed together, Konstantin has become a fairly successful writer (albeit unsatisfied), Nina has lost a child after an affair with Trigorin and is now a mediocre actress, and Masha is unhappily married to Medvedenko. The play concludes with the family enjoying a party, while Konstantin commits suicide in the next room.

Nina's Character Arc¹:

Act One – Nina is introduced into the world of the play. She is young, idealistic, and desperately wants to be famous in order to escape her cruel home life. She performs in Konstantin's play, and is encouraged to continue as an actress by her role model, Arkadina, and her idol, Trigorin. Nina and Trigorin are infatuated with each other at first glance, but their time is cut short as she must rush home before her father discovers she is gone.

Act Two – Nina returns a few days later, as her father and step-mother have left town for three days. She begins to puzzle out the idea of fame, asking herself how famous people can still be unhappy in their lives. Konstantin shoots a seagull in defiance of Nina's detachment, assaulting Nina with its remains, and fully cementing the end of their relationship. On the other hand, her infatuation with Trigorin is intensified as they converse about fame, theatre, and writing. The act concludes with Trigorin and Arkadina deciding to stay, allowing Nina to live her "dream" world.

Act Three – Nina gifts Trigorin a medallion inscribed with his initials and line numbers from his book. She tries to make him decide for her whether or not to pursue a career as an actress, and probes to see if he has any feelings for her. She leaves before Arkadina can find her. After examination, Trigorin discovers the lines that Nina reference to be "If you ever have need of my life, come and take it". Nina enters as the company is departing, and confesses that she is going to Moscow to pursue a career as an actress, leaving her entire life behind her. She and Trigorin make plans to meet in the city, finally kissing each other before they part and begin their affair.

¹ A character arc is defined as "a progression that culminates in a significant event" (Bloom 175).

Act Four – Two years have passed. Nina returns to the estate a changed woman. She had an affair with Trigorin in Moscow, resulting in a child, who died. She developed a turbulent career as a mediocre actress, only really succeeding in dying and crying on stage. Her family has banned her from their home, and Trigorin left her to be with Arkadina. She refuses to see anyone, and signs her letters as “The Seagull”, a reference to the bird Konstantin shot and Trigorin used. Her nerves are fraught, and she is cold, hungry, and exhausted. She meets with Konstantin briefly, discovering that she does have the courage and the stamina to go on living, and confessing that she still loves Trigorin.

Thesis Materials

Actor’s promptbook (including but not limited to...)

- Scratching²: Scratching will consist of a detailed Pinterest board, as well as a digital folder full of photos, artwork, music, and articles that inspire me as a theatre artist. Anything that reminds me or gives me new ideas for this project will be considered scratching.
- Script Analysis: My script analysis will follow a combined outline as described in my THE 307 (Script Analysis) and THE 204 (Directing I) classes. My research will consist of dramaturgy, as well as research in regards to the geographical, sociological, political, and religious environments of the play. I will then analyze this research, in addition to producing a character, dialogue, and unit analysis. I will also be using the book *Backwards and Forwards* by David W. Ball as a reference when analyzing the script.
- Notes and Journals: Notes will be taken in a journal at meetings and rehearsals. I will also include any journal entries that I write about the process in addition to the notes. They will then be typed and inserted into my actor’s promptbook to show progression of the project over time.
- Design Materials: Designer sketches and drafts will be added to the promptbook to showcase all elements of the project. Although they are not a part of my own design, the progression of lights, sounds, staging, and costuming help to tell the story of time, and will contribute to and affect my character’s arc. As Michael Langham writes in the forward of *Backwards and Forwards*, “A play’s sound, music, movement, looks, dynamic – and much more – are to be discovered deep in the script, yet,

² Scratching as defined by Twyla Tharp is, “a tangible idea to get you going. A good idea is one that turns you on rather than shuts you off. It keeps generating more ideas and they improve on one another” (Tharp 94-95).

cannot be detected through strictly literary methods of reading and analysis” (Ball vii).

-Production Calendar: A finalized calendar of the production will be inserted to show the detailed rehearsal and technical process leading up to the final performance.

-Reflection: A detailed reflection on the process as a whole, what I’ve discovered through the finalized performances.

Projected Process

- Mid-May:
 - Casting notice posted.
 - Sign contract with department.
 - Go to costume shop for measurements.
 - Begin the scratching process.
 - Create a Pinterest board.
 - Create a digital folder.
- End of June:
 - Basic scratching completed.
 - Begin script analysis and other relevant research.
 - Begin with dramaturgy on Anton Chekhov, *The Seagull*, the Moscow Art Theatre, and Konstantin Stanislavsky.
 - Continue into geographical, social, political, and religious environments within the play.
 - Break down the play into units.
 - Establish Nina’s polar attitudes and character-mood intensity.
- End of September:
 - Finish script analysis.
 - Begin rehearsals.
 - Work on becoming off book.
 - Table work each unit.
 - Clarify objectives, tactics, status shifts, and relationships.
 - Memorize the preliminary staging for each unit.
- Mid-October:
 - Be entirely off book for full production.
 - Finalize staging with Bill.
 - Solidify character relationships and continue building upon them.
- November:
 - Find nuances within scene work.

- Explore new gestus³ and other physicalities within the space.
 - Play with vocal variety, especially in regards to pace, clarity, and pitch.
- Find new and surprising choices and moments.
- Play with the set as it comes into the production.
- Work with costumes, hair, and makeup, finding new choices as elements are added to the production.
- Find the pace in working with lighting and sound elements, and how it affects the performance.
- December:
 - Perform finalized production for audiences.
 - Keep each performance fresh and exciting, not allowing any room for habit or auto-pilot.
 - Reflect at post-production. Give feedback to the process as a whole.
- January:
 - Compile and edit materials into a cohesive promptbook.
 - Finish writing a reflection on the process, what was discovered, and how it relates to the thesis as a whole.
 - Go through digital folder and begin finalizing the table of contents.
 - Edit materials as needed.
- February – March:
 - Continue editing materials; find new resources to create a full perspective.
 - Incorporate research on other actresses, historical research, and personal experience to come to a conclusion on the role of women in theatre.
 - Compare and contrast how the role of Nina has been approached throughout time.
 - Explore how the role of women has changed from 1895 to present day.
 - Draw conclusions on what this means for the future of women in theatre.
- April:
 - Finalize promptbook, and have readers begin giving notes for editing purposes.
- May:
 - Turn in finished promptbook.
 - Showcase findings at symposium or other artistic venue.

³ “Gestus is the ‘aesthetic gestural presentation of the economic and socio-ideological construction of human identity and interaction’, something which ‘finds ultimate expression in the corporeal and intellectual work of the performer’” (Thomson 109).

Production Team

Director: William Cunningham
Stage Manager: Chelsea Jeronimo
Set Designer: Michael Harvey
Assistant Set Designer: Rachel Burke
Technical Director: Topher Morris
Assistant Technical Director: Myles McMann
Lighting Designer: Isabel Samuel
Costume Designer: Jane Hillier-Walkowiak
Sound Designer: Ryan Blaney
Project Adviser: Peter Sampieri

Creative Significance

The significance of this project lies in exploring the inner life of Nina, and bringing my own interpretation to this production. The major themes of this play revolve around love, art, and the human spirit. Chekhovian characters feel to the depths of their souls with no apologies for their feelings; and yet, like us, they are seemingly unaware of how little time they have, and are often unable to live in the present. Ideally, I want the audience to slow down, breathe, and see themselves in these characters. At the end of the day, the characters are only human, and connecting with them on a genuine level will bring the catharsis that any audience craves.

I also find significance in exploring the role of women as storytellers in the world of theatre. Women still face challenges, not only in having their stories brought to life on stage, but also in the standards that are set for them in “the business”. I believe that exploring the history of women in theatre and how it has evolved will reveal how we can move forward in bringing equality to the theatre workplace, and bring more stories involving strong female characters to the stage.

References

- Ball, David. *Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983. Print.
- Bloom, Michael. *Thinking like a Director: A Practical Handbook*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2001. Print.

Stoppard, Tom, and Anton Chekhov Pavlovich. *The Seagull*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997. Print.

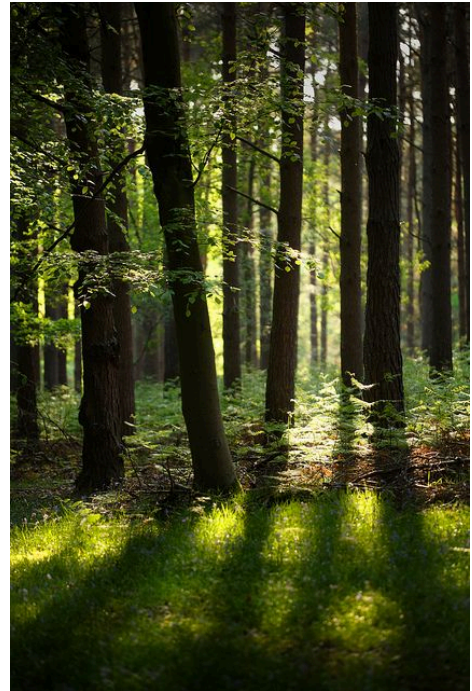
Tharp, Twyla, and Mark Reiter. *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life: A Practical Guide*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. Print.

Scratching Images

(For more images, videos, and music, please refer to my pinterest board at <https://www.pinterest.com/LivDumaine/seagull-scratching/>)



Seagulls: beauty versus disgusting, tearing apart dream.



Woods, lighting, nature.



Love versus infatuation, not looking at partner/looking at camera, idea of fame.

ANTON CHEKHOV'S 8 QUALITIES OF CULTURED PEOPLE

from Brain Pickings

1

They respect human personality,
and therefore they are always kind, gentle, polite,
and ready to give in to others.

2

They sit up at night in order to help.

3

They respect the property of others.

4

They are sincere, and dread lying like fire.

5

They do not disparage themselves
to rouse compassion.

6

They have no shallow vanity.

7

If they have a talent they respect it.

8

They develop the aesthetic feeling
in themselves.

www.TheSilverPen.com

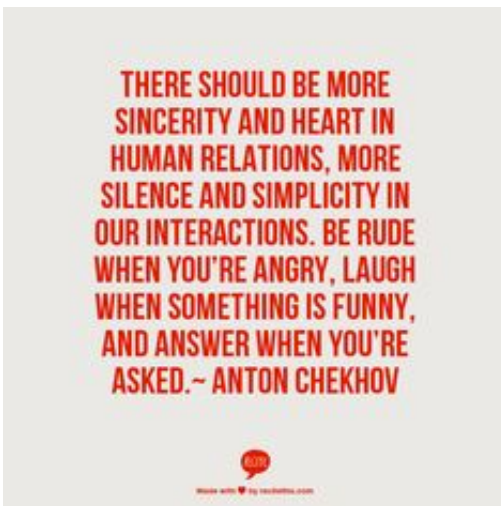
Anton Chekhov character information. Only kind people, no intentions of malice.
Good people who make mistakes, inherently human.



Water landscape, idea of escape



Giving heart entirely no matter how painful; innocence.



Honesty, live from the heart.



Resembling Konstantin's play, theatrical.



“Man happened to come along and having nothing much to do, destroyed her.”



What Nina envisions her life with Trigorin to be.



Fame.



Theaters that Nina wants to perform in; Moscow, Russia (Bolshoi Theatre).



Fame. Mariinsky Theatre;
St. Petersburg, Russia.



Subtle touch; Trigorin.



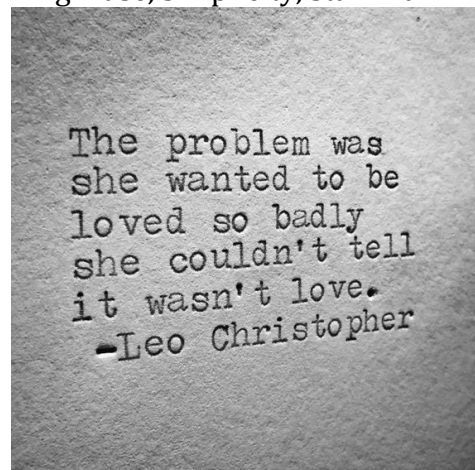
Mother's love. Lost child.



Performing. Ease, simplicity, stamina.



Newborn – two weeks old. Lost child.



Nina and Trigorin.



Landscape. On the water.



Landscape at sunset, nearing top of act one.



Arkadina versus Nina. Also change between act one and act four.



Landscape. Birch trees.

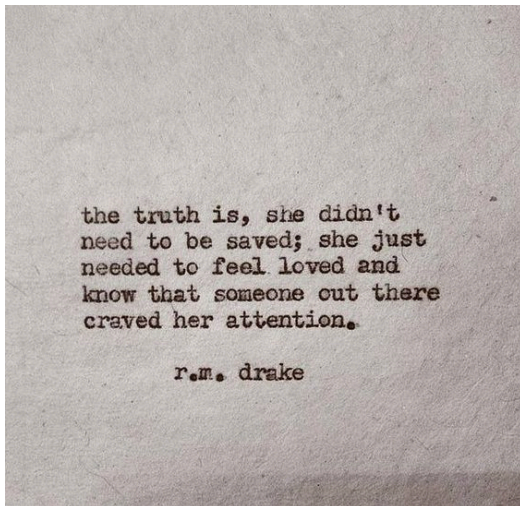
you have to find that place
that brings out the human in you.
the soul in you. the love in you.

- r.m. drake

And then all of a sudden
She changed.
She came back a completely different person
With a new mindset, a new outlook,
A new soul
The girl that once cared way too much
About everyone and everything
No longer cared at all

Importance of humanity. Always the other.

Act one versus act four. *Still cares.



Unrequited love for Trigorin.
"Faith in myself."



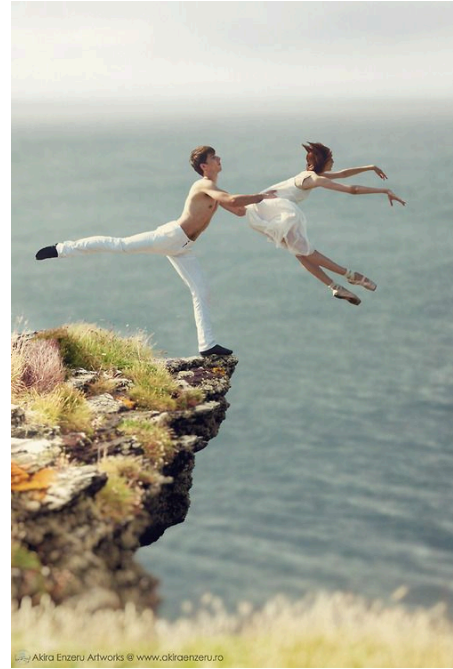
Landscape early morning/midday.



Image for stage at dusk.



Nina getting ready.
Russian artist Zinaida Serebriakova.



Reaching for dreams, only to be
pulled back down by reality.



Seating for play within the play. Rustic, romantic, charming.



Loneliness. Nina in Yeletz.



Worn down theatre. Similar to Yeletz.



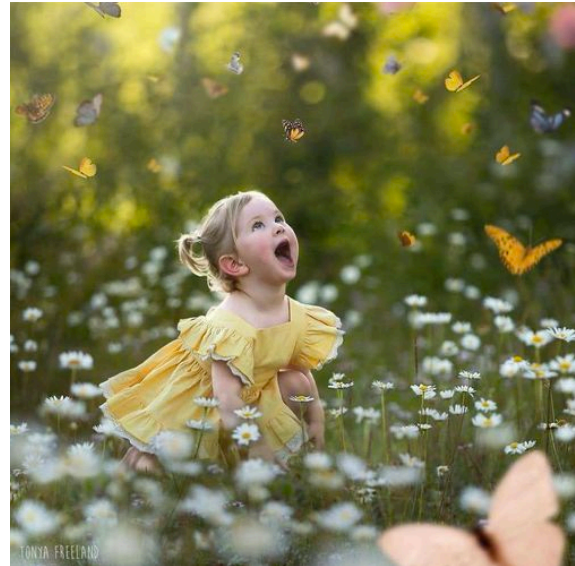
Actress on magazine cover.
Nina's dream. Bohemian.



Konstantin comforting Nina. Just two children.



Nina isolation. Vices act four.



Pure happiness. Act one.



Reading Trigorin's work. Nature, intellect, simplicity.

The Seagull
Script Analysis

Olivia Dumaine
Honors Thesis
May 4th, 2017

Dramaturgical Research

Anton Chekhov

Anton Chekhov was born on January 29th, 1860 in Taganrog, Russia; Yegorovich, his father worked as a grocer, and his mother, Yevgeniya, was the orphaned daughter of a cloth merchant (Raferty). From a young age, his mother would often tell stories to her son and his five siblings. When Chekhov was only sixteen years old, his family fled to Moscow (first his father, then his mother) due to bankruptcy. Chekhov decided to stay behind in Taganrog, and support himself by tutoring younger students. By 1879, he was able to enroll in Moscow University Medical school on scholarship.

Around the same time that he enrolled in school, he also began writing in order to support himself financially. By 1884, Chekhov was officially practicing medicine, but was also writing about a story a day! He became known for his satire and wit, and was often criticized for not writing about political subjects; because of this, many of his works were highly censored by the government. "Many scholars believe that Chekhov's years as a doctor helped him to develop his almost off-hand and subtle treatment of tragic events in his plays and stories" (Raferty). In a way, Chekhov viewed himself as a doctor who wrote, instead of a writer who practiced medicine. As a doctor, Chekhov was known for his extreme compassion, and often attracted patients even after ending his medical career. Often feeling unable to cure the weaknesses of society, Chekhov felt as though he were able to cure these ills through his writing (Cytowick).

In the late 1880's, Chekhov's health began to decline due to the onset of tuberculosis. Because of this, some of his best and most renowned works being created towards the end of his life. His early work was mostly influenced by Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. On the whole, he was interested in humanity and the fine line between comedy and tragedy in day-to-day life. Between 1886 and 1887, Chekhov began writing for the stage, with his first play, *Ivanov*, performed in 1887 in Moscow. Although he received mixed reviews, he continued writing, and produced *The Seagull*, *The Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *The Cherry Orchard* by 1904. "Avid readers of Chekhov also would note elements of his short stories appearing in his plays, thus enriching the action happening upon stage through these connections. For example, *The Seagull*, written in 1896, has nearly verbatim quotes from his story *Ariadna*, written in 1985" (Raferty).

The Seagull originally premiered at the Alexandrine Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1896, and was a terrible disaster. Many people rioted, as the work was so realistic in nature and different than what audiences expected. This deeply discouraged Chekhov, and he vowed to never write for the theatre again. Yet, when Vladimir

Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavsky directed the same play in 1898 at the Moscow Art Theatre, it was a hit; this fostered a relationship between Stanislavsky and Chekhov that lasted until his death. “Chekhov’s work with MAT is remembered for the complex relationships, great productions and how it changed the world of theatre. He was a playwright who had developed a radical new way of writing for the theater – his characters talked about life through seemingly superficial conversation” (Raftery). This idea is seen explicitly in *The Seagull*, as characters carry mundane conversations while experiencing the deepest emotions that life has to offer.

During this time, Chekhov met his future wife, Olga Knipper. Their professional relationship turned into a correspondence, and eventually the two married. According to recent examination, some scholars have “expressed in Chekhov’s writing as an indication of his inadequacies in relation to the women in his life. Yet interestingly, Chekhov sustained a marriage which encouraged his wife to continue with her artistic and professional ambitions at a time when this was no more than an idealistic dream for most women” (Tait). While Chekhov was not a proponent of the feminist movement, and has documented several misogynist documents, this open-mindedness in his relationship with his wife was uncharacteristic of the time.

Unfortunately, he died at the age of forty-four, succumbing to the tuberculosis. “One night in Yalta, he called for the doctor and a glass of champagne, knowing he was about to die. His last words were, ‘I haven’t drunk champagne for a long time.’ His body was then transported for burial in an ice truck marked “Oysters.” This was made even stranger by the fact that one of his early short stories shares this title” (Raferty).

Influences: Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ivan Turgenev

As a young writer, Chekhov was influenced by mainly by Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Ivan Turgenev, all of whom wrote within the movement of literary realism. These authors were all quite liberal in their beliefs, and often incorporated aspects of their own lives in their works, a concept that Chekhov himself followed in his own writing. Some specific values that translate into Chekhov’s work include:

- Tolstoy’s belief that “quality and meaning of one’s life is mainly derived from his day-to-day activities, and that people’s everyday actions define their character and purpose” (“Leo Tolstoy”).
- Dostoyevky’s connections to psychology and philosophy in creating intellectual characters “who ‘feel ideas’ in the depths of their souls”. As such, Chekhov was able to create characters that are perhaps problematic in their actions, but are undeniably human; in other

words, the audience can not fully dislike them. Let it also be known that “Dostoyevsky often stressed the difference between his own background and that of Leo Tolstoy or Ivan Turgenev and the effect of that difference on his work” (Morson).

- Turgenev’s focus on offering “realistic, affectionate portrayals of the Russian peasantry and penetrating studies of the Russian intelligentsia who were attempting to move the country into a new age” (Freeborn). Oddly enough, Turgenev’s play, *A Month In The Country*, was only successful after the success of Anton Chekhov’s performances at the Moscow Art Theatre. “It was there in 1909, under the great director Konstantin Stanislavsky, that it was revealed as one of the major works of the Russian theatre” (Freeborn).

Realism and Stanislavsky

While many artists today use the terms “naturalism” and “realism” interchangeably, Stanislavsky differentiated realism from naturalism in the following way:

“Naturalism, for him implied the indiscriminate reproduction of the surface of life. Realism on the other hand, while taking its material from the real world and from direct observation, selected only those elements which revealed the relationships and tendencies lying under the surface. The rest was discarded” (Benedetti 16).

In this sense, both Stanislavsky and Chekhov were interested in the relationships of real humans, and the specificities of their lives as they pertained to their relationships on stage. Prior to the rise of realism, actors relied on hand gestures and specific voices to convey the story on stage. This can be seen as far back as first century A.D. by the Roman Rhetoric teacher names Quintilian and continued through the 18th century in the work of Aaron Hill, in which actors were asked to create predetermined physical positions in order to convey a certain emotion. In addition to this, the matters of everyday life were never seen onstage; stories were generally meant to be entertaining, and would often depict the lives of royalty as opposed to the common man. Eventually, “realism sought to portray imperfect people likely to fail due to their human flaws” (Raferty). This artistic movement allowed everyday life to become the subject of art, and allowed for more of a social critique rather than an escape through entertainment.

In the later half of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, as realism began to rise, Stanislavsky began working on his renowned System of acting. Some of the central ideas in his system include the connection between the psychological and physical life of the character, the importance of the audience in creating life on stage,

and the necessity of “experiencing” moment-to-moment on stage. “As Stanislavsky explains, ‘If our preparatory work is right, the results will take care of themselves.’ He concludes by warning that actors make a common mistake when they worry about the result, rather than the action” (Carnicke 25). In short, Stanislavsky believed in the process of a production more so than he believed in working for a finished product. In doing so, he “strictly controlled the external elements of a production to create realistic illusion” (Carnicke 29) when staging Chekhov’s plays, adding realistic set pieces, costume, and makeup “as early as two months before a play opened” (Carnicke 29). Overall, his System aimed to foster a creative path for actors to personalize and follow in order to both create and sustain genuine relationships and truthful characters onstage.

Production History and the Moscow Art Theatre

The first production of *The Seagull* took place in 1896 at the Imperial Aleksandrinsky Theatre, which relied on nineteenth century stage conventions, including minimal rehearsals, previously used sets, and actor-supplied costumes. The actors rehearsed primarily on their own, only coming together in the final moments of production. According to Chekhov himself, the production was a failure, and discouraged him so deeply that he vowed to never write again. According to Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, however, the play received “routine success”, referring to its commitment to the nineteenth century theatrical conventions, as opposed to embracing Chekhov’s twentieth century dramatic modernizations in both acting and staging (Carnicke 12). Even still, audiences reacted so poorly to the production, that they intimidated actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya, who was in the role of Nina, that she lost her voice on stage. The production only lasted for five performances.

On the other hand, when the play was produced two years later at the Moscow Art Theatre, it received overwhelming acclaim. In Stanislavsky’s production of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre, “eighty hours of work went into thirty-three rehearsals in order to cultivate an ensemble of actors without stars. Even so, Stanislavsky considered the 1898 *Seagull* under-rehearsed” (Carnicke 12). Regardless of subjective criticism, this production solidified Stanislavsky’s relationship to Chekhov in directing his plays, as well as permanently linking Stanislavsky’s success to the Moscow Art Theatre. As the painter Levitan wrote to Chekhov, following a performance:

“Only now did I understand [the play]. In the reading it made no especially profound impression on me. But here, remarkably, carefully rehearsed, lovingly staged, organized down to the slightest detail, it makes a great impression. How am I

to tell you, I've not yet recovered – all I'll say is, I experienced the most sublime artistic moments when watching *Seagull*. That same sorrow emanates from it as emanates from life when you scrutinize it closely" (Selenick 50)

After its success at the MAT, *The Seagull* was adapted into English by George Calderon, and was first performed for an English audience at the Glasgow Royalty Theater in 1909 (Field-Olsen). Twenty years later in 1938, the text was brought to Broadway, and featured Uta Hagen in the role of Nina. Since then, *The Seagull* has been adapted into films, literary spin-offs, and re-imagined stage plays. It has been translated countless times, with twenty-five published versions between 1998 and 2004 alone. Yet, as Tom Stoppard writes in his own translation, "'You can't have too many English *Seagulls*: at the intersection of all of them, the Russian one will be forever elusive" (v Stoppard).

Relevance to Nina:

According to Ilya Ehrenburg:

"Chekhov understood, with a high measure of art, how to recognize and describe the trivial in life... The trivial always found in him a severe critic... This great, wise man, who observed everything, who encountered the boring, gray mass of weak people, looked at the lazy inhabitants of his homeland, and said to them with a sad smile and in a tone of mild but profound reproach, with an expression of hopeless sorrow – 'Ladies and gentlemen – you are living badly!'" (Melchinger 66).

Inasmuch, Chekhov was ultimately an observer of the world around him, and used pieces of what he found in his works, making his characters wholly human. For example, in creating the characters of both Nina and Arkadina, he drew upon real women that he had been involved with romantically. A man who experienced many women in his lifetime, rarely fell prey to love, but did draw on his romantic and emotional inclinations in his work. Lika Misinova, a friend of Chekhov's sister, fell deeply in love with Chekhov. In response to her feelings and to protect himself against her loving advances, he maintained a cold indifference to her affections and letters from 1891-1892. In 1893, Chekhov met the actress Lydia Javorskaya, who quickly charmed him and was charmed in return. In response to this affair, Lika Misinova flew into her own affair with another friend of the Chekhov family, famous writer Potapenko, who had a wife and family of his own.

"The play's romantic plot follows very closely to the real facts of Lika's and Potapenko's 'affaire'. And Like, herself, recognized this to be true. She had been one of life's victims: her love for a man and her love for the stage had

both come to nothing. But on the stage, Nina (Lika) is able to surmount her unhappy love affair: she rises above the cruel side of love” (Laffitte 201). In this way, Chekhov defines himself in the realm of realism as opposed to melodrama. By using the very real workings of a relationship, Chekhov was able to differentiate between human emotion and excess of emotion; or as Nina comes to recognize, the difference between being an actress and being someone in the theatre.

Action Sentence:

Action Sentence⁴: Faced with her dreams of becoming famous, Nina sacrifices everything, and discovers that the reality of fame is much colder than she had imagined.

Structural Analysis:

Given Circumstances:

- Environmental Facts:
 - Geographical Location:
 - Summer, 1895. Dusk (around 7:00p.m.). Russian countryside, south of Moscow, part of the park on Sorin’s estate. Near a lake.
 - Russia can be divided geographically by the Yenisey River into Eastern and Western Russia. In the summer, temperatures fluctuate between 17 and 23 degrees Celsius (or about 63 to 73 degrees Fahrenheit). Oddly enough, rain also peaks during the summer months (May through September), with anywhere from 87 – 138 mm of rain (about 3 – 5 inches). The play itself likely takes place in a similar countryside in which Anton Chekhov spent his summers writing, outside of the town of Chekhov. “As conditions become warmer with decreasing latitude, deciduous species appear in greater numbers and eventually become dominant. Oak and spruce are the main trees, but there also are growths of ash, aspen, birch, elm, hornbeam, maple, and pine. East of the Urals as far as the Altai Mountains, a

⁴ Action is defined as “a transitive verb in the formula *Character X* _____ *s character Y*” (Bloom 33). Therefore, an action sentence is a sentence that fully encapsulates the action of a play with the formula *Faced with* _____, (*character X*) _____, *and discovers* _____.

narrow belt of birch and aspen woodland separates the taiga from the wooded steppe” (Hosking).



(A photo of Anton Chekhov's summer estate, Melikhovo)

- Moscow (offstage action)
 - Located in Western Russia, Moscow is the capital of Russia. Its climate is hospitable, with warm summers with low-humidity, and brisk yet manageable winters. Both fall and spring are relatively short, with temperatures rapidly dropping and rising temperatures respectively. Precipitation averages about 23 inches a year. “The inhabitants of Moscow are overwhelmingly of Russian ethnicity; the largest minority groups are Ukrainians, Belarusians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Tatars” (Murrell). By the year 1897, the population had steadily grown to 978,000 in Moscow alone. At this time, Moscow became the hub for railway travel, and brought in a number of factories in the surrounding areas, especially focusing in textile manufacturing, engineering, and metalworking.



(The Slavyansky Bazaar in Moscow 1895, hotel in which Trigorin directs Nina to stay)

- Economic Environment:
 - Working Class (Teachers, Housekeepers, Estate Managers, etc.)
 - Within the play, there is a distinct class divide between the working class and the upper class family living on the estate. Historically speaking, the Russian revolution in regards to the working class was beginning to brew at this time, however, it does not affect the characters in the world of this play. It does, however, bring about the issue of class consciousness, in which “individuals of different occupations, ages, and educational levels, and skills believe that they belong to a common social group that is different from, and often antagonistic to other social groups” (Richards 784). In act II, Shamraev explodes at Arkadina after expressing her ignorance in how the horses are used and cared for on the property. Those outside the working class waste their time away, while those in the working class embrace the smaller moments that they have; at the end of the day, they have a better perspective of what is important in life versus what is not. For example, Medvedenko

continually expresses his frustration in how little he makes as a school teacher, and his difficulties in supporting a large family; yet, at the end of act IV, he is contented by being a good father.



(A school teacher with his students in Russia; turn of the century)

- Artists (Writers/Actors), Doctors, and Judges
 - Within the play, writers and actors alike are spoken of with the highest of praise and acclaim; and yet, they all claim to have no money. When Arkadina is pressed to buy Konstantin a new set of clothes in act III, she repeats that she has no money; in reality, she has a great deal, of which she spends on herself. Trigorin, as well is expected to have a great deal of money, as he travels regularly and at the drop of a hat. By the end of act IV, it is clear that Konstantin has also joined the ranks of making money from his art, albeit struggling to make ends meet up until that point. He is also unsatisfied with the work he is producing, despite making him money, posing the question – does making money off of art mean that it is good art? Similar to the artists, both Dorn and Sorin claim to have no money:

either from paying farmhands or from traveling. In addition to not fully grasping the worth of money, those in the upper class are also the characters who cannot comprehend the value of time, wasting it as freely as air.

○ Political Environment:

▪ Marxism

- While not specifically discussed in the context of the play, Russia was on the brink of the rise of Marxism, which would eventually lead to the Russian Revolution. Marxism became popular in Russia at the rise of the working class under a tsarist government. Lenin, or Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, initially headed this movement in the early 1890's, which was eventually brought to a head in 1917. The initial goal of this rise was to eliminate the exploitation of the peasantry, however, it quickly became something much more complex following the timeline of this play. As the world of the play is set outside of the industrialized cities, the characters are on the outskirts of, if not entirely separated by class, from this political environment.

▪ Art as Political Medium

- While Nina and Arkadina are intensely focused on fame, fortune, and affection of fans, Trigorin and Konstantin are more so drawn to art as a political medium. Konstantin is set on developing new forms of art that will reach past the Romantic drama that has taken hold of the theatre; while this may be driven by a selfish desire, it also may be explained by the weight of responsibility that writers carry. Trigorin, as one of the characters with more world experience, goes into detail in act II about his duty as a citizen of Russia, and his responsibility as a writer to speak up on behalf of the people (Stoppard 34). Chekhov, a writer and doctor himself, felt similarly on this subject, and did his best to take care of as many people as he was able – either through medicine or words.

○ Social Environment:

▪ Bohemia vs. Traditionalism

- Bohemia can be loosely described as a way of life outside of the norm of living. In comparison to a

traditionalist lifestyle, this may include artists, intellectuals, musicians, and other sorts of gypsies. This is the exact sort of lifestyle that the family lives on the estate – drinking, playing games, singing, and enjoying theatre on the lake. As such, it is the sort of lifestyle that Nina’s father warns against, and accordingly forbids her to take part in. While the family still promotes an upper class standard of living, they are more free spirited compared to other citizens in Russia during this time; thus providing conflict for Nina, who desperately wants to be included in the bohemian culture.

- Religious/Moral Environment:
 - Agnosticism
 - There are several instances in the play in which the characters mention not having religion. There is mention of angels, the soul, the devil, and so on – but never any mention of devout religion. In act III, Konstantin idealizes dancers who used to live in the same building as Konstantin and Arkadina, referring to them as “having religion” (Stoppard 44). In act IV, Dorn extrapolates on this by saying, “the only people who fear death rationally are those who believe in life hereafter, because they fear retribution for their sins. But you – in the first place you don’t believe, and in the second place, what sins?” (Stoppard 57). As bohemians and artists, the characters in this play are fascinated and perplexed by the soul, but have no means of explaining it outside of artistic endeavors.

Previous Action: Arkadina and her lover, Trigorin, have come to Sorin’s estate for the summer. Konstantin has written a play, which will be performed later in the evening. Nina must secretly break away from her father and stepmother in order to perform.

Unit Breakdown:

ACT I:

Unit 1

Pg. 1 – 2

(Masha, Medvedenko)
Unhappy Love

Trigger: Medvedenko pities himself and his love for Masha.

Heap: Masha dismisses Medvedenko and his love for her.

Unit 2

Pg. 2 – 7

(Sorin, Konstantin, Masha, Medvedenko, Yakov)
“She loves me, she loves me not”

Trigger: Konstantin confesses his insecurities of feeling humiliated around his mother’s celebrity friends, and defensively scoffs at Trigorin’s writing.

Heap: Konstantin declares his undying love for Nina.

Unit 3

Pg. 7 – 9

(Nina, Konstantin, Sorin)
Young Love

Trigger: Nina worries that she is too late for the performance, and that her father will discover where she is.

Heap: Nina flirts with Konstantin, and teases him about his writing.

OBJECTIVE: To flirt with Konstantin/to perform freely.

Unit 4

Pg. 9 – 10

(Polina, Dorn)
The Doctor

Trigger: Polina criticizes Dorn for his behavior with other women.

Heap: Dorn maintains that women have always liked him, especially for being “a damn good doctor” (10).

Unit 5

Pg. 10 – 14

(Shamraev, Arkadina, Sorin, Trigorin, Dorn, Polina, Medvedenko, Masha, Konstantin, Nina)

The Play

Trigger: Konstantin ignores his mother's condescending commentary, and signals the play to begin.

Heap: Konstantin stops the play (and his mother's commentary), refusing to continue with the performance.

OBJECTIVE: To perform Konstantin's play truthfully and to the fullest.

Unit 6

Pg. 14 – 16

(Arakadina, Sorin, Trigorin, Dorn, Polina, Medvedenko, Masha, Shamraev)

Tough Love

Trigger: Arkadina defends herself against the insinuations that she hurt Konstantin's feelings by mocking his play.

Heap: Arkadina worries that she genuinely did hurt her son, and asks for Masha to find him.

Unit 7

Pg. 16 – 19

(Nina, Arkadina, Sorin, Trigorin, Dorn, Polina, Medvedenko, Shamraev)

Reviewing the Play

Trigger: Nina discusses the play with Arkadina and Trigorin.

Heap: Dorn reflects absentmindedly that he "liked the play" (18).

OBJECTIVE: To gain approval/recognition from the company (especially Arkadina and Trigorin).

Unit 8

Pg. 19 – 21

(Dorn, Konstantin, Masha)

Bewitched

Trigger: Dorn compliments Konstantin on his play, and encourages him to continue writing.

Heap: Dorn wonders what he can do to help all of the “sensitive creatures” (21).

ACT II:

Unit 9

Pg. 22 – 28

(Arkadina, Dorn, Masha, Nina, Sorin, Medvedenko, Shamraev, Polina)

“Refusing the Famous Actress!”

Trigger: The company debates trivial matters of life while enjoying the beautiful weather.

Heap: Shamraev refuses to give Arkadina carriage horses, prompting his resignation.

OBJECTIVE: To fit in with (become?) Arkadina.

Unit 10

Pg. 28 – 29

(Dorn, Polina, Nina)

Being A Doctor

Trigger: Polina begs Dorn to run away with her.

Heap: Dorn pacifies Polina, and directs his attention on the others.

OBJECTIVE: To pick wildflowers/enjoy the weather.

Unit 11

Pg. 29 – 31

(Nina, Konstantin)

The Seagull

Trigger: Nina ponders what fame is, if it is not what she imagined it to be.

Heap: Konstantin assaults Nina in retaliation of her detachment.

OBJECTIVE: To solve the puzzle of fame/To dismiss Konstantin's dramatics.

Unit 12

Pg. 31 – 36

(Nina, Trigorin, Arkadina)

The Dream

Trigger: Trigorin enlightens on the reality of being famous.

Heap: Nina continues to live in her dream world, as Arkadina announces that they will be staying.

OBJECTIVE: To grasp the feeling of fame/to flatter Trigorin/to dream.

ACT III:

Unit 13

Pg. 37 – 38

(Masha, Trigorin, Yakhov)

Kindess

Trigger: Masha confesses her plan to marry Medvedenko to Trigorin.

Heap: The two enjoy each other's company, and part contented to have met one another.

Unit 14

Pg. 38 – 39

(Trigorin, Nina)

A Parting Gift

Trigger: Nina gifts Trigorin a small medallion as a gift "to remember her by" (39).

Heap: Nina beseeches Trigorin to give her another moment before he leaves.

OBJECTIVE: To convince Trigorin to show some sign of feeling for her.

Unit 15

Pg. 39 – 42

(Trigorin, Arkadina, Sorin, Yakhov, Medvedenko, Konstantin)
Treading Lightly

Trigger: Sorin petitions Arkadina to pay more attention to her son, including giving him “a bit of money” (41).

Heap: Arkadina cries for help, as Sorin becomes faint.

Unit 16

Pg. 42 – 46
(Arkadina, Konstantin)
Mother and Son

Trigger: Konstantin comforts his mother after Sorin’s episode.

Heap: Arkadina comforts Konstantin after attacking his insecurities.

Unit 17

Pg. 46 – 48
(Arakdina, Trigorin)
Breaking Apart

Trigger: Trigorin begs Arkadina to let him be with Nina.

Heap: Arkadina seduces Trigorin into staying with her.

Unit 18

Pg. 48 – 51
(Trigorin, Arkadina, Shamraev, Yakhov, Maid, Cook, Polina, Sorin, Medvedenko, Nina)
The Kiss

Trigger: The family absentmindedly rushes to make it to the train station on time.

Heap: Trigorin kisses Nina in private upon learning that she is going to Moscow, too.

OBJECTIVE: To make Trigorin to love her.

ACT IV:

Unit 19

Pg. 52 – 54

(Masha, Medvedenko, Polina, Konstantin)

(Un)happily Married Life

Trigger: Medvedenko begs Masha to come home to their family.

Heap: Polina confronts Konstantin about being kinder to Masha.

Unit 20

Pg. 54 – 59

(Masha, Medvedenko, Polina, Konstantin, Sorin, Dorn)

“The Man Who Wanted To”

Trigger: Dorn, Medvedenko, and Sorin bicker about the fulfilments and the shortcomings of life.

Heap: Konstantin informs the company of Nina’s losses over the past two years.

Unit 21

Pg. 59 – 65

(Masha, Medvedenko, Polina, Konstantin, Sorin, Dorn, Arkadina, Trigorin, Shamraev)

False Comfort

Trigger: The company revels in playing a game of Lotto as time continues to pass.

Heap: Konstantin refuses to join in the dinner and merriment.

Unit 22

Pg. 65 – 66

(Konstantin)

“The Same Old Conventions”

Trigger: Konstantin laments his shortcomings as a writer.

Heap: Konstantin realizes that true writing “flows naturally from the heart” (65).

Unit 23

Pg. 66 – 70

(Konstantin, Nina)
Reality of Life

Trigger: Konstantin comforts Nina, and pleads with her to stay with him.

Heap: Nina confesses she still loves Trigorin, and promptly leaves.

OBJECTIVE: To make Konstantin to artistically empathize with her.

Unit 24

Pg. 70 – 71

(Dorn, Arkadina, Polina, Shamraev, Sorin, Trigorin, Masha, Yakhov)
“Nothing to worry about”

Trigger: Konstantin shoots himself offstage.

Heap: The company dismisses the noise as a medicine bottle, and enjoys their night together.

Character Analysis

a) Nina Zarechnaya

i) Character at the beginning (pg. 6 – 7):

(1) Objective: Nina wants to perform on stage.

(2) Obstacle: Nina must be home in half an hour.

(3) Will (Need): Nina pushes Konstantin to begin the production as soon as possible.

(4) Moral Stance: Nina justifies this by reminding Sorin and Konstantin that her father and stepmother keep her under close watch, and forbid her from visiting Sorin’s estate.

(5) Decorum: “agitated” (7), “worried sick” (7), “happy” (7), young, innocent, passionate, excited, energized

(6) Inner life: Nina is running entirely on adrenaline during this first unit, and is entirely living in her nervous and cardiovascular system. Her heart is racing and her blood is pumping – out of excitement, exhaustion, adrenaline, and anxiety. Her initial relief at arriving on time is quickly diminished by the need to be home on time. Time is the biggest inner conflict that she has in this unit.

(7) Initial character-mood-intensity at the scene opening expressed as:

(a) Heartbeat: rapid, adrenaline

(b) Perspiration: under arms, forehead/hairline

(c) Stomach Condition: flipping in somersaults, butterflies

(d) Muscle Tension: free-flowing and loose, much more relaxed after entrance

(e) Breathing: out of breath, belly breathing, connected to body

ii) Polar Attitudes (in the first unit):

(1) How do I feel about my world?

(a) Nina lives in almost two separate worlds: at home with her father and stepmother, and at Sorin's estate. In her offstage world (at home), she is miserable. Her mother is dead, and her father is cruel and abusive, rarely letting her leave the house. On top of this, he has given all of her mother's money to his new wife, leaving her desolate. At Sorin's estate, however, she is able to explore and enjoy the world around her. She is happy and free, and wishes to spend all of her time in this world. It is the closest thing she has to living within a dream, and often uses it to escape from the harsh reality of her home life.

(2) How do I feel about my relationships?

(a) Outside of her tense relationship with her father and stepmother, Nina has a great deal of love for those around her. She is in love with Konstantin, and is able to be her carefree, childlike self with him. They complement each other, and she enjoys teasing his serious nature with her dreaminess. She deeply admires Arkadina, and relishes that they have a semblance of a relationship. She sees both Sorin and Dorn as father figures, and treats them as family. Nina has no hate or ill intentions towards anyone in the play in this first unit, and only wants to experience the comfort of living amongst the family.

(3) How do I feel about myself?

(a) Nina loves herself. All Nina wants to do is perform and become a famous actress. She feels as though she is doing a great deal of justice to Konstantin's work, and that she is genuinely on her way to becoming everything she has aspired to be. She sees no negativity in her future. She is hopeful and happy, with all of her cares released the moment she steps foot onto Sorin's estate.

(4) How do I feel about my prospects?

(a) Nina feels optimistic about her prospects. She is overjoyed to be starring in Konstantin's play, as she loves both him and the art. At this moment in time, nothing can go wrong. Nina's biggest fear is that she will be unworthy or insignificant in her career as an

actress. It is her chief concern to rise above the rest, and escape her home life. This is why she idolizes Arkadina and Trigorin, as they have “made it”.

iii) Character at the end (pg. 66 – 70):

- (1) Objective:** Nina wants Konstantin to empathize with the life of an artist.
- (2) Obstacle:** Konstantin wants Nina to love him, and is approaching her as a lover.
- (3) Will (Need):** Nina compares life as it was to what it has become in an effort to make the difference clear to him.
- (4) Moral Stance:** Nina feels that she needs to impart what she has learned as an artist to a fellow artist. She loved Konstantin, and does not want to hurt him.
- (5) Decorum:** “near to tears” (66), “thinner” (66), “eyes are bigger” (66), “third class” (67), “not glamorous” (67), “tired” (68), “hungry” (69), in love, weak, exhausted, anxious, embarrassed
- (6) Inner life:** Nina is mentally and physically exhausted. She is anxious being back in the same space that once brought her such happiness. She does not want Trigorin or Arkadina to find her, and have them see her in such a state. She treads lightly around Konstantin, as she does not want to hurt him in any way. And yet, despite all this, she is just contented to be inside and warm.
- (7) Initial character-mood-intensity at the scene opening expressed as:**
 - (a) Heartbeat:** erratic, slow and fast
 - (b) Perspiration:** none, a chill to the bone
 - (c) Stomach Condition:** starving, almost sick to her stomach
 - (d) Muscle Tension:** weak, trouble standing
 - (e) Breathing:** shallow, labored, occasional quickness

iv) Polar Attitudes (in the final unit):

- (1) How do I feel about my world?**
 - (a)** By the end of the play, Nina has experienced the harsh realities that the world has to offer. The illusion of her dreams has melted away, and she is left with almost nothing; and yet, she is still optimistic about her world and her place within it. Although she is poor, hungry, and tired, she is still ready and willing to travel to Yelutz to perform, as it is the only semblance of joy in her life. Despite everything, she still maintains her passion and happiness in being an actress.
- (2) How do I feel about my relationships?**

(a) Nina is unhappy in her relationships. The only relationship that she cares to focus on is her relationship with Trigorin, who is once again with Arkadina. Despite everything, she deeply loves him, almost to a fault, as her love will never be returned. She still cares for Konstantin, but not in the way he wants her to, and therefore is pained to see him pained in loving her. Her relationships with the rest of the family have also evaporated, as she is embarrassed to have them see her.

(3) How do I feel about myself?

(a) Nina has developed a great deal over the course of two years, and as such she has grown to have faith in herself once again. She comes to the realization that only she can always be there to support her, and as such, she discovers the importance of stamina. She imparts this wisdom on Konstantin, telling him that fame does not matter, but having the “stamina and courage” to go on is what truly matters. By imparting this knowledge on Konstantin, she hopes to make a difference in his life as it has in hers.

(4) How do I feel about my prospects?

(a) By the final unit, Nina’s philosophy is to take things one day at a time, as opposed to dreaming about the future. She understands that moving forward and continuing on is what is important, but she no longer plans on her elaborate fantasies coming true. Nina does not feel as though Yeletz is a grand prospect, but she does still aspire to be a “great actress” (69).

Dialogue Analysis

Please see attached script for an in depth dialogue analysis of the play.

Thematic Idea of the Play

Art versus Love:

While there are a number of thematic ideas present in this play, the one most relevant to Nina is the argument of art versus love. In the first act of the play, love and art are synonymous for Nina; she loves to perform, and aligns herself with other artists that she feels can help her achieve success as an artist. By the end of the play, she sees a very clear distinction between the two, and chooses accordingly. While there is love of one’s art, romantic love and artistic love are very different concepts that do not always fall hand in hand, as Nina discovers by the end of the play. In the end, she chooses to follow her passion of acting instead of settling for the love of

Konstantin. While I don't think Chekhov provides us with any clear cut answer to the problem of art versus love, I think he poses the argument that one must always follow their heart above all, despite how difficult that road may be. We all make choices in this world, and at the end of our day, our lives are a culmination of the choices we've made. We should not settle, we should not give up, but we should devote our energies into what is most important in our hearts. As Nina says in her final moments in act IV, "what really counts is not dreaming about the fame and glory... but stamina: knowing how to keep going despite everything, and having faith in yourself" (Stoppard 69).

History of Nina Zarechnaya

Vera Komissarzhevskaya (1895):



Vera Komissarzhevskaya (as pictured above) was the first Nina Zarechnaya to take the stage in 1895 at the Grand Duke Michael Theatre. According to Anton Chekhov himself, she “almost moved me to tears. I felt that my throat was torn out” (Senelick 32). While the rest of the production had horrifying reviews, Komissarzhevskaya continually received the most positive of the feedback. Ivan Leontev, one of Chekhov’s good friends, called her:

“a dream, like a phantom, a slender, fair-haired girl with a pale, drawn face, large stricken eyes, depressed and jerky movements... Nervous, rapid speech, plucked from her heart by her deep sincerity... And in the sounds of her mournful nervous voice, the spectator felt the profound spiritual drama, inner disquiet, dissatisfaction, passionate protest against the vulgarity of the life around her, the agonizing search for a new one” (Senelick 36).

While the performance itself failed miserably, with Komissarzhevskaya losing her voice by the end of opening night, she went on to have a long and full acting career.

She was known for falling into roles, seemingly playing herself on stage and bringing a sense of honesty to her roles on stage.

M. Roskanova (1898):



One of the more inexperienced actors in the newly formed Moscow Art Theatre and a favorite student of Nemirovich, M. Roskanova took the stage in the 1898 production of *The Seagull*. Contrary to what happened with the original production, this reprisal was a resounding success; except for Roskanova's performance, which was considered "artificial and mannered" (Senelick 49). Despite Stanislavsky's best efforts, Nina's final monologue still received laughs, as Roskanova "whined and sobbed and made even the most well-intentioned spectator hard to put control on himself" (Senelick 49). As fond as he was of Vera Komissarzhevskaya, Chekhov had no kind words in regards to her performance, and even refused to let Act IV happen. As such, she left the troupe in 1902.

Uta Hagen (1938):



At only eighteen years old, Uta Hagen made her Broadway debut at the Shubert Theatre as Nina in the Lunt's production of *The Seagull*, in which Alfred Lunt played Trigorin and his wife, Lynn Fontanne, played Arkadina. "According to at least one New York critic, the fledgling actress stole a few scenes from her formidable co-stars" ("Hagen, Uta 1919 - "). Even still, Ms. Hagen had the following to say about herself:

"At the age of eighteen, I played Nina in *The Sea Gull* with the Lunts. Nina is a naïve middle-class girl from the country who is drawn into the life of her neighbor, a famous actress of whom she is in awe and the actress's lover, a noted writer whom Nina hero-worships. I was in awe of Miss Fontanne and hero-worshipped Mr. Lunt. These particular character relationships were mirrored by my own, and I used their reality directly for my role" (Hagen 70).

She goes on to say that she was first exposed to the Method through working with the Lunt's. In Act IV, in which the family leaves to have dinner in the next room, Fontane and Lunt did not believe that they were truly exiting to eat dinner. Therefore, they had an entire dining room constructed offstage, in which they improvised a dinner scene every night, complete with props and dialogue; none of which was ever seen by an audience.

Natalie Portman (2001):

Many decades after Uta Hagen, Natalie Portman took to the stage as Nina, in the 2001 production of *The Seagull* in Central Park. It is said that audience members waited in line for upwards of sixteen hours in order to receive a ticket to the production, which ran from July 24th through August 26th, 2001 in at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park. Surrounded by talented actors, such as Meryl Streep and Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Portman fell flat, according to several reviews. In comparing the two, Charles Isherwood wrote, “where Streep’s performance is all art, Portman’s is all artlessness — perhaps as it should be for these two actresses at different junctures in their careers” (Isherwood). He continues his critique of the performance by extrapolating on her performance of the final scene, in which Nina returns to the estate, broken entirely.

“It’s a painfully difficult scene to play, and Portman hasn’t mastered all its emotional intricacies. But *The Seagull* is about, among other things, the elusiveness of art, the long odds against true creative achievement in a world that prizes other things more highly. Watching Portman struggle through this scene — and, yes, be defeated by it — is in itself a moving illustration of that painful truth” (Isherwood).

Yet, in other articles, her performance was not that only one that received mixed reviews. According to Ben Brantley, a theater critic for *The New York Times*, none of

the actors were speaking the same language, resulting in "the feeling of watching a movie that has been spliced together from different eras and styles" (Brantley).

Carey Mulligan (2007-2008):



In 2007, at the Royal Court Theatre in London, Carey Mulligan appeared as Nina Zarechnaya, under the direction of David Hare who has nothing but awe for her. In his adoration, he has said, "Carey was the greatest Nina of my lifetime ... I've seen two dozen, often in very great productions, but Carey is the only one who has ever convinced me. She had an access to what she convinced you were her own feelings – as if she wasn't acting, but simply existing on the stage" (Pulver). Mulligan herself describes Nina as "the ultimate female role" (Pulver). She reprised her role under the direction of Ian Rickson at the Walter Kerr Theatre in New York the following year. According to New York Times critic, Ben Brantley, "More than any actress I've seen, she captures the raw hunger within Nina's ambition, the ravaging vitality as well the vulnerability. This is no mere fluttery sacrificial seagull. There's a reason that the mother-fixated Konstantin falls in love with her" (Brantley).

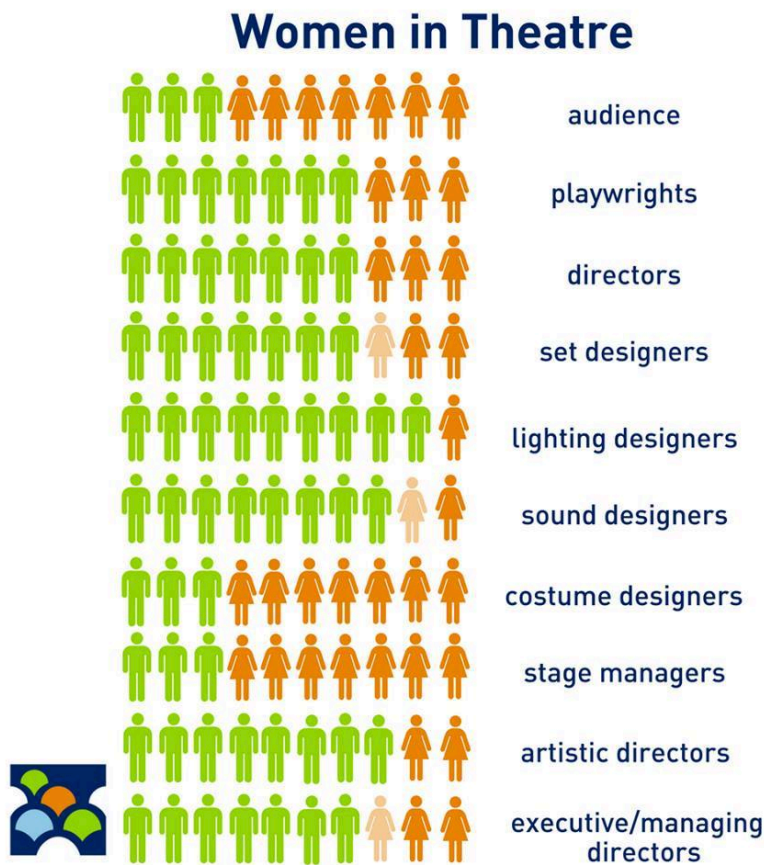
History of Women in Theatre

Women have progressed in theatre, but not as much as one would imagine. From the first documented theatre productions in Greece and Rome, through the 1660's in Elizabethan England, women were not permitted to perform on the stage. For the most part, they were also unable to attend the theatre, dating back to the festivals of Dionysus in Athens, and continuing up until the Restoration in 1660. In 1647, a law was passed under Puritanical ordinance that all theatre was to be banned. This was lifted in 1660 when two theatre companies, one run by William Davenant and another by Thomas Killigrew, were granted licenses (Thorpe). Prior to the allowance of actresses on stage, young boys were hired to play the female roles. These boys often died quite young, as they wore a great deal of make-up in order to appear more feminine, of which primarily lead-based ("Elizabethan Actors").

Following the Restoration under Charles II, women began to make their way on to the stage, albeit with some difficulty. "Regarded as prostitutes or, at best, titillating diversions, these six or seven prominent actresses had to carve out places inside previously all-male companies. They also had to deal with wealthy male theatre-goers paying a little extra each night to watch them dress in the wings" (Thorpe). These women, while being sought after in lust, partially used their sex to their advantage, with many young women increasing their income by becoming mistresses to wealthy patrons. This allowed them to sustain their careers as actresses without burning out in the process. Despite their popularity amongst male and female audiences alike, women never lived up to the acclaim that men earned. Male actors were paid more, and often became successful playwrights as well. This stigma continued into the 18th century, in which actresses continued to be excluded from what was considered respectable society, and yet, they still intrigued the masses. Actresses became notable for their so-called loose morals, in reference to their means of survival and their chosen profession, which was still considered to be shameful on the whole.

The 19th century proved to be more of the same, in which respectable families dreaded having their daughters fall in love with a career on the stage. "Despite the debased reputation of the theatre in the 19th century, there was never a shortage of actresses, or women to work backstage" (Hail), many of whom also worked second jobs in order to make ends meet while simultaneously pursuing a stage career. Yet as time went on, albeit still looked down upon, women became more and more tolerated on the stage, even admired as celebrities. The thought of producing a play without women onstage has become unimaginable, and actresses had finally become a staple on the stage.

The 20th century brought about the rise of realism, in which the work of Anton Chekhov came to rise. With this, came more forms of theatre training, branching out from the work of Konstantin Stanislavski. Women were educated in the same theatre workshops as men, especially as theatre and theatre training became more of an art form. This training has continued into the 21st century, with the number of women leading men in professional training programs. As of 2003, New York University’s Department of Performance Studies was over 80% women, according to Richard Schechner, a professor in the program. A question he poses is how do we manage this rise in females in the world of theatre when the business itself is predominantly run by and written for males? The obvious answer is cross-gender casting, and yet, this tactic is used minimally in productions today. It also does not solve the imbalanced statistics of women in the theatre, especially in the design field, as seen in the image below.



* Broadway League study published January 2016
Women Count, 2015

The main issue that this disparity causes, is the fact that the majority of theatre audiences are women, but those creating and telling the story are not. In all elements of theatre, aside from the audience, women are massively underrepresented. Playwright Zinnie Harris believes that:

"It is somehow harder for people to embrace a play written by a woman, whatever its quality. There is something slightly unseemly about filling

stages with our voices, whereas men have a sense of filling Chekhov's or Ibsen's shoes. The woman who raises her voice becomes shrill and hectoring; the man becomes authoritative. When plays by women don't work, they are over-condemned. With men, they are seen as a step on the way to developing an interesting voice" (Higgins).

As previously mentioned, this issue dates back to the 17th century, in which repertory companies were entirely male. Female roles were written sparingly, and were still played by male actors. This tradition, despite no longer in use, still runs deeply in the history of women in theatre, and subconsciously affects the theatre community to this day.

Production Calendar

September 2016						
"The Seagull" Rehearsal Schedule						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 No Rehearsal	27 5-8 Table Work Units 1-4 Tech Classroom	28 5-8 Table Work Units 5-8 Tech Classroom	29 5-8 Table Work Units 9-11 Tech Classroom	30 No Rehearsal	
	Notes:					

October 2016
“The Seagull” Rehearsal Schedule

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3 8:00-10 Table Work Units 12-14 Tech Classroom	4 5:30-8:30 Table Work Units 15-21 Tech Classroom	5 REHEARSAL CANCELLED TONIGHT	6 5:15-8:15 Table Work Units 22-24 Tech Classroom	7 5:15-8:15 Units 1-3 Metro Room	8
9	10 No School No Rehearsal	11 5:15-8:15 Units 4-7 Sullivan 205	12 5:15-8:15 Units 8-10 Sullivan 205	13 5:15-8:15 Units 11-12 Sullivan 205	14 5:15-8:15 Units 13-15 Sullivan 205	15
16	17 Unit 16 - 5pm Unit 17 - 6:30 Unit 18 - 7:30 PCR	18 Unit 19 - 5pm Unit 20 - 6:30 Unit 21 - 7:30 PCR	19 Unit 22 - 5pm Unit 23 - 6:30 Unit 24 - 7:30 PCR	20 REHEARSAL CANCELLED	21 REHEARSAL CANCELLED	22
23	24 Unit 1 - 5:15 Unit 2 - 6:15 Unit 3 - 7:15 PCR OFF BOOK	25 5:15-8:15 Units 4-7 PCR	26 Unit 8 - 5pm Unit 9 - 6:30 Unit 10 - 7:30 PCR	27 Unit 11 - 5:00 Unit 12 - 5:30 Unit 13 - 6:15 Unit 14 - 6:45 Unit 15 - 7:15 Unit 16 - 7:45 PCR	28 Unit 17 - 5:00 Unit 18 - 5:35 Unit 19 - 6:20 Unit 20 - 6:50 Unit 21 - 7:30 PCR	29
30	31 HALLOWEEN REHEARSAL CANCELLED					

November 2016
“The Seagull” Rehearsal Schedule

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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November 2016
“The Seagull” Rehearsal Schedule

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Designer Run 5:15-8:15 Acts 1 + 2 Callan Theater	2 Designer Presentations 5:15 PCR Designer Run Act 3 + 4 Callan Theater	3 5:15-8:15 Act 4 Callan Theater	4 5:15-8:15 Act 1 Callan Theater	5
6	7 5:15-8:15 Act 2 Callan Theater	8 5:15-8:15 Stumble Thru Acts 1 + 2 Callan Theater	9 5:15-8:15 Act 3 Callan Theater	10 5:15-8:15 Act 4 Callan Theater	11 1pm-6pm Scenic + Props Run Crews and Actors Called Transition Work	12
13	14 5:15-9:15 Stumble Thru Act 3 + 4 Run Crews Called Callan Theater	15 Bios Due 5:15-9:15 Acts 1 + 2 Run Crews Called Callan Theater	16 5:15-9:15 Acts 3 + 4 Run Crews Called Callan Theater	17 5:15-9:15 Full Run Run Crews Called Callan Theater	18 5:15-9:15 Full Run Run Crews Called Callan Theater	19 12-6pm Q2Q Without Actors Callan Theater
20 10am-10pm Q2Q With Actors Callan Theater	21 5:30 Call Tech Callan Theater	22 Thanksgiving Break No Rehearsal	23 Thanksgiving Break No Rehearsal	24 Thanksgiving Break No Rehearsal	25 Thanksgiving Break No Rehearsal	26
27 3:00pm Call Tech Callan Theater	28 Dress Rehearsal Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30 Callan Theater	29 Dress Rehearsal Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30 Callan Theater	30 Final Dress/Preview Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30 Callan Theater		Notes:	

December 2016 "The Seagull" Rehearsal Schedule						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Opening Night Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30	2 Show #2 Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30	3 Show #3 Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30
4 Show #4 Call: 12pm Go: 2pm	5	6	7 Brush Up Call: 5:30 Go: 8:00	8 Show # 5 Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30	9 Show #6 Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30	10 Show #7 Call: 5:30 Go: 7:30
11 Show #8 Call: 12pm Go: 2pm	12 Mandatory Post-Production 11am-12pm Callan Theater	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Notes

5/12/16

Read Through #1

Pre-Read Talk:

- Dreams
 - Enjoy them, live in them
 - **Idealistic** – if you're not idealistic when you're young, you have no heart
 - **Older** = lost touch with heart
- **Find traits and wants of characters**
 - Dominant versus recessive
- Must fall in love by the end of act II
- **Don't comment on the characters**, get inside of their skin
 - Don't judge
 - Understand them, know what you're after
 - What is at stake???
- Love the brokenhearted
 - Must have big hearts
 - Don't be afraid of showing love
 - Be with the simplicity
- There are no good or bad guys – just people
- Find the beauty in truth

Post-Read Talk:

- What is the play about?
 - **Love**
 - Miserable people?
 - Coming of age?
- Dorn
 - Doctor and writer
 - Make other people happy
 - Heart!
- **Don't think about historical significance!!**
 - Find the humanity
 - Care about each other, refuse to give up on love
 - Quiet beauty, nice people who make mistakes
 - Humanity as it is
 - Enjoy the time that you have.
- Life versus Death
 - **Not a tragedy!**
 - Death is a reality of life
 - Characters throwing away life unintentionally
 - Can't blame them

- Go for walks in the woods
 - Slow down!P
- **Character's feelings (pg. 70) – PASSIONATE**
- Play **against** the melodrama!
 - Audience needs to invest in **every** character!
 - **Minute details**
- Who loves who and why?
 - Trigorin versus Konstantin
 - **Something more???**
- Every thought a new thought
 - **IMAGES**

9/27/16

Units #1 – 4 Table Work

- Warmth, natural setting as possible
- Can't see the world that they're in
- Romance to realism
- **Stop thinking about the weightiness of it**
- Chekhov is compassionate to his characters
- **How does time change them?**
 - Time is of the essence!
- More "Hamlet" added to the Stoppard translation
- Always play against emotion!!
 - **Don't play the love for Trigorin yet – Love for Konstantin!**
- What if there's someone better???
- Soulmates don't exist???
- Romance versus realism
- What do people in love sound like?
- **No one wants to be insignificant!**
 - **UNWORTHY (9)**

9/28/16

Units #5 – 8 Table Work

- **Basic:** neighbor, daughter of a widower, in love with boyfriend's mother's lover and theatre
- Best she can, but not great, not bad (in play)
- Tempo of play w/in play
 - Pick up, slow down?
 - Variety!
- Youth in future, adults in past

9/29/16

Units #9 – 11 Table Work

- Takes place the next day (following act I)

- Pronunciation:
 - Moss-CO (Moscow)
 - Eh-reena Nick-oh-LIE-ehv-nah (Irina Nikolayevna)
- Acceptance vs. Denial
- Dream vs. Reality
 - Monologue
- **Don't sit in moments, just touch on them**
- **OBJECTIVES**
- Look at mask work!

10/3/16

Units #12 – 14 Table Work

- Nina is **hopeful** – don't let her be tainted by the world
- Push Trigorin for the answers **SHE** wants -> **FAME!**
- **Reality breaking dream!** (pg. 46)

10/4/16

Units #15 – 21 Speed Table Work

- 21st century versus 19th century

10/6/16

Units #22 – 24 Table Work

- Alike and Different? Act I vs. Act IV?

10/10/16 – 11/1/16

Staging – Notes in Script

*10/12/16:

- SENIORS ARE LAZY. Disappointing.
- Be hungrier for the work.
- Get off book.
- More choices, trust yourself. Keep the stakes high.

11/2/16

Act III and IV

Zack (AD):

- Act III
 - Maintain connections to each other
 - BREATHE! through the ends of thoughts
 - Where are the stakes???
- Act IV
 - Images lost, no energy

Bill:

- Act III

- “Parting today” – **higher stakes!**
- What story are you telling??
- “Going on the stage” – **why** are you telling him?
 - Don’t be a “theatre person”
 - Someone who hasn’t seen the realities of working in theatre
 - What is the **secret/subtext**?
 - Will he help?
- Act IV
 - Concentration? Attention? Where are you meantally?
 - **DISCIPLINE**

11/14/16

Act III and IV

- Vocally commit = volume
 - Volume choice on operative word
- Physically commit, don’t just stand there
- **Subtext** of game, “**parting today**”
 - Urgency through whole scene/act
- **Relationships rule all!**
 - Find the love, find the need
- Act III exit
 - Make it different from the top of the act, more fear
 - TERRIFYING
 - Leaving to run away to another city!!! Leaving everything!!!

11/15/16

Act III and IV

Celena Sky April Notes

- Have a relationship to **everything!**
 - Spend more time in the space
- Articulate – this is what I want
 - Tell me to go to Moscow!!
- Pay attention to the moment before, don’t wade into second circle
- What is your offstage life???
- Always touch bosom, never stomach (indicates pregnant or sick)
- Don’t ever resign yourself!
- Losing words with Trigorin
 - Fight the urgency of the scene
 - Play the love!
 - Try to sustain the moment
- **Innocent child!!**
- Make “looking” and “not knowing” different things.
- WHAT ARE YOUR BODY AND ARMS DOING???

- No one stands with their arms by their sides for an extended period of time
- New thought for “wind”
- REALIZE that you haven’t cried in ages
- Falling into a generalized dreamy wash
- **Genuinely BE tired.**
- Convince yourself, not Konstantin
 - FAITH
- Character Mood Intensity: heart/breath/stomach
 - What are they doing???
- Grasping at the good memories – “monkeys” moment

11/15/16

Act I and II

- Needs conflict
 - **What do you want DESPERATELY???**
- Tighten up the beats, moment to moment.
- If you’re just standing there, you’ve stopped acting.
- Keep energy up – work on words
 - “Happy” versus “half an hour”
 - Color changes!
- Inflection!!!!
- **Want love so badly that it hurts**

11/16/16

Act III and IV

- Keep your voice supported
- **Put the pressure on Trigorin to TELL you to go**
- Gift of medallion = HUGE!
- **Be TERRIFIED – find the courage to go to Moscow**
 - Joy (inside the house) and Fear (outside) on exit
- Past/Present/Future
 - Which world do you choose, feel the pull of each one

11/18/16

Full Run

- Better!!! ☺
- What is THE moment?
- Yay on entrance! – Lines much clearer!
 - Good mood shift, go further with it
- **MORE on “Bohemians”**
 - It’s the life you want to live!!
- Shake up “woof” for fun
- **Dog bark = got to go, cue**

- Pick up line pick up on “sitting in a hotel room learning one’s lines”
- Wait to say “what a dreadful thing to happen”, on exit/closer to woods
- Start at chair for “fame” monologue
- **Duck underneath the seagull to escape**
- Top Trigorin’s need on “I want to be in your place, too!”
- Build to “transcendent happiness”!
- Walk in the lake on “a dream”
- YES on “that means no”
- Gift medallion – put it in his hand!
- Good on act III exit
- **Do act IV at quick pace, then find THE moments**

11/19/16

Full Run – Q2Q

- **Touch trees as much as possible!!!**
- VOCAL CLARITY
 - Find beginning/middle/ends of thoughts
- Don’t let the audience’s laughter throw you, just be a human
- Keep questions up to Trigorin
 - Topping him – good!
- **Keep pathway imagery – lost in the woods!**
- **Speed run for final scene**
 - Find your sanity by the end

11/21/16

First Full Dress Rehearsal

- **Meet Monday for Act IV work**
- Good relationships
- What is THE moment in the scene???
- Human or wasting time???
 - Life vs. Death
 - **WATCH PEOPLE OVER THANKSGIVING**

11/27/16

Post-Thanksgiving Run

- Run time: 1 hour 3min (Act I and II), 57minutes (Act III and IV)
- Needs more heart – **EVERYTHING is a love story**
- Don’t be afraid of uncomfortable silences
 - Line pickup, not speed
 - REACT!
- **Articulation!!!**
- Put energy into voice, not physical gestures.
- **LISTEN!!!**
- **Make sure all of your senses are alive!**

- Don't let the costume ruin your inner life!
- "We're parting today" -> MOMENT yay!
- Earn a silence, let it be your friend
- Don't touch pole or door, not part of the world of the play
- Addition of French doors (invisible) for act IV

11/28/16

First Dress Rehearsal

- Act IV – good light versus dark
 - "Wrong story though" YES
 - **Don't forget to open the doors on exit**
- Touch more trees
- **Clear relationships!!!**
- Sell the "loneliness" in play within a play
 - **Make sure the audience hears what Dorn hears**
- Everyone can slow down
 - **Pace NOT speed**
 - Find the thoughts – activate
- **Maintain attention to details/nuances**
- Slow down game with Trigorin
 - More awkward, emotion behind it

11/29/16

Second Dress Rehearsal

- Run time: 1 hour 5 minutes (Act I and II), 1 hour 5 minutes (Act III and IV)
- **Let images move you, not you move the images**
 - **No anticipating!!**
- Pick up dialogue with Tristan, couldn't hear
- Add break for dog bark, couldn't hear
- **Up conversation with Delaney**
 - **ANXIETY!!!**
- Move math problem for monologue, use space
- **Give all attention to the other!!!**
- Foreshadow more in forest at the end of act III
- Go lighter on act IV makeup, less death

11/30/16

Final Dress Rehearsal

- **Keep things fresh!** Don't can anything!
- Don't lose humanity for humor
 - Don't get seduced by it
- **Articulate on entrance**

12/7/16

Brush Up Rehearsal

- Good listening, working as a team!!
- **Keep inner life alive, let the word do the work!**

Photos

Act One:



Nina runs in to greet Konstantin and Sorin before the performance.

Nina: "I've been worried sick all day – oh, I was so terrified my father would stop me coming. But they've gone out – he and my stepmother. The sky was red, the moon was rising, and I was urging on the horse – come on – come on – come on! I feel happy now though" (Stoppard 7).



Nina and Konstantin share a moment before the play.

Konstantin: "What if I came back with you, Nina? I'll stand the whole night in your garden looking up at your window."

Nina: You'd better not! – The watchmen would see you! – Tresor isn't used to you, he'll bark."

Konstantin: "I love you."

Nina: "Shh..." (Stoppard 8).



Nina idolizes Trigorin and his writing as Konstantin looks on.
Nina: "All those wonderful stories he writes!" (Stoppard 9).



Nina performs Konstantin's play for the family and gathered guests.

Nina: "I am all alone. Once, in a hundred years I open my lips to speak and my voice echoes dismally in the void and there is no one to hear me... Not even you pale fires"
(Stoppard 12).



Nina emerges following the play and Konstantin's outburst.

Nina: "We're obviously not going on; I might as well come out. Hello!"

Sorin: "Bravo! Bravo!" (Stoppard 16).



Nina and Trigorin meet for the first time.

Arkadina: "Now – let me introduce – Trigorin, Boris Alexeyevich."

Nina: "Oh, I'm so please to – I've read all your books..." (Stoppard 16).



Nina realizes the time, hurrying off, much to her own chagrin.

Nina: "I've got to go. Goodbye."

Arkadina: "Go where? Where do you have to go so early? We shan't let you go."

Nina: "My father's waiting for me" (Stoppard 17).

Act Two:



Sorin leads Nina to the lawn, where she is greeted by the family.

Sorin: "We're all smiles because Papa and Stepama have gone away and we are now free as a bird for three whole days."

Nina: "I'm so happy. Now I can be all yours."

Sorin: "Looking pretty as pretty can be."

Arkadina: "Turned herself out just so and very fetching" (Stoppard 23).



Dorn lectures the company on the dangers of wasting one's life.

Dorn: "Life is serious. Taking cures when you're sixty and complaining you didn't have fun when you were young is frivolous. To speak frankly" (Stoppard 25).



Dorn attempts to soothe Sorin after Shamraev refuses Arkadina horses.

Sorin: "We'll go to her, that's what. We'll plead with her not to go. Impossible man! Tyrant!" (Stoppard 27).



Nina tries to solve the “problem” of fame.

Nina: “But here they are, crying, fishing, playing cards, and losing their tempers just like anybody else” (Stoppard 29).



Konstantin enters with a dead seagull.

Konstantin: "Are you alone here?"

Nina: "Yes. And what's that supposed to mean?"

Konstantin: "I sank low enough today to kill this seagull. I lay it at your feet"
(Stoppard 29-30).



Konstantin tries to hurt Nina, in the way that he has been hurt.

Konstantin: "Your detachment is literally terrifying, something inconceivable, as if I were to wake up one morning and this lake had gone, simply evaporated, or ran away into the ground. Not clever enough? – What's there to make out? My play was a disaster, you despise my inspiration, now you think I'm just another insignificant nobody just like they all – " (Stoppard 30).



Trigorin tries to dissuade Nina from a life of fame.

Trigorin: “Well – there are people who develop an obsession with something – say, a man who can think about nothing but the moon, day and night. Well – I have my own moon. Day and night I’m driven by one constant thought: I must be writing”
(Stoppard 32).



Nina asserts that she would do anything in order to be famous.

Nina: "If I were great like you, I'd dedicate my whole life to my public, but I'd always remember it's reaching up to me which is what makes them happy – and they'd pull my chariot through the streets" (Stoppard 35).



Nina learns that Trigorin and Arkadina are staying.

Nina: "It's a dream!" (Stoppard 36).

Act Three:



Nina gives Trigorin a medallion in an attempt to make him stay.

Nina: "We're parting today and I don't suppose we'll ever meet again. Would you take this little medallion? – to remember me by? I've had your initials engraved on it – and on the other side, the title of one of your books, *Days and Nights*."

Trigorin: "But how sweet of you. It's a lovely present."

Nina: "Will you think of me sometimes?" (Stoppard 39).



Nina confesses that she is going to Moscow to become an actress.

Nina: "I've made up my mind once and for all! – the die is cast – I'm going on the stage! Tomorrow I'll be gone from here. I'm leaving my father, leaving everything. I'm starting a new life. I'm going to Moscow, too – we'll see each other there"
(Stoppard 50).



Nina and Trigorin plan their affair.

Trigorin: "You're so beautiful. It makes me so happy knowing we'll soon be seeing each other... that I can look into those wonderful eyes – that inexpressibly sweet smile, this lovely face – with its gaze of pure innocence like an angel's – my darling..." (Stoppard 51).

Act Four:



Nina returns, two years later.

Konstantin: "Hello? – Who's there? Who's out there?! Nina! Nina!" (Stoppard 66).



Nina waits patiently as Konstantin locks the door.

Nina: "There's someone here."

Konstantin: "No – no one – "

Nina: "Lock the door in case anybody..."

Konstantin: "No one will come in."

Nina: "I know your mother's here. Lock the doors..." (Stoppard 66).



Nina and Konstantin observe how the other has changed.

Nina: "... Have I changed?"

Konstantin: "Yes. You've grown thinner... your eyes are bigger. I feel so strange; I can't believe I'm looking at you... Why wouldn't you let me come and see you? Why haven't you come before? I know you've been here nearly a week. Every day – several times a day – I've gone and stood under your window like a beggar" (Stoppard 66-67).



Nina reminisces on happier times.

Nina: It's all right, it makes me feel better to cry. I haven't cried in ages. Then, yesterday when it was dark, I came to look in the garden to see if our theatre... and to think it's been standing there all this time. I began to cry for the first time for two years. It was such a relief to cry, like a weight lifting from my heart" (Stoppard 67).



Nina wonders why Konstantin still loves her.

Nina: "What do you mean you kissed the ground I walked on? I don't deserve to live. I'm so tired. If only I could rest - I need rest!" (Stoppard 68).



Nina finds the stamina to continue.

Nina: “What I’ve realized Kostya, is that, with us, whether we’re writers or actors, what really counts is not dreaming about the fame and glory... but stamina: knowing how to keep going despite everything, and having faith in yourself – I’ve got faith in myself now and that’s helped the pain, and when I think to myself, ‘You’re on the stage!’, then I’m not afraid of anything life can do to me” (Stoppard 69).



Nina says goodbye to Konstantin.

Nina: “Oh wasn’t it good before, Kostya! – When everything was so clear and life was so simple and happy – the feelings we had... feelings as delicate as tiny flowers. Remember that time? – ‘Mankind and monkeys, ostriches and partridges... antlered stags, ganders, and spiders...’ And the poor moon lighting her lantern all for nothing” (Stoppard 70).

Reflection

Nina Zarechnaya has been a character that I have grown to love and hate, mostly in the sense that we are very similar; we are dreamers and we are easily seduced by those dreams. Nina is not a weak character, although many scholars are quick to dismiss her as such – a girl quickly swayed by impulse and heart. Yet, I believe she is far more than that. She is driven by her heart without a doubt, but she weighs her options carefully. She takes her time (or so she believes) in deciding to go to Moscow, and truly believes that she is making the right decision. It is only the audience, and later herself, that understands how truly detrimental this is. An approach that Bill Cunningham and I worked with involved breaking Nina's arc down into years of college. As such, we saw her as a freshman in Act I, a sophomore in Act II, a junior in Act III, and a senior in Act IV. We focused on finding the similarities of Nina that already lied within my emotional memory, instead of reaching for images that I've never experienced. We substituted images of my own in order to access the weight that Nina experiences by the end of the play. In aligning Nina's journey with my own journey at Salem State, I was able to dive farther into her long-term arc and development over the course of the play.

One of the biggest acting lessons that I have taken away from this project is the importance of images and action over emotion. If you are actively trying to get something from someone (be it love, attention, approval, sympathy, etc.), and you are seeing the images as the language presents it, then the emotions will come naturally. In contrast, I went through a period in which I felt the need to dive deep into my psyche to recreate a moment in which I felt completely desolate in order to achieve Nina's emotional depth for Act IV. Yet, once I found my images in "homeless wanderers", "the theatre", "Turgenev", and so on, I was able to react to the images as they presented themselves, as opposed to forcing an emotion for a different circumstance.

The difference between Nina and Konstantin is that Nina finds a way to continue on, no matter how difficult life becomes; whereas Konstantin cannot find a way to go on, resulting in his suggested suicide at the end of the play. As a graduating senior about to enter the world of professional theatre, stamina is something I will take away, not only from this play, but from my time spent at Salem State. Nina has taught me that if there is something that you dream of more than anything, you must do what it takes to pursue it.

In comparison to other actresses before me, I am acutely aware of the scale difference of our productions. While the five actresses that I examined performed at the professional level, compared to my collegiate level, I feel as though the age and life experience needed for the character are similar. Nina is young and idealistic, but must also be able to show how jaded the world can make you; therefore, the actress in the role must have experienced similar naivety and damage in order to truly access the role to the fullest. Above all else, she must be truthful, vulnerable, and ambitious. While I'm not sure I achieved any of these to their full potential, I did my best to bring honesty to the role, and live each moment as if it were the last time I would ever perform – as those are the stakes that Nina lives and breathes by.

In exploring the role of women in theatre, it has unfortunately not changed much since the 19th century. “Despite the debased reputation of the theatre in the 19th century, there was never a shortage of actresses, or women to work backstage” (Haill). Likewise, there is no shortage of women in the theatre today, on and off the stage; however, men still dominate the business. Most explanations of this phenomenon relate back to the precedent that the classics set. As the canon is mostly, if not entirely male, people subconsciously accept the work of males as better. The best solution is to embrace gender-blind casting. In an ideal world, this would involve making the cast of any production half male and half female, and assigning the roles based on storytelling ability as opposed to gender identification. The inner lives of characters do not have to be inherently male or female, but rather tell the story of a human being. In the same vein, Nina is an incredibly strong human being, having the stamina to continue in a field as difficult as theatre. This sort of perseverance, written in 1895, is what is still needed today to expand the role of women in theatre. Her story, a story of love, art, dreams, and determination, is a story that is still relevant in 2017. I am proud to have shared it with the world for one fleeting moment.

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