

**Unlocking the Body, Finding the Heart:
Directing Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull***

by

KATHLEEN JOY DUBORG

B.F.A., The University of British Columbia, 1990

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2014

© Kathleen Joy Duborg, 2014

Abstract

Unlocking the Body, Finding the Heart: Directing Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* explores my directorial practice while staging Chekhov's *The Seagull* at the Telus Studio Theatre, University of British Columbia from January 23 to February 8, 2014.

As presented in the following pages, my primary objective was to find and deliver an immediate and unique interpretation of this exceptional play's dramatization of romantic and artistic conflict in late 19th Century Russia. My practice centred upon an analysis and rehearsal process that investigated character through movement and an understanding of the connectedness between the body and emotional states. I also examine how I worked within the Telus Theatre thrust stage configuration, finding ways to not only overcome this challenge, but to use it to my advantage. Finally, I look at how *The Seagull* served as a crucible for me to expand and begin defining my practice and abilities as a director. In doing so, I also discovered a deep passion for teaching—a journey that should be evident in both my journal and directorial process pages.

This paper includes a directorial analysis of the script, the journal chronicling the entire production process, production photos and a chapter containing my reflections on the year I spent working on *The Seagull*.

Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished and independent work by the author, Kathleen Duborg.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 1: Directorial Analysis.....	2
Part 1: Initial Response to the Play	2
Part 2: Type or Genre of Play	5
Part 3: The Significance of the Title.....	7
Part 4: Style	8
Part 5: Space	9
Part 6: Period	11
Part 7: Action of the Play.....	12
Part 8: Geographical Location	13
Part 9: Date, Season and Time of Day	14
Part 10: Economic Environment.....	14
Part 11: Previous Action.....	15
Part 12: Theme or Central Idea of the Play.....	16
Part 13: Emphatic Element.....	17
Part 14: Character Analysis.....	18
Part 15: Directorial Approach.....	29
CHAPTER 2: Production Journal	33
CHAPTER 3: Detailed Scene Analysis	83
CHAPTER 4: Reflections	119

Appendices	125
Appendix A: Notes for First Day of Rehearsal	125
Appendix B: Director's Program Notes	131
Appendix C: Production Credits.....	134
Bibliography	135

List of Figures

Figure 1: Thomas Elms as Konstantin. Photo credit-Nancii Bernard	2
Figure 2: Matt Kennedy as Trigorin, Natasha Zacher as Nina. Photo Credit-Nancii Bernard	11
Figure 3: Matt Kennedy-Trigorin, Mercedes de la Zerda-Arkadina. Photo credit-Nancii Bernard.....	21
Figure 4: Helena Fisher-Walsh as Masha & Nick Preston as Medvedenko. Photo Credit: Tim Matheson	33
Figure 5: Over Eternal Peace, 1894. Painter Isaac Levitan	44
Figure 6: Helena Fisher-Welsh & Thomas Elms. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson	50
Figure 7: Elliot Squire, set design detail. Act 4 The Seagull.....	53
Figure 8: The Seagull Act 4. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson.....	53
Figure 9: Mercedes de la Zerda as Arkadina & Javier Sotres as Sorin. Photo credit-Nancii Bernard.....	67
Figure 10: Mercedes de la Zerda and Matt Kennedy. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson	99
Figure 11: Natasha Zacher as Nina & Thomas Elms as Konstantin. Photo Credit-Nancii Bernard.....	117
Figure 12: Thomas Elms as Konstantin. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson	124

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the actors who brought *The Seagull* to life. Their openness and daring were inspiring and, ultimately, my greatest lesson.

My utmost thanks to my collaborators: designers Elliot, Sian, Lauren and Daniel who all worked so hard to unstuff this bird! Also to the Three Graces of stage management, Ndola and assistants Becky and Kaylin and the many dedicated and incredibly talented staff from UBC who joined and supported our production.

I am indebted to the mentorship and advice from my advisor Stephen Malloy who offered such incredible wisdom, intuitive dexterity and kindness to my directorial self and the project over the past year. Also many thanks to voice teacher Gayle Murphy for all of her brilliant work with the cast and her encouragement to all of us.

I want to acknowledge my esteemed teachers over the past two years of study: Stephen Malloy, Tom Scholte, Stephen Heatley, Kirsty Johnson, John Cooper and Robert Gardiner. You have imbued me with incredible tools and profoundly deepened my curiosity about the theatre and the spirit of inquiry you all embody.

To my family, where I've learned most of my elemental knowledge on social systems, laughter through tears, and debating—Mary, Klaus, Paula, Carol, Christina, Samson, Cecil and Iken—love and thanks.

A very special thank-you to my friends and colleagues who listened, fed, challenged and championed my efforts, especially Lisa Beley, Kerry Davidson, Christopher McGregor, Brenda Leadlay, Jonathan Holmes, Julie Atkinson and Thrasso Petras.

And to my partner in all of this, Terry Dove, I offer a river of thanks from my heart.

Dedication

To my mother, Mary and in the memory of my father, Klaus.

Introduction

The Seagull by Anton Chekhov was written in 1896. Peter Gill adapted this version from a literal translation by Helen Molchanoff. Our production at The Telus Studio Theatre, University of British Columbia ran January 23rd to February 8th, 2014. The cast featured Ghazal Azarbad, Nathan Cottell, Mercedes de la Zerda, Thomas Elms, Helena Fisher-Welsh, Matt Kennedy, Daniel Meron, Demi Pedersen, Nick Preston, Javier Sotres, Naomi Vogt, Zach Wolfman and Natasha Zacher.

Our Stage Manager was Ndola Hutton who was assisted by Becky Fitzpatrick and Kaylin Good.

The production design team consisted of: Elliot Squire, set design; Sian Morris, costume design; Lauren Stewart, lighting and Daniel Tessy, sound design. Technical operators were Julia Vu and Julian Figueroa. Running crew were Charlene Saranchuk, Jingyi Gu Jiqing Sun and Linda Yan with set dressers Lizzy Fu Jessica Warren and Elaine Yan.

Contributing greatly to this production were also: Associate Professor Stephen Malloy, directorial advisor; Gayle Murphy, voice instructor; Cathy Burnett, movement instructor; Lynn Burton, head of props; Jim Ferguson, technical director; Andrew Pye, assistant lighting designer and head electrician; Lorraine West, scenic artist; Jodi Jacyk, head of costumes; Deb Pickman, communications and marketing; Jay Henrickson, production manager.

CHAPTER 1: Directorial Analysis

"If you cry 'forward', you must without fail make plain in what direction to go."
- Anton Chekhov

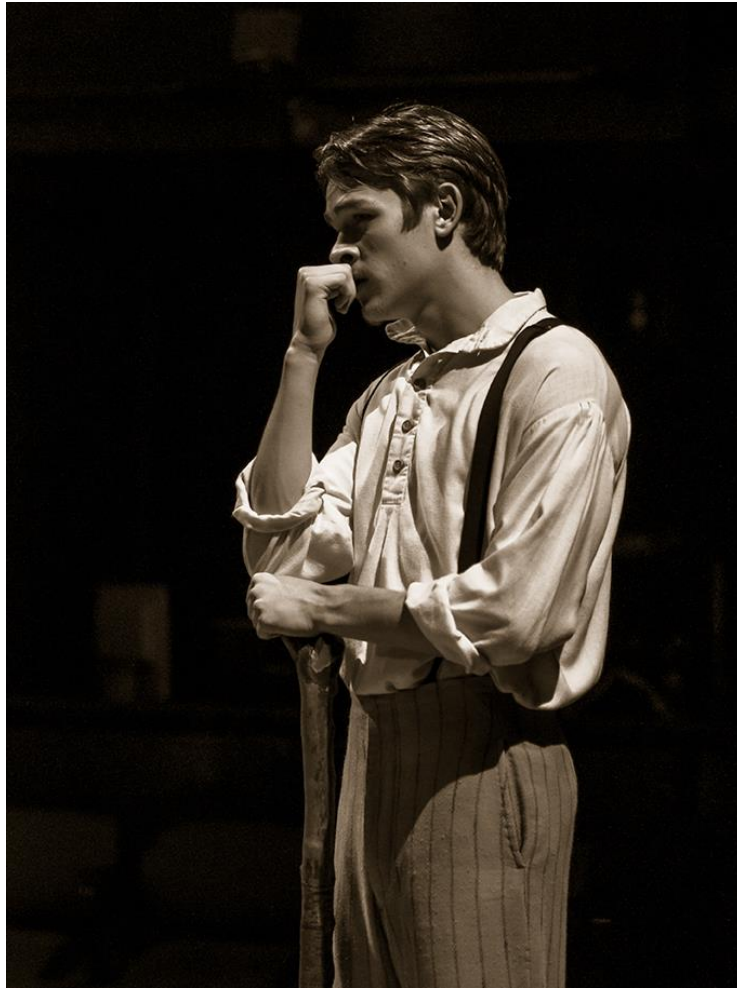


Figure 1. Thomas Elms as Konstantin. Photo credit-Nancii Bernard

Part 1: Initial Response to the Play

The Seagull is about the theatre. It is also about love and family, about work and vocation, about finding what you do and how that relates to who you are. The people who inhabit this play are all yearning. What I find compelling about Chekhov's writing is that his characters inhabit confounding oppositional forces of humanness. These people are not stereotypical. Arkadina is full of insatiable ego as she flirts and controls and pushes. In

equal measure she is caring, grateful and loving while vulnerable to turning petty, cheap, jealous and careless. Masha is a practical, sardonic alcoholic whose no-nonsense demeanor sits alongside her all-consuming flame of love for Konstantin.

I admire this play's ability to accurately and fearlessly examine extended relationships: mother/son, uncle/nephew, childhood friends, old flames, platonic friends, servant/master/servant, brother/sister. I'm also drawn to the types of love and power that exist between the players over time, such as the extremely complex relationship between Polina and Arkadina. Polina is an employee, but the many years in which the two women's lives have intertwined have created a kind of unbalanced sisterhood. Their children have grown up together. Polina is the surrogate mother to Konstantin, arguably a better one, and I think Arkadina is thankfully relieved for this. Polina has been in love with Dorn since a young age. She is jealous of his affection towards other women, Arkadina chief among them. Yet Dorn seems oblivious and aloof. I believe there is deep affection amongst these characters, coupled with jealousy and the incredibly intricate dynamics of power, obligation, gratitude and love.

The carefully crafted generational divisions in this play resound deeply with me. I'm drawn particularly to the profound love of the aging Sorin, playing out the end of his life, contrasting with his beloved nephew's frenetic unhappiness with his youthful status. The May-December-May romantic triangle with Arkadina, Trigorin and Nina speaks volumes of the intimate imbalance of romantic love's verisimilitudes.

Konstantin, Masha, Polina, Dorn and Arkadina form the emotional and physical nexus of the play on Sorin's estate. Trigorin, Nina and Medvedenko are the outsiders, the characters who bring emotional dynamics from outside the estate.

I find Konstantin's suicide, and his seemingly comic attempted suicide, deeply affecting. Chekhov examines one of the most complex human questions, a subject of extreme

importance that spans history, cultures and status—the taking of one’s own life. This challenge does not escape me in its serious and far reaching implications for the audience and cast.

Those ‘big’ scenes loom large in their intricacies, with the questions they ask, which is why these moments excite my imagination in finding ways to stage them. What is Trigorin doing, and what does he want with Nina when he talks (and talks) about his life as a writer? How do we understand Arkadina’s mountain of emotional lava and the multiple twists in the power dynamic when Trigorin begs to leave her? Arkadina is an intriguing force, yet not easily understood. Then there is the final scene with Nina and Konstantin as Nina, like a phoenix, chooses life and Konstantin chooses death—constituting perhaps one of the most beautiful and heart wrenching scenes ever written. And this moment still puzzles me, entices me to wonder about these two people and who they are. I’ve played Nina, and this scene remains a mysterious, elusive quandary. It remains the Chekhovian paradigm. I find myself apprehensive about untangling this knot for the actors.

My first impression of this play is that it presents a circle of people striving and grasping, for love or happiness or something else perhaps indescribable. This is surely a dissatisfied lot, looking outward for someone or something to relieve them and solve their problems. Most of them believe love is the panacea. They’re all reaching for love and reassurance in one form or another. Konstantin reaches for his mother, for Nina and for respect as an artist. Masha reaches for Konstantin and the apparent remedy of vodka. Polina reaches for Dorn, Sorin reaches (and aches) for the city, while Medvedenko reaches for Masha and more money. Arkadina reaches for youth and position. Nina seeks fame and the love of her family. They are all sobbing and wishing and kissing and begging in hopes that their lives will have meaning. The happiest among them seems to be Medvedenko, a man with simple needs, relatively content and expecting very little. Chekhov apparently equates desire with unhappiness.

I see a play of talking and more talking and filled with sometimes mundane conversations. On the important flip side of this dynamic are the listeners. More often than not, we find multiple characters in the vicinity of the speaker. I'm curious about effects of these conversations on the listeners. The audience, of course, represents the other listeners. I am anxious to determine how the thrust stage and balconies of the Telus Theater will support (or perhaps hinder) this listening aspect.

I want to accent the small acts of kindness between characters that run throughout the play. Polina brings Arkadina a basket of plums and makes up the bed for Sorin. Medvedenko takes care of Masha and the child. Sorin cares tenderly for Konstantin's well-being. Arkadina acquiesces when she bandages her son's head and attempts to improve Masha's attractiveness. Konstantin tries to improve Sorin's health.

Overall I'm left with a deep sense of human frailty. I feel I know these characters in an intimate and empathetic way. I want them to be free of their unrequited desires and find peace. I question the pursuit of my artistic ambitions, feeling like I finally know what Nina describes as she toils in the trenches of theatre, far away from fame in relative obscurity.

Part 2: Type or Genre of Play

Chekhov famously called *The Seagull* a comedy. Much artistic and scholastic opinion has been raised in discussion about, and in many cases opposition to, the genre Chekhov ascribed to his play. Can a play that features two suicide attempts (one successful) and so much unrequited love really live in the comedic style? Or was Chekhov being consciously cheeky and subversive when he offered a play about the human condition, one that prevailed between what we call tragedy and comedy? Chekhov's characters, though not traditionally comic, are often pathetically foolish in the seriousness of their pursuits. This excessiveness, with its crying and lack of restraint, gives audiences the moments to laugh at

someone else's pain and suffering—as we do in life. Chekhov seemed to understand that humans are a bit ridiculous and life merely a contradiction to death.

I think where this play is very funny and comedic is in its presentation of the utterly desperate, passionate and ego-filled characters' pursuits of love relations. Everyone loves someone who loves someone else. Love is personal and emotionally recognizable to most audience members, and I think the incredibly rich detailing, the laughter in darkness and tears in joy—the hallmark of the Chekhovian style—is what sets it in a deceptively multifaceted pool that is hard to define and even harder to ascribe a genre.

Where the story is tragic (and what reinforces the duality and genius in Chekhov's writing), is the presentation of an action as horrible as Konstantin's unsuccessful suicide attempt as it relates to the reactions of other characters—which is primarily self-interested denial. Trigorin admonishes that Konstantin showed a “remarkable lack of tact”, while Masha gets drunk and Arkadina beats a hasty retreat back to Moscow. These reactions frame the set-up for the final moments of the play, where we hear an off-stage gun shot. With dreaded, full knowledge we, the audience, know the outcome. The knife of comedy twists to a state of tragic inevitability.

If you played *The Seagull* as straight-ahead tragedy, for example, earnestly finding the pity of the world, what would result? Could tragedy work, or would the characters come off as completely maudlin and unrealistic? Alternately, if you played for laughs only, or in a comedic style, would an audience miss the pathos? Would they need to breathe into the darker and deeper pains that these characters traverse? These questions perhaps help explain why Chekhov has been ascribed his own genre of ‘Chekhovian’. One might also call *The Seagull* a tragicomedy.

I take to heart the adage that one must not play for a laugh, but to find the genuine objective and intention in the characters' actions. We sometimes laugh at our lowest points,

and Chekhov certainly points a pathetic and wry finger at all of his characters and the vacillations of the comedy and tragedy that exists simultaneously in the plethora of human activities.

Part 3: The Significance of the Title

The Seagull—what exactly did Chekhov mean with this enigmatic title? The meaning is elusive, but I believe it resides in the progression and perversion of Nina innocently stating her desire to be with them at Sorin's estate: "I'm drawn to the lake as if I was a seagull." This description leads Konstantin to enact his own interpretation of Nina's metaphor. He does "...a vile thing" and kills a seagull. "I lay it at your feet," he says to her. He then tells Nina that he will kill himself in the same way. It is an astonishing proclamation that of course distorts Nina's original intent and desire. He appropriates the idea and bastardizes Nina's sense of innocent desire. The final mutation is when Trigorin takes Konstantin's actions and develops a 'fiction' or story of the event. So this idea of a seagull becomes ingested by these lovers and changed to become the Seagull, much as the girl Nina becomes romantically 'owned' by Konstantin and sexually owned by Trigorin.

In the final scene between Konstantin and Nina we find out that she is signing her letters "The Seagull." The interpretation could be that she has 'become' the manifestation of these men's ideas. However, Chekhov makes her repeat the assertion "I'm a seagull. No. That's not it," three times before she turns to her vocation and what is really important to her. I believe she is actually re-acquiring ownership of the title and in, 'choosing life' and 'hav(ing) faith', which is the woman she has become at the end of the play, she is disavowing the male suppression.

The inspiration for *The Seagull*, according to some accounts about Chekhov, is that the painter Isaak Levitan (a friend of Chekhov's), shot, but did not kill, a woodcock in a fit of

romantic rage. Unfortunately, Chekhov was the one who had to euthanize the bird. Levitan also tried, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide due to a rejected love interest.

The idea of an individual's titles, birthright or position being distorted or changed exists with many of the characters in the play. This element probably results from the changing conditions of Russian culture with the abolishment of serfdom in 1861 (the year after Chekhov's birth). In the play, it is represented in Medvedenko's constant commentary on the conditions of his position as a schoolteacher to Arkadina's falling value as an aging actress. Aging also figures in both Sorin and Dorn's reduced states as retirees from the judiciary and medical fields respectively. They were once respected and revered, but are now poor, powerless and directionless. The seagull of the title begins as a feeling of happy, lofty purpose to becoming a bird shot in a fit of jealous self-interest like Polina's on-again, off-again relationship with the elusive Dr. Dorn.

Part 4: Style

Konstantin's 'symbolist' play-within-the-play, which he writes and directs, strikes me as an extremely contemporary poem or 'rap' on environmental degradation and human existentialism. If staged about 75 years later, Konstantin's aesthetic would have made him a wunderkind film auteur if he were to have persisted with his ideas. This scene is long, and the scale of its importance to Konstantin mustn't be dismissed as well as how I will need to direct it!

So what does this scene tell me about the style of the play? It lays open a diversion of aesthetics amongst the characters that should be mirrored in how we execute the telling of *The Seagull*. Chekhov was at the vanguard of the monumental shift in theatrical style from melodrama just before the turn of the century to a realistic representation of life aided by Konstantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre. However, today this Realism of

character and performance seems heightened to contemporary audiences whose view of realistic or naturalistic acting is based in television and film. What does Konstantin's play look like for us? I'm interested in examining the parameters of this and seeing how truthful we can make these characters and their journeys while still honouring the size and poetry of Chekhov's world.

Myerhold called this style a theatre of mood. I call it heightened realism based in complete commitment to a character's wants and without any self-conscious commentary by the performer. I want to work with the actors in a very realistic and personal way. I want to engage their bodies to tell the story as much as their words and emotions. My instincts tell me these actors will need to find the given circumstances of these characters, especially the actors who are considerably younger than their characters, and explore the largesse or grotesque bodies. Then we will need to condense. This play will require the actors to be very brave—it's big, it's Russian and I am demanding a fearlessness that I think this play needs to be meaningful. While we are aiming for realism, I intend to rehearse using a lot of expansive Grotowski work, improvisation, gestural symbolism and to explore how big we can make it, then pull it in and make it subtle, true and effecting.

Part 5: Space

We are staging the play in the Telus Studio. Therefore our choice of playing space has to consider the architecture of that room. Two key issues frame these deliberations. Issue one concerns location—the first two acts are outside, while the last two acts occur in two different interior settings. We have to accommodate and emphasize this movement into interior, both physically and psychologically. Issue two is this is a play with a clear time line and horizontal structure. The full circular position, or in the round, seems too 'unending.' *The Seagull* certainly is, by contrast, a meditation on endings and journeys.

Hence, we have chosen to adapt the deck in a modified thrust, meaning the north end of the stage is open, while the two end towers are angled in at 45 degrees. This design allows the lake and beyond to be represented in Act One/Two. We will then use the 'line' created by the bump out of the towers for separation, augmented by set, to denote the exterior and interior. The theme of *returning* underlies all of Act Four. Nina makes her final appearance, and Arkadina, Trigorin, Masha and Dorn all come home in a sense. And I would argue Sorin's imminent death is a fulfillment of a cycle, of which Chekhov, with his advancing illness, would have been very aware.

I want to use as many of the entrances and exits as possible to underline the social/communal sense of the garden and house. The characters' intimacies are often observed and overheard, creating a sense of danger and risk that accompanies love relations and the comings and goings of many.

I will rehearse the play for the initial three days in the Telus Studio to get a sense of the size and configuration. We will then go into a smaller rehearsal room for more in-depth study and blocking.



Figure 2: Matt Kennedy as Trigorin, Natasha Zacher as Nina. Photo Credit-Nancii Bernard

Part 6: Period

I will not be 'updating' this play or playing with the setting. One could argue that *The Seagull* might be set in any time/location, and the play would still resonate given the devotion Chekhov has to the details of character and the overarching theme of love—which is of course timeless. In fact, there have been numerous contemporized versions of the script in the past five years. Some received large productions by writers' such as Anya Reiss (U.K.), Ira Avneri (Israel). Peter Hinton's production is upcoming in Montreal.

It is my premise that the focus on character, action and relationships will remove the

‘classical costume drama’ tendency to a visceral, modern telling of this story without time travel and a location move. I think it is interesting how often I’ve had to defend this approach, where many are anxious to hear what ‘spin’ I will be layering onto the story to make it my own. I want to let the audience make it *their own*. It’s not uncommon to update or modify a play’s period and it can be illuminating and interesting to reframe the narrative in a different historical or cultural context. However, I believe this device is overused. The ‘clever’ time shift can actually draw undue attention to itself and simply add yet another level audiences must fight through as they work to see how the production shoehorns itself into a different context.

Part 7: Action of the Play

STASIS

Arkadina and her famous writer lover are on their annual summer holiday at her brother Sorin’s estate on a lake north of Moscow. The staff has prepared the house and meals for the visitors which include Dorn, an old admirer of Arkadina’s and friend to Sorin.

Konstantin has written a play, and he is preparing to present it starring his love, Nina, the girl from across the lake.

Turning Point One: INTRUSION

The inciting incident is Konstantin’s play, which is really an attempt to rise in the eyes of his mother and Nina. He sees his creation as an utter failure. This moment changes the balance of the relationships and puts in motion a line of events as people react to his efforts.

Turning Point Two: MAJOR CRISIS

Konstantin tries to shoot himself. This attempted suicide sends Arkadina packing as she tries to rush Trigorin (who her son has threatened to a duel) back to Moscow. Masha decides she will acquiesce and marry Medvedenko. Nina is completely turned away from Konstantin to the increasing attentions of Trigorin. Sorin finally stands up to his sister to ask for money for Konstantin and, interestingly, Dorn is nowhere to be seen. In fact he does not appear until Act 4. I believe this is Chekhov telling us the world is out of balance.

Turning Point Three: CLIMAX

Nina returns to the house. She is exhausted, dirty and she speaks frankly and honestly about her life and her love. This is the first time Konstantin has seen her in a long time. He tells her how he still loves her. She tells him she still loves Trigorin. She said she has found “faith” while Konstantin admits he has none.

Turning Point Four: NEW STASIS

Konstantin kills himself.

Part 8: Geographical Location

Our production will place Sorin’s estate on a lake visited by Chekhov in 1895. The lake is near the Finnish coast, northwest of Moscow, which is a three-day train trip from the estate. The climate at this latitude would be very similar to northern Alberta, with harsh winters and long hot days in summer.

Part 9: Date, Season and Time of Day

Act 1: Friday August 25th, 1895. Evening, dusk, just before moonrise, 8:10 pm.

Act 2: Saturday August 26th, 1895. Before lunch; the weather is very hot.

Act 3: One week later, Saturday September 2nd, 1895. The act starts at 11:45 am.

Act 4: Two years later, Tuesday November 11, 1897, 5:30 pm and dark. A howling wind and storm.

Part 10: Economic Environment

The economic situations that Chekhov sets for these characters have the same paradoxical nature as the rest of his set-ups. There is Sorin's once affluent position as a judiciary reduced to a pensioner's impoverishment with land owning responsibilities—he is at the mercy of his estate manager, Shamrayev. Arkadina's hard-working middle class comfort will never be adequate for her professional expenses (i.e. clothing, travel and entertaining), coupled with her miserliness. Nina comes from wealth. However she will inherit none of it, and at the end of the play is destitute. Likewise, there is Dorn who as a physician was well paid, but chooses to spend all his money on travel at the end of his life—a position that, depending on one's perspective, is either frivolous or rather clear-headed. In the character of Medvedenko, Chekhov applies all of his humour and commentary to the schoolmaster who is obsessed with the conversation about wages and worth.

In placing his two writers Trigorin and Konstantin on the fame barometer, Chekhov is able

to play with another type of prosperity-versus-poverty pendulum. The placement of artistic satisfaction as the currency at play allows the Trigorin and Konstantin dynamic to flip from Trigorin's man-of-the-moment stature paralleling Konstantin's youthful artistic rebellion to a point where, in the final act of the play, Konstantin has surpassed Trigorin's fame. Ironically however, neither is particularly satisfied and they both still feel the paucity of their talents.

Part 11: Previous Action

This is a story of a closely-knit group. With the exception of Trigorin, they have all grown up with one another. The romance of Dorn and Polina has endured potentially for 22 years, if one is to consider Masha as the illegitimate daughter of their union. This is a simmering affair, and one must consider the class differences they have come from. He is a doctor, and she is a married housekeeper. Arkadina has memories of the music that came from the other side of the lake and how the younger Dorn was the 'catch' of the area. What happened between the flirtatious Arkadina and the young Dr. Dorn in those days?

Nina and Konstantin have certainly grown up with one another and are now experimenting with the blossoming of first love. Masha and Konstantin were raised in the same house in the summers, and perhaps their relationship intensified when Konstantin came to live with his uncle Sorin—permanently by my estimates when he was becoming too much for Arkadina to handle. I think Masha has been chasing after Konstantin since she was a small girl and, as both are only children, they could have arguably been like siblings. My reading of Masha and Medvedenko's relationship is one with an enormous amount of history as

well. The sense is that they have been acquainted with one another since school days.

I believe one of the most significant relationships in the entire play is that of Konstantin and his Uncle Sorin. There is an incredible amount of love and commiseration between these two characters. As the estate, Sorin's home, is the central setting of this play, so too is the goodness, optimism and gentleness of Sorin's character the metaphorical heart of the piece.

To impress his mother, Konstantin writes a play to be performed for her and the guests on the night of the full moon. The scene occurs in August during Arkadina's annual visit—this time with her new lover, the famous Trigorin. Sorin is in ill health. Medvedenko needs to ask Masha to marry him, and while we don't know how many times he's asked, she will refuse.

Part 12: Theme or Central Idea of the Play

I believe a key theme of this play is that, when you fall in love, there is no guarantee that you will ever find what you are searching for. This is a fundamental human tendency. We fall in love, with another person, with an artistic pursuit or even an idea, and we can never be certain that our desires will be fulfilled. In *The Seagull*, no one character is in romantic love with another who loves them back. This scenario is at once both tragic and highly comedic, exemplifying Chekhov's ability to employ human paradoxes.

I believe this theme or central idea has a Chekhovian antidote: when your expectations are unfulfilled and you are not loved in return, the human being in us survives on gestures of

kindness. This play is built around small, seemingly insignificant acts of human decency. Polina making up Sorin's bed, Dorn coming to check up on his ill friend, Masha and Medvedenko searching for Konstantin, Polina giving Arkadina the plums, Medvedenko asking Nina to stop by when he sees her in turmoil, Arkadina trying to spruce up how Masha puts herself together, and Trigorin counseling Masha. One could also argue that Nina not meeting with Konstantin during the years she was travelling to small towns to perform was an incredible act of selfless kindness. We know how lonely she was with the loss of her child and reputation due to her affair with Trigorin, so it seems she would have been in great need of an old friend, someone she grew up with. However by refusing to see him, she recognizes his unhealthy obsession with her and tries to keep him from her.

I think Chekhov understood fully the parallel between an artist's work and the pursuit of romantic love. A writer pursues a story, an actor plays a role, a painter attempts to capture a vision on canvas. All try to achieve something beautiful, important and concrete. Then they risk everything by putting their creation out to an audience—so much like the great risk of exposing one's love to another, followed by the purgatory of waiting for the response and result. Will it be heaven, or will it be hell? Does the artist or lover find fulfillment in the eyes of others?

Part 13: Emphatic Element

Character. This play is about the inner workings of people and their desires and needs of one other. This play is also about relationships. So my intention is to spend a considerable amount of rehearsal time on investigating and fleshing out these dynamics. The listening

and full engagement with the conversation between everyone on stage is paramount. The actions and events of this play are essentially the motivations of the characters based on their needs and obstacles.

Part 14: Character Analysis

ARKADINA ~ Irina Nikolaevna ARKADINA

- *Age:* 43 years old/ 45 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum:* An Actress. Famous, popular, renowned in the melodramatic theatrical styles of the late 19th century. High status and Moscow-centric. Arkadina is the part-time parent and is constantly trying to assuage her guilt while using her charm to somehow flirt her way around the emotional fragility of her offspring and his overwhelming need for love, affection and recognition.
- *Rhythmic or musical quality:* Maria Callas, a wailing Celine Dion, Madonna and Elizabeth Taylor. She is a pop song sung by a star.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* Celebrated fame vs. impoverished obscurity.
- *List of adjectives:* Flamboyant, famous, beautiful, flirtatious, egotistical, volatile, passionate, cheap, generous, funny, curious, commanding, sexual, competitive, warrior.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To hold onto love and prestige.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Exposing herself/ hiding herself.
 - Generous/Frugal
 - Calculating/Spontaneous

KONSTANTIN ~ KONSTANTIN Kostya Gavrilovich

- *Age:* 25/27
- *Position/Status/Decorum:* Arkadina's son. His father was a famous actor (yet came from the class of shopkeepers), but he does not have a relationship with him. Thrown out of university for undisclosed reasons "beyond our control". With no job and no money of his own, he depends on his uncle for a place to live. Feels he is "a nobody". Sees the theatre as anachronistic and in need of radical change.
- *Rhythmic or musical quality:* Frenetic and anxious. Youthful and impetuous. A sweetness and vulnerability of spirit.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* In love with Nina and suffering from considerable lack of self-awareness or self worth. His obstacle is that Nina falls in love with his mother's lover and leaves to pursue her dreams of becoming an actress. Wants Nina to love him vs. does not love himself.
- *List of adjectives:* Funny, listless, low self esteem, blames others for a lot, very little self accountability, passionate about life.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To find love.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Earnest/Ironic
 - Needy/pushes people away
 - Wants to be loved by Nina/Hates Masha's love
 - Distrustful of those that might like/love him ie: his mother's friends.

TRIGORIN ~ Boris Alekseyevich TRIGORIN

- *Age:* 39/41
- *Position/Status/Decorum:* Arkadina's lover. A fairly successful writer of stories and articles, yet dissatisfied with his work. Easily flattered and prone to the fickle nature of others' opinions.
- *Rhythmic or musical quality:* He's a DJ mixing up others beats and rhythms while looking for the perfect vibe that people will dance to.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* He wants to be something other than he is. He doesn't know if he is the story, or the writer of the story or how to live life that is not written in a book. Wants life vs. being drawn into others' stories.
- *List of adjectives:* Reactive, fervent, distrustful, lustful, sexual, thoughtful, absentminded, careless.



Figure 3: Matt Kennedy-Trigorin, Mercedes de la Zerda-Arkadina. Photo credit-Nancii Bernard

NINA ~ NINA Mihailovna Zarechnaya

- *Age:* 18/20
- *Position/Status/Decorum:* A motherless girl who has been raised on an estate by the lake. While raised in relative wealth, her father has bypassed her and will leave his estate to his second wife leaving Nina with nothing. She wants to be an actress and finds great happiness with the 'bohemian' people and relationships at Sorin's estate. She cares deeply for the old man and has started a budding relationship with Konstantin.
- *Rhythmic or musical quality:* A flute yet a drum. One cannot say that she is just a light piece of music because there is a backbone or deep quality of resilience. She finds joy

and is fun, hopeful and quick...a girl who wonders what others do and think and who spends a lot of time alone. She is lonely.

- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* She wants fame and to be recognized vs. how men treat and use her.
- *List of adjectives:* Truthful, trusting, smart, needy, nervous, kind, alone, imaginative, Fighter, resilient, confident, realistic.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* From a girl to a woman and from innocence to a world weariness.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
Innocent/wise
Orphaned/Abandoned
Loved/Loathed
Careful/Risky
Needy/Self sufficient

MASHA ~ MASHA *Marya Ilinichna*

- *Age:* 22 years old/24 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum:* Masha is the daughter of the estate manager, Shamrayev and the housekeeper, Polina. She is being romantically pursued by Medvedenko, a schoolteacher who is responsible for his mother and siblings. She is not interested in the schoolteacher; she is in love with Konstantin. They have known each other since childhood and while she is below his status as the nephew of the owner, she does not

seem to be bothered by this. She drinks vodka, wears only black and her hair is messy. She may be the illegitimate daughter of Dr. Dorn and her mother, Polina. She chooses to marry Medvedenko after Konstantin kills himself and she has a child with him.

- *Rhythmic or musical quality:* Slow and a bit out of sync. A punk rock rebel. Patti Smith, but underneath I think there may be a whole lot of Bob Dylan or Bonnie Raitt.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* She wants Konstantin to love her, however he loves Nina.
- *List of adjectives:* Pragmatic, serious, pessimistic, addict, unresolved, dedicated, the observer, a watcher, hurting, yearning, bawdy.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To make Konstantin love her.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Drunk/sober
 - In love/hates love
 - Black clothes/soft pink heart
 - Sarcastic/sincere
 - Helper/Escapee
 - Loner/Needs love

MEDVEDENKO ~ Semyon Semyonovich MEDVEDENKO

- *Age:* 26 years old/28 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* A penny whistle and hand organ. A polka. He is practical and patient. He is looking for how things have to be and should be versus a world that is hard to get through.

- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* He wants to have a good comfortable life vs. he doesn't make enough money.
- *List of adjectives:* Practical, thoughtful, walker, energetic, concerned, helpful, smart, pleasant, goofy, loyal, quiet, dedicated, bashful, frank, shy.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To get Masha to love him—or even liking him is fine.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Fulfilled/unfulfilled
 - Tired/Energetic
 - Enthusiastic/Bummer
 - Pushover/Strong and stubborn
 - Patient/impatient

Pyotr Nikolaevich **SORIN**

- *Age:* 60 years old/62 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* Declining health has lead this once bon vivant to isolated country boredom—he's a Schubert Serenade at a rococo concert hall now having to listen to the broom sweep over the floors. However, he does find somewhat of a sweet tune in that too.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* To live in the city surrounded by his family and friends vs. not being in control of anything—his estate, family or health.
- *List of adjectives:* Laughing, ill, weakened, dying, affable, kind, unfulfilled, earnest, spontaneous, intelligent, ironic, sardonic, self-effacing.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* Taking care of his family and making sure his nephew has a future.

➤ *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*

Drunk/sober

City mouse/country mouse

Nice tie/horribly messy hair

Kind to all/alone

Yearning for love/happy with his lot

Fulfilled/unfulfilled

Yevgeny Sergeyich **DORN**

➤ *Age:* 55 years old/57 in Act 4.

➤ *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* He is a doctor in the country where it's not his fault the woman whose babies he delivers fall in love with him. He's a heady mix of a Parisian dance hall mix and a middle eastern lament.

➤ *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* To understand people and watch the proceedings vs. sexual urges and emotional entanglements.

➤ *List of adjectives:* Philosophical, ladies man, bachelor, traveler, philosopher, confidant, attractive, elusive, watcher, seducer.

➤ *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To help care for his friends: Sorin, Masha, Konstantin and Arkadina.

➤ *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*

Fulfilled/unfulfilled

Seducer/seduced

Father/fatherless

Distant/wanting to be closer

Philosophy/real situations

Rich/poor

Alive/dead

POLINA *Andreyevna*

- *Age:* 41 years old/43 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* The housekeeper of Sorin's estate and ready to leave her marriage to be with her old love and lover Dr. Dorn. She is a love song played very slowly. She is trying to grab the flute, but ends up with the drum with no drumsticks.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* She wants to run away with Dorn, but he refuses.
- *List of adjectives:* Unloved, yearning, kind, tough, sensitive, unfulfilled, jealous
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To find love and as she sees her life slipping away she is willing to do anything.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Fulfilled/unfulfilled
 - Tough/sensitive
 - Angry/powerless
 - Decisive/unsure
 - Loving/bitter

Ilya Afanasyevich **SHAMRAYEV**

- *Age:* 47 years old/49 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* A trombone played by a bear.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* Wants respect vs. class and position.
- *List of adjectives:* Bombastic, sweet, pleasing, bully, sarcastic, determined, a clown.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* Wants to be involved and acknowledged for his contributions.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Furious/Friendly
 - Daring/afraid
 - An opera singer/a military officer
 - Farmer/Boss

YAKOV

- *Age:* 22 years old/24 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* Playing a guitar at a cabin in the mountains with a full moon.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* Wants to read a book vs. has to work.
- *List of adjectives:* Loose, hungry, irreverent, passionate, thoughtful, loyal, casual, disinterested, funny.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To stay out of trouble and take a break.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Free spirit/tied to his job

Tired/hyper

Religious/atheist

MAID

- *Age:* 19 years old/21 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* A quick step. A Virginia Reel, swaying by herself dreaming.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* She wants to get away to Moscow and become a shopkeeper vs. she has no money and no position.
- *List of adjectives:* Funny, smart, helpful, pleasant, sexy, in love with Yakov, sneaky, gossipy, yearning.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* She wants to have fun and get the job done.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*

Cheeky/sad

Smart/gullible

Lover/virgin

Youthful/old soul

Hard worker/truant

COOK

- *Age:* 29 years old/31 in Act 4.
- *Position/Status/Decorum: Rhythmic or musical quality:* A Russian folk song, she moves very quickly and is very affable.
- *Major Desire...Want vs. obstacle:* Wants to travel to France vs. she must work

- *List of adjectives:* Dedicated, proud, friendly, helpful, grumpy, time conscious, exacting, mimic, funny, irreverent.
- *Main Action/Journey of the play:* To make sure everyone is well fed and there is enough of everything.
- *Opposites or contradictions (interior tensions):*
 - Full/Hungry
 - Perfectionist/lazy
 - Content/Looking for a new job
 - Loves Sorin/Is ignored by Sorin

Part 15: Directorial Approach

As an actor, I have spent the past two decades approaching scripts and rehearsals with an actor's intentions and tools. I am not an experienced director. My approach then is to widen my gaze and select the different ways and means to facilitate this experiment. I intend to direct this incredible play with openness to the abilities and ideas of the cast and designers as they apply their imaginations and creative interpretations. I want to present this story with clarity and passion. Also, I wish to inspire the audience to see themselves and those around them in these thirteen characters—their loves, their delusions and their human needs. This is a sensual play; it is seen, it is heard and it is felt. I will utilize my instincts, the past 18 months of work with my teachers and study, plus the vision I have of what theatre looks like to anchor this production and to consider my directorial practice more deeply.

My initial rehearsal work with the cast will focus on ensemble building and engaging the body as the primary storyteller. I will direct the details towards the major events of action, embracing the contradictions and paradoxes of these people and Chekhov's world to ultimately find the theatrical 'size' of the play. I am looking for the pulse or rhythm of the play and how it manifests and affects each character's behaviour. As we get into the piece, I expect I will need considerable flexibility as we analyze our progress and diagnose our next steps.

To build the ensemble, I will use improvisation to cultivate personal biographies and character alliances. I would like to propose we use the audience as part of this ensemble; they are the flies on the wall, ever present, invited and onside. I would like each actor to place themselves in the audience in a specific place reserved nightly, so they have their biggest fan encouraging and supporting them. It's a trick I learned many years ago and one I find personally significant. I will encourage exploration and consider all ideas—we learn invaluable information by following unusual paths. There is no 'wrong' question. I've found these actors to be very hard on themselves, something I want to mitigate. Chekhov's characters are often ridiculous, and we need to embrace this in ourselves

I will utilize my training in physical theatre and movement-based character development to work on the psycho-physical relationship between mind and movement. My approach is to engage the body as the primary storyteller in an exciting, innovative and nurturing way. I will use Viewpoints, Grotowski and grotesque work to help support the idea of performance in 360 degrees of aliveness. Breathing and listening is key to this idea and, given the Telus theatre's thrusting balconied space, we cannot do the play without actively

playing the backs of the characters. I want to see how much I can have the stage pictures and the bodies in space tell another part of the inner workings of these people.

Move step by step, put the ties down, then the rails and then get the train on the tracks. I'm directing the details of action by focusing on each character's individual objectives through the play to the events of collision and opposition that affect the whole world of the story.

What story is the audience getting, and why do we stay in the room? We will spend a lot of time understanding the given circumstances and obstacles that face these characters. We need to experience the journeys from right to wrong, resistance to surrender, from young to old or trapped to free. It will be crucial to keep conjecture under careful observation.

Actors often want to make assumptions that tie them up later on. I want to stay very close to the facts and questions that this play presents.

This leads to the basis for embracing the contradictions and paradoxes for which Anton Chekhov, the brilliant short story writer and observer of human behavior, is famous.

Sometimes his characters say completely different things than what they mean or what their actions indicate. It is this sub textual play-beneath-the-play that must be found and expanded upon as meticulously as the analysis of what and why each line is uttered. What are the characters' secrets? As Stephen Heatley commented recently, "Chekhov is the comedy of recognition." As we dig into playing the reality of the situation, coupled with the heightened sense of passionate needs that are encased in these people, I feel we'll get an idea of the theatrical size that the play needs to live in for our audience to identify with the absurdity of our collective human foibles.

How to work on the big emotions in this play can be daunting, even for the most seasoned pro. I expect and will encourage my actors to find these connections early on. We will use some sense memory work, laughter/crying triggers, straight ahead Acting, and Stanislavski's "method of physical actions" to create spontaneous emotion in our created environment. It has been my experience that directors put undue strain on performers by placing all the responsibility of the emotional components on the actor, and then hope for the best. I want to support the actors and let them 'fake it till they make it'. I would like to play with grotesque exaggerations of emotional frameworks alongside compression exercises to give a robust spectrum to dial it up or down.

How long can I wait to give a note? I want them to own their work. Keep throwing it back at them. I've lived with *The Seagull* since playing Nina 24 years ago, and I'm still incredibly curious about this play and its inhabitants. I hope to impart that inquisitiveness to my collaborators.

CHAPTER 2: Production Journal

"Perhaps I shall succeed in doing something, though time flies fast."

Letter to D.V. Grigorovitch from Anton Chekhov

Moscow, March 28, 1886.



Figure 4: Helena Fisher-Walsh as Masha & Nick Preston as Medvedenko. Photo Credit: Tim Matheson

August 1, 2013

It's a good feeling to start this journal's first official entry on the first day of the month. I've come to the Sunshine Coast to immerse myself in the play and get deeper into Chekhov's world, *The Seagull* and other influences.

Why *The Seagull*? I played Nina in 1989 at The Frederic Wood Theatre (directed by Charlie Segal) when I was pursuing my BFA in acting. My memories of that experience were fraught with insecurities and experimenting with different ways of making myself cry! A lot and on a 'dime'! I'm only half joking, but the profound memory of working on *The Seagull* was how much it satisfied the actors investigation—the more one dug in, snooped, extrapolated, used imaginative forces, the more Chekhov would offer, solve and plainly set out the soul of the human you were trying to bring to life. It was extremely gratifying, and I remember thinking, 'I think I'm getting to be a better actor just by working on this stuff'!

So when I came back to do my directing MFA, I wanted to work on a play that was a good teacher—a master playwright. I stayed away from *The Seagull* for a long time. I read countless other playwrights, plus all Chekhov's other major works, in the search for a play that could challenge me and the acting students. I looked for something exciting on which to work with designers. Most of all, I wanted a play that would provide me with essential groundwork to become a better director, and specifically work on articulating deeper investigations on character, structures of action and creating a cohesive, pungent world for an audience to be immersed in.

I don't think *The Seagull* is a stuffy play. The themes and topics play out across history and cultures. I am convinced that the mirror it holds up to an audience today is as urgent and exciting as it has been for 120 years. And it is about the theatre!

Some of the thoughts and questions that have been percolating:

- How do I light the fire under this play? For myself, the audience and most importantly for the actors?
- Many themes are emerging. Foremost Love in all its guises: parental, youthful adoration, first love, old love, unrequited love, passionate love, obsessive love, love of the theatre, sexual attraction, romantic love, the love of a friend, the love of your work, 'celebrity' love, loving the wrong person. These are the triangles, 'one way streets' and exchanges of this emotion/idea/endeavor called love. There are clichés of course, and our literary world is full of them. But I want to find the human, truthful and courageous heart of this matter in each of these characters.
- Silences and sub-text.
- Maturity. Time changes things. Life happens. These people are activated upon by time, specifically the two years between Acts 3 & 4. Also, time has affected the state of these relationships when we start the play, specifically in the case of Polina and Dorn, Masha and Medvedenko, Arkadina and Treplev.
- There is a strong line through this piece of the aging male as mentor, caregiver. Men who are looking in the rear view mirror of life—Sorin, Dorn, Shamrayev, and one could argue Trigorin is feeling some of the wear and tear of faded glory. I have resolved myself to the casting realities of having younger men portray these much

older characters...it is extremely non-naturalistic and wraps these characters up in the most obvious form of 'acting'. However, it might offer a challenge that they can take on, as trying to find the most truthful way to the heart of the person and the 'casing' is as a cloak to be worn. I want to move away from a stereotype of old man to what are the given circumstances of these men's lives lived and where they are now.

- A play about the theatre, actors and writers. A complicated love triangle that! Throw in a director and an audience and you've really got some drama...and comedy.
- How to articulate the form of 'naturalism' that Chekhov seemed to be experimenting with as a reaction to the romantic melodramas and star vehicles that were populating Russian stages.
- How to set this in the Telus? In the round, or in alley so the audience is aware of each other...using the 'stage' from Act 1 for the study later? This is such an important piece of the puzzle as I try and visualize the play. Interesting how I find this base part of the invention so necessary.
- Casting is making me nervous.

I'm having a strong image of Masha being out there while the audience comes in. She is waiting for the play. A perfect mirror. Medvedenko enters and watches her for a moment. They are good friends. They know each other very well. They've grown up together. She waits as she has since she was a little girl for Konstantin, her love. It will mean adjusting the way they traditionally enter the space, as on a stroll.

The sidebar on all this is Stanislavski's involvement in Chekhov's development as a dramatist, first interpreter of his plays as a director and specifically *The Seagull* and the development of The Moscow Art Theatre and its correspondingly radical new style of acting and plays: naturalism. I want to use this opportunity to do some research on Stanislavski as a kind of refresher. The famous schism between Chekhov and Stanislavski regarding the comedy vs. tragedy of intention and interpretation is fascinating. How the director can sway so strongly the tone and mood in a vastly different direction than what the writer feels he has written.

On a practical level I've sent an email to Robert to get the designer's contact info so I can start the preliminary design discussions. Set, as mentioned, is really a key starting point for me, but also the lighting will be pivotal to the march of time, the seasons, and the dramatic score of this play. I'm thinking a lot about light as the editor and 'focusing' agent in the piece. So much is exterior and elemental, the sunsets and hot days, stormy nights that the lights will need to add the tone and a high degree of ambiance for the world to effect on the characters.

August 3, 2013

Starting to read Rose Whyman's book Anton Chekov. Discussion of some of the major productions of *The Seagull* and where she has some keen insights into the themes of suicide and isolation. I've had an idea to make the set one that will allow a bit of fluidity and evolution, as the seasons go from hot August to cold and forlorn November. I'm interested

in making some decisions, and worried I'm not opening the play to the size of its possibilities.

I love this idea about a vase of fresh flowers—real flowers—that are in various stages of their lives on our set. These represent the details as I ask my actors to detail so minutely their characterizations. I am reminded of the Buddhist monk who explained that all the pictures and vases of flowers on the alter at this particular temple, were ALL included to represent all of the stages of their lives; fading, falling blossoms contain their budding, fresh newness and then full flower of maturity...I am struck by these characters being flowers at different stages of life, but also in very different growing conditions. They are transplants, they get too much sun or not enough rain.

Is this play about endurance? How do you direct to find 'truth'? Faith...?

August 4, 2013

Scene breakdown and first/last line identification, which I find illuminating. Polina's first line is "It's getting damp," and Dorn's is "I'm getting hot". How perfect. Masha's last eight lines are only numerals, a countdown of sorts.

What is the difference in the relationship with Konstantin and Sorin and then Konstantin and Dorn? Often there is a sameness to these paternalistic hinges and I think there might be a key to our Konstantin...in the relationship will lie an important truth I suspect.

Konstantin says, "The ordinary person in me is ashamed my mother is an actress." Shame of the profession. Shame of the person and shame at what he has become...his nothingness.

Completed a scene breakdown to try and get a picture of the logistics, and I find it's always useful to see the weight of presence in the scenes and not just in who is talking. I am starting to have some ideas about the servants, Yakov, the maid and cook. Where can they fill in the picture and who are they to this family? I want to give them names; or rather the actors playing them should christen them.

Another realization is the lengthiness of these relationships. Other than Trigorin, they have all known one another for a very long time and in some cases since birth. These people have grown up together, loved together, and faced the future together. If you include the servants, which I suspect have been employed by the family for quite some time, they are a unit. There is the switch that has occurred with Shamrayev, the employee, now exerting almost full control of the property and its finances and in effect giving Sorin only a small allowance for his personal use. The landowner vs. the collective of workers.

Eating together. Eating like real people. There is something about the preoccupation with food holding some attention on stage and with the characters...not sure why. Families spend a lot of time not talking to each other over food. Use real food.

August 8, 2013

I went up to UBC today and was able to meet with Robert about my designers. All very inexperienced and still in the throes of 'first time.' The exception is my set designer who has just graduated and will be doing this as a work experience. I'm not only disappointed at this, but also very concerned. I was frank and appreciated his honesty with respect to the lack of senior designers this year and the predicament it presented for all the shows in the season. However I am an inexperienced director. Working with a strong design team is important to 'up' my game. He suggested I could try doing the lighting design?! I think he was half joking, but I was not there to do a lighting design on *The Seagull*. I need to work WITH someone to develop the design and direct. I also don't have a sound designer yet...I understand there isn't anyone.

A live violinist instead of a sound designer? That instrument is so heart wrenching and lovely. But as there are very few sound cues, as I see it, they will need to cover act transitions primarily. I do like the volume and largesse we can achieve with an all-over sound creating an ambient score. It needs to be more atmospheric than watching an individual, yet deeply felt. I'm beginning to feel like I don't want to put a singularly Russian score on this either, but rather a deeper, even contemporary, more internal sound into the piece. More thinking.

Some ideas for rehearsal:

- Film everyone eating and zoom in on the actual action when we play it back...to see how human and existential it is.
- Apply the 'do absolutely nothing' exercise...make them understand how compelling and complex it is to just watch someone doing nothing. There is an essence of this 'truth of human behavior' that Stanislavski spoke of about Chekhov's characters.
- Grotesque work that will flow into gestural work. What are the 5-7 things you can note physically about a character and expand, exaggerate and build over to an apex. Then reduce and integrate.
- Have actors do every line twice. After the first time all others in the scene can respond (interject) with their internal reaction/articulation, quickly and forcefully. It will encourage involvement in the speakers more directly.
- How to get them into relationship rather than personal needs. Focus on the whole.
- Ensemble building exercises.
- Improvisations for past events with a focus on the love stories and triangles. Have Masha watch Konstantin and Nina work on their stuff. Create an atmosphere of all seeing and hearing with one another and the servants.
- Different run-throughs, weighted towards certain themes and positions. Have a run concentrated entirely on money, physical awareness or clearly isolating friends or enemies.

August 29, 2013 - Brecht style of working with Tom and actors Ghazal and Nathan

An interesting look into some of Brecht's rehearsal techniques with Tom. We had worked on the short play *Rex* by J. Pintauro using some Stanislavski exercises, and today we're applying the Brechtian principles of the A-effect (distancing), 'demonstrator of an incident', or the witness at the murder trial to try and understand how this might affect the performers, my work as a director and the play itself. Also, with a greater view to seeing how and if this way of approaching a fairly naturalistic short comedy/drama could influence how one would rehearse something like *The Seagull*.

There were two specific exercises we were using:

- 1) After each full sentence the actor would inject their character names and the word 'said'. As in "What do you mean? Said Eric".
- 2) The "Not...but..." which was to identify as each sentence the choices the character is *not* taking, but rather choosing to say/do-fill in the blank. This exercise would illuminate that for every juncture of 'forward' Brecht would want to have a shadow of what didn't happen.

I found the second exercise illuminating. While it took a great deal of time and thought by forcing the actors to clearly understand and articulate what they *were* doing in opposition to what they *were not* pursuing, this process was really valuable. Note, in the actual playing of the scene or play the audience would not see or know that this was occurring, but the simple job of an actor knowing the road not taken is the point. For the male actor in particular, it forced a more active relationship with the text and propelled him further into the scene.

It emphasized ACTION as a decision, making us need to respond and WANT A RESPONSE back! The result was an expansion of the needs and, I might say, stakes.

I also found (and this could be because I was looking not at the actors acting, but had been able to start looking at how the exercise was actually playing out—the tree instead of the grove) that I saw a couples ‘relationship’ more than the ‘conversation’. This would have achieved one of Brecht’s motives, which was to see the political or social ramifications at the forefront for the audience to ‘judge’ or be conscious of.

As we move into the larger analysis of subtext and actor motivations in *The Seagull*, I see a useful application of the “Not...but” exercise which will help identify deeper connections and needs. There is also the question of obstacles, why they don’t say something, and the desired response they are appealing for.

September 8, 2013

I had a good meeting with Elliot Squire, the set designer, and it has quelled some of the concerns I’ve been having regarding the visual articulation of this play. One of the decisions we have to make is the Telus in a round configuration or a modified thrust. The issue is anytime you get something like a buffet for the dining room on stage, you’ve got an impediment to sight lines for people behind the buffet. So EVERYTHING has to be hugging the floor...not sure I’m loving that frankly. I keep having an image of the stage from Act 1 being used for each subsequent act in a different configuration. It gives us some height and

contrast to the 'tongue' shaped main deck. Plus, I love the idea that Konstantin's little stage is what he is 'living' on in the study at the end of the play. At least the thrust gives us a lake, and a verandah for Act 4. But I have been warned about the vacuum of energy, voices, views that the height and emptiness which this thrust configuration can create, something I witnessed recently in *The Duchess*.

September 20, 2013



Figure 5: Over Eternal Peace, 1894. Painter Isaac Levitan

I've been spending a lot of time researching Chekhov and his world. I found an interesting connection to Isaac Levitan, the incredible landscape painter. He was a good friend and spent a great deal of time with the Chekhov family. Levitan was extremely poor and of

Jewish descent, which still brought with it a fair amount of anti-Semitism. There was a large falling out with Anton about being used, supposedly, as the foundation for the painter in Chekhov's story The Grasshopper. (Rayfield, 1999, p. 100) It was not a flattering portrait. He also tried to commit suicide and was supposedly a rash, passionate suitor, falling in love quickly and whole-heartedly. It has become a very useful line to Konstantin and his all consuming passions.

A tender picture is starting to emerge of Chekhov the doctor, gardener and artist. His advancing ill health due to tuberculosis seemed to cultivate a way of looking at the world from a contemplative and often pragmatic standpoint. Donald Rayfield's Understanding Chekhov (Rayfield, 1999) has been invaluable in understanding the influences that dominated Chekhov's worldview.

September 25, 2013

I watched a documentary, *The English Surgeon* (Smith, 2007) last night, and it brought into great relief the starkness of modern Russia: the landscape, mud, snow, ice, pockets of trees. Also the Ukrainian doctor using Dr. Marsh's full name constantly was the first time I heard the respect and warmth in the Russian use of full names. He always called him the full 'Doctor Henry Marsh' and it resonated sometimes with respect, teasing, concern, dominance and love. I think I should call the actors by their full names for the entire rehearsal process.

I am more than ever really thinking about the starkness and simplicity of the set...How to show the 'character' of the Russian architecture, the state of the estate, its comforts and disrepair. This is a place that has a starkness, but the characters are 'drawn' to it. They infuse it with the values of their lives.

Meeting with Sian Morris who is doing costumes and Elliot for set on Friday. Also the first meeting with Stephen Malloy, my advisor on this thesis production. I'm excited to talk to him about a range of things I've been thinking about, including the asides or soliloquies, set ideas, casting, possibility of putting the intermission after Act 3 (might be crazy), how to hit the third tier of the Telus etc.

September 30, 2013

Met with the costume designer, Sian Morris. I was a bit disappointed that she had only had a cursory reading of the play. It spurred a funny reaction, though—it made me mad, and it *really* made me want this girl to see what she was missing! It also made me articulate what I think good costume design and people that excel at it can do for actors and for the play. A costume becomes the character's skin. It wraps us and carries us. Sometimes you just have to fill it up. A good costume will ask questions and answer many. Why did this character CHOOSE these clothes this morning, what did they want people to see in them, what secrets are held in its pockets, what do I look like in the rooms I visit, the rooms I live in? Flowers are everywhere in that script, so what do they mean to each character? What can they tell us? Who washes and irons them? Do they smell? Getting to the heart of the colour is a

whole other creative choice for each character. It is a purposeful and beautiful choice that a costume designer must undertake. I want Sian to fall in love with these people, their lives and the design. I want her to find and make clothes that will tell a whole story unto themselves. This is what I ended up laying out there...and I'm glad I did. So we'll see what she comes up with next time. The more we talked the more I felt like she was getting excited, buying into my inspirations. I believe she will go far deeper with her investigations.

Met with Elliot regarding the set, which we're nearly 100% sure will be on the thrust. I found a picture of a painting where all the colours had been pulled through, creating a murky, confused depiction of colour and emotion. Since a large portion of the audience in the balconies will see the floor, I wondered how we could make that surface a canvas for the play. I don't want the floor to just be a black pit. It should be a vibrant springboard for their lives. The trick is that it can't be too busy and must reflect the changes in the world of the play.

Stephen Malloy was asking some great, pointed questions. He made a very good point about not making it too 'clean.' These people's lives are messy. Their interactions are full of interruptions, brush-offs, blind eyes and deaf ears. So I hope we will be able to have a mash up and let the sparks fire.

September 6, 2013

I looked at the moods of the four acts. This resulted in some interesting observations about rhythms, repetitions and some structural clarity. It also helped in trying to visualize the set requirements. There is an emotional contradiction at every turn in this play, and the action vacillates or zigzags to keep the uttered and the unutterable in constant opposition.

Anton Chekhov, a master of the short story, wrote hundreds during his life and was a master of the form. The limitations of the short story was a boon, as the novelist Richard Powers observed:

“One can say with some assurance that in settling upon the short story as his chosen narrative form, Chekhov elected in essence not to represent all of life, not to make a splash, but to fashion discrete parts of life and focus our attentions and sharpest sensibilities there as a form of indispensable moral instruction. [...] Chekhov made his stories precisely commensurate with life and with a view of it we can accept in an almost homely way.”

October 20, 2013- Casting

I will be using all but two men in the final two years of the BFA program. Casting is more like slotting people into ‘the best possible’ choices, so I want to learn about the affinity an actor has for the role. What their instincts tell them. I have not asked them to memorize anything, but to just be familiar with the selection and this way I can throw different stuff at them, shake them up, and see what their guts do. With regard to the students in second

year, some of them have only been on stage a couple of times. But from the first round of auditions they've really been strong.

Now we are in callbacks and my focus is on relationships, which are imperative for this show! Arkadina must have a sexuality and drive that can be extremely hot with her Trigorin, while there is a distancing, cool, tired maturity with Konstantin—and some believability that she could be the boy's mother. Masha and Medvedenko have to have a dry, almost sardonic way with each other; she is a sarcastic cat, and he is a large, rather doe-eyed, loyal dog. Konstantin and Nina must contain that quality of star/love-struck earnestness with the depth and chops to access the dark, humbling and painful corners of loneliness and heartbreak.

I am very impressed with how hard these actors have worked to bring strong choices and interesting interpretations into the room. They are listening to one another. Thomas Elms brought all his gawky intensity and intelligence into Konstantin, and I was very impressed by how he balanced this with a beautiful warmth for his uncle in the scene. Helen Fisher-Welsh did a tremendous reading of Masha, and Mercedes de la Zerda nailed a passionate and ego-driven Arkadina. I'm at about 50% needing simple confirmations of my choices from the first round and who they should be paired with, but really hoping the other 50% demand to be cast by certain actors. The older roles of Sorin and Dorn are particularly difficult.

October 29, 2013

The casting meeting with Malloy, Ryan, Heatley, Tom, Gayle and Cathy has gone really well. As Ryan will be using all women in his production, I won't need to balance the gentlemen. I feel I have all my ladies in the right spots. There are two gals from first year who did fine work, and while I'll be using both of them, they really could do either role.



Figure 6: Helena Fisher-Welsh & Thomas Elms. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson

November 1, 2013

I had the final concept meeting with my designers. Trying to find a time when all could attend was a nightmare, but we were able to do it! I wanted it to be informal and listen to the questions and inspirations. I don't feel like they've got a handle on the collaborative side of this, but instead they're looking and concerned only with their corner of the design

picture as more of a student assignment—which it is, sure, but we need to stitch the picture together a bit more.

Daniel had gone quite a distance in designing a complex underscoring of the action and actors. After some lengthy discussion, we decided we needed more ‘framing’ from the music in between the acts, for the set changes and to invoke a feeling of the world and the progression of time and circumstance. His advisor, Andrew Tugwell, has been present a lot, and that has lead to some fruitful discussions and suggestions. From Satie to Miles Davis we are looking for the sound to match the heart of the matter. I’m beginning to see the music as an important thread that transitions us from act to act. The scene change from Act 3 to 4 in particular needs to turn the world of these people in on themselves plus cover a substantial furniture and set change.

I don’t want to disguise these events, but rather have a time where the play breathes and remains alive still—invite the audience in. Perhaps a choreographed interchange and using the servants to dress the incoming set will help.

Also, the largest question for everyone being the play-within-the-play, what is the music that exists (if at all) during this? We settled on looking at Yakov etc. perhaps playing some ambient sounds from the house, as directed by Konstantin, or a gramophone. Not sure, but I think this might be useful rather than recorded music.

Sian is doing her sketches. I will meet with her on her own when she is further along in her process and when there is more to edit from. When I'm given only a pencil drawing, I have a hard time being specific about the article of clothing other than general comments.

November 18, 2013

Meeting with Sian before the Costing Production meeting on November 20th. Starting to see the designs coming through, although we are waiting on the floor colour palette. I like the direction things are taking, but we are in pretty much the same state with the drawings that we were last week.

I'm grateful to Jodi Jacyk for all her work helping Sian. She is head of costumes and seems to be invaluable in preparing and focusing the work towards production. She is very patient and I can see how Sian's work is growing more confident and interesting as we go along.

November 20, 2013

Costing meeting: Everyone was in attendance except Daniel, the sound designer and Stephen Malloy. It was mostly about budgets, expenses and making some decisions on materials. There was a lot of discussion on the floor/backdrop material and what/how that will work. I'm interested in how it will be painted, as I believe the effect of the 'squeegees' across the painting (which gives it that altered and much changed look) will be lost if we just try and duplicate the model colour.



Figure 7: Elliot Squire, set design detail. Act 4 The Seagull



Figure 8: The Seagull Act 4. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson

This is the riskiest part of the design—it will either be really cool and a perfect ‘place’ to set these people on this world, or it will look like a confused mess. I am still very convinced that I want to try making it work.

Sian took the biggest hit to get things more along for costumes. She has a large task in front of her to start pulling out of various warehouses and costume stock rental places to see where she is.. \$2,000 budget, set the same, props \$1,000, paint \$650. It is very tight.

Meeting with Lauren for lighting design. This will be our first formal meeting, and I was really happy how it went. I was able to articulate the world of each act and, more importantly, the rhythm/feel of the act transitions. We spoke to quite an extent about the ‘natural’ feel of the lighting as well as the claustrophobia and two-year shift into Act 4. She seems really excited about the possibilities of the backdrop and floor morphing and creating a very dynamic surface to play on.

Ndola is so wonderful and positive. I’m amazed at her consistently upbeat attitude and very no nonsense nature—extremely useful for a stage manager.

November 22, 2013

Meeting with Daniel and Andrew Tugwell on sound design. So glad Andrew was there to offer suggestions and monitor where we were. Daniel threw out some great ideas, but we were missing anything with a Russian feel and any generational or period components.

Also, many of the songs were really strong lyrically. I felt they would detract from the

investment in the story as we moved through the play. I think instrumental is where we need to go. The music can help us with these act changes and we talked a lot about those. Andrew said he felt we were in really good shape.

Received some much better samples of the floor treatment from Elliot. More contrast, less muddy and more interesting.

December 2, 2013 -- FIRST DAY OF REHEARSALS~ *The Seagull*, Telus Studio

A full company introduction using full names (including middle) and the full name of their role or duty. Please see Appendix A for a detailed outline of my presentation.

The reading. It went well and I asked them to not 'perform' the play, but to 'listen' to it. I was struck by the change between the first two acts and the last two. Outside to inside, overt love proclamations to needier and rejected advances.

We then presented the set. Elliot did a fabulous job. Showed the video of the art critic from the Guardian describing Gerhard Richter's works, presented black-boarded inspiration and design concept pictures, culminating in showing his beautiful maket, which excited everyone.

Lauren did lights with the model. Brief, but I was excited and she has some great ideas about the play-within-the-play and the transitioning backdrop. If we can create a movie

patina with aspects of the seasons, time and emotions rushing along and through the lights, I'll be really happy.

The costume presentation was sadly disappointing. Sian was sick and her assistant, Curtis, tried to do the best he could. But he was reading little notes that were short-handed and not always good for actors to hear. As an example, making it sound like Yakov wouldn't get much of a costume because he's a 'smaller character' (you could see Zach's heart drop), and there were many disconnects between the explanation for the design and the actual conversations about the decisions made. I also had to ask him to get copies of the design pictures so we could pass them around.

I was struck once again by the importance of the silences as an extension of the conversations in this play. Also by how much age there is on stage and the battle between the older and younger generations.

We broke for dinner. When we came back, I had prepared an investigation into some aspects of Chekhov and his world that I felt were important for this production.

December 3, 2013

We began by sharing our homework. I asked each actor to find five facts about a subject each actor chose that they were interested in or might relate to their character and to late 19th century Russia. Great stuff: food, serfdom, celebrity, melodrama, political world,

housemaids, woman position, education etc. It was empowering for the actors to share their research and nice that it did not come from me.

We then started to go through the play from the top. Classic table work with scene breaks, titles and conversations. Unfortunately, it became very clear that the conjecture and suppositions were rampant, time consuming and, with 13 actors, it was unruly. I tried to keep them on track with given circumstances and finding the where, when, why and who, but it took us 2.5 hours to cover the first 3 scenes—too long.

After dinner we hit the deck with some physical work. I need to use the next three days for experimenting with the room, sight lines and sound issues.

- Found and gesture circle
- Passing ‘nothing moment’ mime props and added in saying everyone’s names. What was interesting here was the need for this group to entertain one another and they laugh and respond so purposefully that they start to ‘play’ to the reaction rather than staying in the work. However, when we added the names everyone really got stoic and settled into this experience—which I loved.
- Next we started the grotesque walk. With that many people we had to do 3 at a time and I used lines from the play which encouraged them to interact with one another in some really cool ways. Some spectacular moments: Nick and Helena as Medvedenko and Masha...so serious and then trying to get the other one to laugh...a lovely connect. Thomas, who is so fidgety, getting him to stand on his words.

- Watched some movement from above to begin testing and trying to frame the beginning of the play and the transitions. Best when Masha was in the centre with all moving around her.
- The metallic 'ring' is really intense and it's hard to hear anything when more than one person is talking. This is important to note for the atmospheric sound may not be workable when anyone is speaking.

December 4, 2013

Last day in the Telus. All called and we began work on identifying and naming all the facts and questions in the script. This was an exercise from Katie Mitchell, which I'd used in my analysis and I decided to introduce it for focusing and highlighting the action of the story as we went through our table work. It also got away from all the conjecture that was so time consuming and premature at this point in the process. We would read, and if something was not a fact then it was a question. We will use the facts as we move forward to analyze the script and characters with the questions clearly defined for our scene work and the character biographies that each actor would be undertaking. I will break this work up so we're not sitting for long periods.

In the afternoon I wanted to block the large group scene before we had to leave the theatre for the next ten days. We didn't have a lot of time, so instead of sitting at the table, I got them to go for it and see what happens. We warmed up first with music, movement and a 'body reading' exercise. The scene actually found itself and we had some interesting interaction. Lessons learned:

- People need to activate their backs
- A lot of solo lines means actors have to move before they talk to draw focus
- Sitting on the 2nd and 3rd tier made the deck edges harder to see

December 5, 2013

We actually got to start the play. First up was Masha and Medvedenko and scene one. So lovely to really get into the work. We spoke about the practicality of this couple and some of the considerations of their upbringing and status. Given circumstances and intentions with objectives and intentions and a great conversation about their history and some of the obstacles to the romantic overtures Medvedenko suggests. I love the height that Nick has and how he can play with his status so well. He needs to remember that Medvedenko is not a hero, but a very ordinary man—I see a lot of the posture and mask of the last show they’ve been working on, *Pride and Prejudice*, which was so presentational. I want to ground them in the really profound needs of these characters and how they can be ridiculous in their pursuits.

In the afternoon all were called to continue with the facts and questions. The acts seem to highlight a different character for each: Act 1-Konstantin, Act 2-Trigorin, Act 3-Arkadina and Act 4-Nina. I want to somehow leapfrog this emphasis through the scene changes and blocking.

Met with Deb regarding the publicity. I’m sorry I can’t call the entire cast for a photo call.

With my emphasis on ensemble it seems hypocritical. Had a quirky idea to use the candy

'Love Hearts' with the inscriptions to present a different approach. She liked it, but I think it may have been a bit 'out there' for her purposes.

December 9, 2013

"There is no way to really put your finger on what makes conducting great, even what makes conducting work. Essentially what conducting is about is getting the players to play their best and to be able to use their energy and to access their point of view about the music. There is a connection between the gesture, the physical presence, the aura that a conductor can project, and what the musicians produce."

Alan Gilbert, music director of the New York Philharmonic

We began Act 3 today. I feel like I need to step back and look at the big picture. The work is detailed and the mini steps tend to make me go 'microscopic' on things. I would like to widen my gaze and try and get the larger picture more solidly in view. We are fiddling with furniture and trying to make sure we have enough for the variation and needs of the scenes, but not too much so all the actors have 'islands' to perch on. I want them to 'have to' stand or sit on the ground.

There is fatigue in the ensemble, I think. They've had a busy fall. With exams they're looking at things pretty casually and weakly. But I must not let that affect me or slacken the work. I need to be ON them if we are to convincingly and compellingly tell the story of these people. The little Canadian people want to stay safe and they need to be brave.

In the evening I've been asked to be on a panel with John Wright, Jerry Wasserman and Richard Neuman on "Staging Chekhov" at the Vancouver Public Library where we will

discuss our processes. I was quite nervous and definitely the weak link on the panel. However, I was able to articulate my ideas and thoughts about the writer and his plays. The onion, peeling the layers of character and story, being the essence of Chekhov for actors.

December 10, 2013

Act 3 is driven by Arkadina's attempts to get out of the estate and back to Moscow with Trigorin in tow as soon as she can. Mercedes and Matt are running into the old actor problem of really wanting us to 'like' these characters. Matt was having blocks understanding how his path changes from asking Arkadina to stay for one more day, to asking her to 'let him go' for Nina. He does not want to make strong or obvious choices. Instead he would rather 'wonder' or be unsure. So we spent a fair amount of time going through what Trigorin's actions were. It was useful for me to help him track through on this and to try and have HIM come to the answer I wanted him to. It was 'leading the witness' to come to a vision that I think is the story Chekhov is telling.

After lunch we blocked the large exit scene, and then I wanted to collectively breathe, check in and energize the cast. So I got them doing the extended Grotowski exercise which we established. Then they chose a character opposite and used that to fling onto either side. After I pulled them into a circle and while we moved around, I got them to jump into the circle, one at a time, and tell their character's story (past tense, first person). Exhausting and exhilarating! We moved and punched and stomped and vocalized. I wanted them to FEEL the energy collectively and go back into the story with verve. It worked.

Act 3 was good. It's Arkadina's act and it will need a very purposeful working to empower and encourage Mercedes from the weak Arkadina who seems resistant to the darkness of her character's ego and power right now. There is a great deal of zig-zag, high-low contrast and I think she just needs confidence and time to let it cook. She needs to give herself permission.

Stage management needed to be reminded of the help they can provide by making the props available and in the correct place, the blacks drawn over the mirrors, calling the actors down etc. There are 3 of them. We then figured out the schedule for the next 4 days.

December 11, 2013

Began Act 4. We did table work on this act with facts and questions until 1:30. Everyone was sharper on this and the conjecture and suppositions minimal. Some ends being tied up and lots of illuminating answers to the questions.

Production meeting: Everyone seemed in good spirits and, with the exception of Jacqueline, all in attendance. I have to say I feel under the belly of this script. In rehearsals I feel like I'm stretching to lead this discussion and find the answers that everyone seems to be looking for. I love it and I'm feeling inspired, suitably confused so I'm enticed and working hard. Jodi looked swamped and I'm concerned about her. I will go over tomorrow at lunch and then meet Daniel about the sound at 6:30.

We started in on Act 4, the first 2 scenes and I was so smacked at the difference in tone we found. It's strained and the extensions of human kindness from asking for horses or Konstantin extending his hand to Medvedenko when Polina refuses all fuel this simplicity and weightiness. Javier is starting to work with Stephen on a deeper investigation of the character and it's helping. We have to be aware however, that as he gets closer to frailty he doesn't lose volume.

I need to eat and drink water.

December 12, 2013

I feel like a rhythm is being established and the work is starting to have a cumulative purpose.

Lots to be optimistic about, however I have to keep my eye on the larger story we're telling. This play demands a complex sense of timing, and I suspect I get seduced into the small meticulous advancements and discoveries that each individual actor is making. I need to stay objective.

Stage management: Ndola, Becky and Kaylin are really starting to support the process and I love their good humour and patience. Ndola has been really detailed and has a great troubleshooting instinct.

Saw some of the costumes, which were nice and the actors seem happy about them. I want them to be fairly broken down, except Arkadina who needs to shine with a diva's attention to detail. Pockets are needed especially for Trigorin's notebook etc and I know this is proving difficult, but it's non-negotiable.

December 15, 2013

Run through on Friday and notes/ work on Saturday. I also let them have a 'lay in' on Saturday morning 10-12, to work on script at home. They deserved it; it's been a long week.

Friday run: Overall really good and I started to see development. They were thinking about character and the choices were coming through. We can do a lot of tightening and I have to clarify the scene change from Act 1 to 2.

The coolest thing to happen, and I can't believe I forgot about this, was that it was really the first time many of them had seen anything of the others' scenes. They were showing off their work, and this meant they got to see where THEY were in the world of the play and world of rehearsal. There were some fabulous moments and laughs that no one expected. (I almost want to suggest they are not allowed to laugh at one another, but overall they are powering in and not playing for laughs, which is imperative.)

- Very impressed that Act 1 held together as well as it did.

- Helena is starting to get the vibe of Masha and is really interesting to watch, but she needs to get consistent and find her body in space.
- Javier needs to start clarifying what he's saying and vary his speech—he has no idea how flat he sounds. He's very open and I think he just needs confidence building and the right to enjoy Sorin.
- Thomas is acting too much on his pauses, but when he hits something and connects with it you really can't take your eyes off him. He holds his tension in his hands. This almost, but not quite, works for Konstantin.
- Daniel is underprepared and the staccato rhythm he's given Dorn, at high speeds, is not on track.
- Naomi is trying some nice stuff
- Mercedes is starting to realize the payoff of the BIG Arkadina bursts and the relationships that hinge on the zig-zag of emotional and intentional action. She hauled off and slapped Thomas as her son, unexpectedly and while this is totally unacceptable, it was incredible and awesome—I'm sorry to say. Will look at choreographing and keeping it.
- Matt is still locked down and afraid of being the bad guy. Needs to vary his intonation and find more of Trigorin's charm.
- Nathan I'm guiding away from his tendency to be clowning and I'm encouraging him to stay in the real world of his actions and his objectives. Shamrayev is powerful and a yearning artist too.
- Natasha is doing great, but needs to start reining in the high-pitched horse. I've asked her to remember the nature of her upbringing, her independence and her

intelligence. She mustn't be playing this girl as a ninny and can bring her voice into a more grounded place.

- Nick made some different choices, which we worked on Saturday to get back to the world Medvedenko is in. He doesn't want Medvedenko to be 'a wimp' or a 'wuss'. What is his character I ask? He's a bear he says. We look at this analogy and I encourage him to see the loyal, servant of a dog and perhaps a more appropriate animal. Nick is a harsh judge of this character and I challenged him to let Medvedenko be walked on-encourage it-revel in it. He seems to want peace in his life and that often takes being the doormat. We worked on this with an improvisation and found such a beautiful soul...it really is heart breaking when you see someone being so lovely and generous who just wants Masha to be his partner. Medvedenko is a kind of hero in this play.



Figure 9: Mercedes de la Zerda as Arkadina & Javier Sotres as Sorin. Photo credit-Nancii Bernard

December 16-21st Week 3

We are in the Telus. It is big and 'tinny' sounding. When people are not facing you it is hard to hear. Audience bodies will mitigate some of this 'aliveness' of the room, but our set isn't going to be helping us with this as, it takes the sound up and out through the 'lake'.

Final week before Christmas break, and I feel the play's loose ends are starting to flap in the wind so to speak. I would like to focus on cleaning and delving into the first three acts so actors have as strong a connection as possible to take them through the ten days off.

Monday December 16th

Worked on the play-within-the-play and adding Yakov, the maid and cook for sound scape and the effects. I want there to be a homemade feel for the soundscape, devil eyes and green marsh, plus there might be ways of accenting the speech with the instruments. There needs to be a minimal feel and some sense of Konstantin's spare style from the writing in his directing. I brought him into rehearsals so he could contribute if he felt the inclination.

Spacing: I need to see how all the entrances and exits are flowing and how they affect the private/public scenes that we have with multiple pictures/scenarios happening up and down stage of one another. I did a fairly extensive warm-up with the cast to further look at their characters' relationships to this world. How do they 'see' one another in this space. We looked at how their characters moved when they were pursuing someone they loved and how did they 'avoid' or 'get away' from the select person that was following them. We discovered that following someone you loved was a way of showing you loved them. It was panicky and at times characters felt desperate and needy. So how does this affect the overall arch of their objectives and the obstacles that they encounter?

We did a section on gestural work where I asked that they find, play with and exaggerate a physical gesture. Using five character adjectives, three actual character words and three character needs they laid these on while moving through the room. Encouraged to be daring, bold, and surprise themselves in the exploration. Then, I asked them to play with turning the 'dials' on the gesture to amplify or reduce the magnitude and extent of the movement. How does it make them feel? We then isolated one gesture and added an organic vocal colour to put onto the physical. Then in groups we showed and played with the exercise. My focus and the intent of this work is to find a vocabulary that is deeply connected with their characters and how that can inform the world in which they live. Lots of discussion, and it freed some restrictions they'd been inadvertently laying over their practice. Expansion now...we can look at perfection later. Be bold and adventurous and look for more—every time you're on stage you are looking and searching and finding something. What is it?

Expansion becomes particularly important as everyone is ALWAYS having to act with their backs and be alive in three dimensions. The typical stand and deliver, then wait for my next line approach is death in this space. They will all need to tell the whole story with their whole bodies to sell the layered approach I'm trying to articulate.

December 17, 2013

I wanted to have a roundtable and get everyone back into the space as a company. One of the challenges with this piece is trying to have the company invested and growing as an ensemble, but needing to schedule all the scene work that is generally two or three handlers

with entrances overlap. We can go great stretches without people needing to be there. So I'm trying to keep the integration by scheduling group work and movement exercises on a regular basis. I suspect the ensemble nature will be enforced by the runs. I am trying to make solid the fine detail work and make sure each actor is working on and growing into their choices. So Wednesday, Thursday and Friday we'll do in-depth, stop-and-start work culminating in the run on Saturday.

One of the things I did with them was a group think-tank on themes, habits, words, environment and received actions. We looked at each of these subjects and threw in very spontaneously and quickly what we thought. I loved all the light bulbs that were going off and how sharing these ideas invigorated the spheres of personal and public, spoken and unspoken.

Many themes were mentioned, and of these we highlighted five to investigate physically: money, love and unrequited love, the purpose of art, family and belonging, the effects of time in regard to endurance and the old versus the new.

What questions do I want the audience to ask themselves in relation to these themes? How and who do I love around me? What could Arkadina have done to help Konstantin in his development and maturation? If she had given him the money, would he have found something, somewhere else to occupy his passions and have given him some self worth? Would I be able to go on as Nina does after all the tragedies she suffers? Why did Kostya need to kill himself?

Gayle Murphy came in and gave some great help, which was very needed! She is helping with Daniel's cadence and inflection, Natasha's working to pitch at a lower register, Javier's vocal staccato rhythm, Matt's need to work on variation of pitch and other specifics. This is useful and I'm appreciating, and I think the actors are as well, the multiple rooms of work happening when people aren't being used with me specifically on their scenes.

Stephen has offered to work with Javier. I'm running out of ideas other than direct line readings, as he seems unable to vary his intonation at all. This certainly isn't unexpected as his first language is Mexican and he's very green. We need to help him understand what he's saying and why, and to play an action or verb on everything. Also, as the others are starting to make some important inroads and discoveries, poor Javier is aware of falling behind and starting to lose confidence. This is my greatest concern, because I want him to feel self-assured. I know he has the ability to give Sorin a beautiful, melancholy and poetic soul.

The production meeting was useful. I asked to heighten the posts for the 'stage' curtain and start integrating the instruments for the play-within-the-play. Props need to stop being mimed and we need to get them or facsimiles so the actors can find the rhythm and nature of what they're dealing with.

December 18, 2013

Worked through all of Dorn and Polina's scenes. There is a lot of stuff percolating in this relationship and the scenes are intense and brief. I asked that Naomi try to find the emotional weight in Polina's reaction to Dorn's rejection. We talked about various 'as-ifs' and I got them to paraphrase the scene to accent what and how they're really driving through their objectives. This is hard, but I think she will be game if she can start to really connect with the honesty and truthfulness that Polina seems to value and which she emphasizes.

Digging in and going deep...then covering up. How much can NOT happen and how active can that NOT happening be? Illuminate what's not happening by GRASPING what they can.

They need to lay their spines on the tracks of this play, let themselves get hit and see what happens.

Stephen had a great point about the asides and how people are foolish when they are alone and sometimes very messy. We need to let the characters just *live* in front of us. What is the aftermath of Konstantin's play-within-the-play and how do each of these people cope?

December 19, 201

We found some great physical business in the garden scene with Sorin and Arkadina's umbrella, and it encapsulates some of the difficulties Javier is having. I give him suggestions or prescriptive blocking/choices just to have some variation in the delivery,

and yet he can't incorporate it. Yes, I want him to make choices and create the character, but he can't seem to imagine outside of himself. I need him to not be pleasing me, but to dig in, play through or lean into his wants and aims.

Saturday December 21

This is the last day before we break for Christmas, and I'm very curious to see what this break will do to the work we've done.

We had a very good run through of Acts 1, 2 and 3. Thoughtful and messy people who needed to be with one another. There was some love, they tended to figure out a reason for being in the room and a lot of pauses! They need to use the words and have more impetus behind their intentions!

Generally I'm very pleased with the growth. While we didn't get to the fourth act in a substantial way, I'm not too worried because I think this actually makes sense to the structure of the story. The depth they found in rehearsal was clearly in the right direction, and I feel the run of the first three acts left an excited and motivated group of actors to ponder their existence, lines and *The Seagull* over turkey, sleep and Santa.

January 2-4 2014

We return for three full eight-hour days and I have tried to focus on a few areas:

- After having 11 days off we need to remind, refresh and run the first three acts.
What have they lost and what has deepened? Who has done their homework and taken the challenge to get further along in the acting process?
- Work to get the ensemble back into group and focus on the task at hand.
- Get Act four on its feet, work it through and tie it all together.
- Start seeing how our props, sound and music cues begin to lay in.
- A full run of the whole play. Put the pieces together. What are the rhythms of the full story arc? Where does the humour and darkness resonate and how do we build company stamina?
- Use this time as a type of intensive to get the show in shape before we go into evening rehearsals where actors will have to split their focus with classes. We have to move into technical considerations and we're in the home stretch.

Thursday I used a Mike Alfred technique where we do a 'fun' run, literally running through the first three acts. When they were talking they had to gallop or race, pursue their objectives, know how they are moving and CUE up the lines which was very necessary from the last run. Otherwise they could lie on the floor or walk. I encouraged them to move as fully and spontaneously as they could. Wake up their bodies.

It worked. They were exhausted, alive, deeply connecting their bodies to the play and breathing together. An unexpected bonus was how this energy made it more sexual and

raised the stakes in the passionate scenes—they had to work harder through exhaustion towards their desires. Alternately, I saw the older characters fight to slow down what was all rushing past them.

Friday we finished up Act 4 and ran it in the afternoon. This act is Nina's act from the long conversation about her circumstances to her arrival at the window. The play is very different in the final two-year time frame and there is a profound sense of empathy, frailty and acceptance...also the faith that plays into one's life journey.

Saturday we worked on Arkadina's story line from the third act, all her scenes in order to look at the links and progressions. Useful, and Mercedes is starting to risk more, each time with greater results giving her more confidence to go even further. Then a run of the whole play, notes and I'm sick as a dog with a huge chest cold, cough and runny nose.

January 8th, 2014

Monday we worked on acts 3 and 4, then ran the whole show on Tuesday. I'm trying to get them to take power, work on control and ownership of their characters and to feel the right rhythms THEMSELVES. I emphasized to the whole company, rather forcefully, that they need to find their bodies, they need to do it now—commit to it and be brave, because we're out of time for keeping it safe. If they don't try it now, they'll never get another chance.

Pace. Entrances and exits. The scenes that need the most attention: setting and stakes in Arkadina and Trigorin's fight. Natasha needs to trust herself and the work she's done, Matt

must find the balance of a passionate self-loathing writer and the charming famous man yearning for this girl. Helena is so funny and pathetic. Thomas has to breathe and live in his body.

I had a meeting with my advisor, Stephen, and he pointed out a number of things that were in the relationships of Arkadina and Trigorin and Nina and Konstantin. He helped articulate what and how I can help Naomi and Daniel with the difficult Polina and Dorn scenes. They have to jump into these big subjects and emotions while trying to keep it all under wraps. It's a great example of the moving target kind of objective and having to keep reassessing one's objectives and wants.

Tonight I wanted to clean Act 1 and give some changes from the run. I also wanted to warm them up and get them breathing...did the 'machine' exercise from Heatley to encourage working together and picking up slack. Then I created an exercise called 'Jerome Robbins' where I wanted them to lead, copy and DANCE. Activate bodies. I would get one leader and they would choose someone or two or ten to follow. They were to copy what the leader was doing as precisely as possible. It was fun and enlivening, and I liked it with really high volume.

The work and run on Act 1 is coming and Mercedes is starting to find some more charm for Arkadina rather than the 'Mommie Dearest' she's been building. This woman is a diva and charming. The play-within-the-play was more fun and Natasha kept it really simple.

January 15, 2014

The director's notes are done and I wish I'd started them quite a bit earlier. What does one say about Chekhov? I feel like the process is so split between wanting to create and mount great theatre, but this is, first and foremost a learning process. So the adjustment or understanding of one's expectations in relation to my abilities and experience and feeling like I have to justify everything—which is ridiculous.

I have used the last three evenings to try and get us in good shape for tech. Monday we did a run. However, I stopped after the second act so we could work on the notes. Things need to be fixed on their feet now, integrated and then cemented. If there is a misunderstanding or conversation it can happen, get to the agreement and then set it. This was useful, and then we ran the third act.

Tuesday we did a full run and I thought it went well. Javier is coming in and settling, Thomas is a bit over the top but we spoke about playing the intention not the energy and I think he's putting it all together. Mercedes is still backing off the size of Arkadina, Helena is needing to find her beat changes and not be wishy washy, Matt is coming ON, Natasha had a nice run and is settling in.

Having Gayle on hand has been invaluable. The actors don't want me to be nagging them, and honestly I don't hear a tenth of what Gayle can. She is honest, funny and really on the money.

Tonight we needed to work on the most challenging scene changes to make them elegant, efficient and fast! We then ran Act 1 and worked on Trigorin and Arkadina's big fight...they found something of the spirit of these people. I saw a maturity in these characters, and Mercedes is finding a much higher set of stakes: she ripped into "Am I so old and ugly..." This increases the overall weight of the scene and makes her ultimate power line, "Now he's mine" sing. We won't do a run until Saturday night, which concerns me.

I feel strangely relaxed. I feel like things are moving forward and now it needs to cook. I almost feel like I should book out for a few days, let them own it. Or am I just really tired and I need 'new' eyes on the whole proceedings? Or maybe I'm just holding my breath for tech.

January 16, 2014

Lynn Burton from the UBC prop shop has been invaluable! She has, with her students, created two beautiful smaller lake gulls. I can't imagine the time that went into them, and they are incredible! Lynn has given so much to this show and we've relied on her expertise constantly. Elliot's set is largely a canvas for the furniture and room dressings and they have searched, found, repaired and acquired a beautiful worn theme through out. I didn't get my live flowers, but I got my apples, snuff and ink well.

The ink well pour into the garbage can is working beautifully, and it adds a finality to all of Konstantin's tearing and ripping of his writings.

January 18, 2014

An Italian and I've tasked them to concentrate on thinking faster, sparking to retort faster and even listening faster. Also, I had to really clamp down on the noise backstage.

I'm so happy with how the costumes and set have integrated with the lighting levels now starting to be consistent and filling the picture with a gorgeous palette. Arkadina's new dress for Act 1 that Jodi found is spectacular: a bit too young, flamboyant and perfectly pink.

Ndola is keeping up with all the adjustments and we finally found a spectacular bit of music for the end. Daniel has spent a lot of time trying to get this right, and he's really pulled some perfect and very evocative sound into the transitions that move us effortlessly into the next scene.

January 23, 2014 Opening Night

I have no idea what happened tonight. I was thrilled for them, but I was not prepared for the adrenaline that hit me or the rather new problem of having to sit still! As an actor the opening night jitters are extended into one's performance and applied to the show. My problem was having nowhere for that tension to get worked out and expelled.

There were some great discoveries, and the final scene with Nina and Konstantin had never been better. Natasha was flying and I understood her need to leave, but her compulsion to stay with Trigorin so close. I loved what Lauren found with the lighting design.

February 1-5th

Traveled to Montreal to see Peter Hinton's adaptation and direction of *The Seagull*. I loved sitting there and watching a play I've eaten and slept with for so long, be transformed by adaptation and performance—like being with an old friend after many years. He made a brilliant adjustment in casting by making Sorin a woman, Aunt Sorinna, doting on her Konstantin with deep resonance as the childless spinster. Was able to see *Porgy and Bess* at Montreal opera and Robert LePage's *Playing Cards: Hearts*.

February 9, 2014 Closing Night

The final show rumbled with depth and confidence. I saw where the decisions I made worked and where they weakened over the run. Very useful information and it brought into relief where I had failed to solidify the 'what' and 'why' of the action. I can't fully articulate how compelling these performers have become and how fully they have brought to life, in 360 degrees, these characters. Final thoughts on the closing night's performance:

- They have come so far. The general shape of the show has held and they have found some incredible depth.
- Mercedes has just filled Arkadina with humanness, and every second she is fighting for something. It is a pleasure to see her finding this woman's soul and the relationships have blossomed.
- The scene change between 3 & 4, as Trigorin and Nina leave the kiss and follow one another out to Moscow, is stunning. All the transitions in general were lovely.

- That moment when Arkadina surprises Trigorin and Nina at the end of Act 2 just kicked up the whole tension of the piece beautifully! The rhythm shift from easy, charming pastoral to getting caught in the action.
- We needed more time to understand the variation, angling and moving through the space to open themselves up.
- The rhythm of the play-within-the-play is cooking and Natasha is doing a great job in playing Nina who is trying so hard to be Good at what she does. She is earnest, to counter and which drives Arkadina crazy.
- I go back and forth on the wheelchair being so far DSC with its back to the majority of the house...in the end I liked it though-it was weak/he is weak. He is a wheelchair. It made everyone so concentrated on that spot which was the audience's sweet spot to be sure.
- We lost some of the irony. Some of the tactics that people use to survive and fight for their lives was under a fairly dense fog of earnestness and self-pity. This was disappointing to see.
- I felt we made sense of the final Nina and Konstantin scene. "I am a seagull"... I cried like a baby.
- The final line by Dorn never landed. I'm disappointed about this and take responsibility for it.
- Group effort with Javier!
- At times Nick lost the mask of Medvedenko and I've wondered a lot about this. It seemed like he needed to find something that 'worked' in his mind or seemed to make it (being the character) effortless. What I think went missing is that he never

understood that it is NOT easy for Medvedenko to *be* Medvedenko and so the actor defaulted to a smiley, fake ease rather than the awkwardness and love he felt.

- Strength of the company and willingness to be brave and vulnerable
- Helena started to really breath into Masha. Her dancing was heartbreaking as was her proclamation to wed Medvedenko. Still has to work on consistency.
- The heart of the piece, connected to the ridiculous pursuit of love in all its guises, shows itself in person on the stage. They are working as an incredibly strong ensemble and they are very proud, as they should be, about their work.
- The audiences seemed to love it, the ticket sales were way beyond what they'd budgeted, we got tremendous reviews. The best part—how many people commented on how funny they thought it was!

CHAPTER 3: Detailed Scene Analysis

ACT 1: Opening Night of Konstantin's Play

Friday August 18th, 1895, 8:10pm.

A warm evening at twilight near the edge of a lake on Sorin's estate.

- Love is in the air.
- The gathering
- Excitement and a sense of frivolity
- The audience gets ready, build up
- Opening night—tensions
- Full moon, crazy people, dusk to Dark
- Coming together
- Dealing the cards
- Damp lakeside, elemental
- Exposure

Scene 1: Masha Rejects Medvedenko's Proposal Pgs: 9-10

Tempo/Adjectives:

Pressed, urgent, needy, examining, kindness, rejection, helpfulness, frankness, honesty, efficient, practical, uneven.

Action Summary:

Medvedenko has come to see if Masha will accept his proposal of marriage. She refuses his offer, he accepts her refusal and, in fact, reasons that he is too poor anyway to make a suitable match.

Analysis:

Love unaccepted, and we feel the presence of a third party or a love triangle right away. We also get a graciousness about the outcome from both Masha and Medvedenko in that he believes it is 'fair' to reject him. Right away the imbalance of love relations and expectations is front and centre. The first of many discussions of the weather and 'a storm approaching'.

Oppositions:

Rich/poor

Mourning-death/life

Nina and Konstantin in love/Masha and Medvedenko not in love

Nina and Medvedenko are drawn to the estate/Konstantin and Masha are stuck there.

Artistic ideal of the artists and play/Medvedenko's preoccupation with the tedium of his work.

Longing for Masha and the practicalities of work, commerce and 'business' of and love unrequited.

Scene: 2 The Nervous Writer Pgs: 10-15

Tempo/Adjectives:

Expectation, excited, waiting, irritated, judicious, jealous, caring, unsatisfied, unresolved, resenting.

Action Summary:

We get a very clear picture of Arkadina's importance in these men's lives and how they are essentially stuck on this estate, not of their own choice. We also hear the story of Arkadina's new lover and get a sense of Konstantin's disdain for

Trigorin. The primary event is that we find out that Arkadina is ‘...out of spirits’ and we begin to see what Konstantin really thinks of his mother.

Analysis:

Konstantin feels the pressure of proving to his mother and the woman he loves, Nina, that he is worthy of them, so we begin to see this boy stuck between childishness and adulthood. There is a deep sense of love and companionship that Sorin and Konstantin extend to one another. We are introduced to Konstantin’s most troubling quest; “Who am I?”

Oppositions:

Needing approval/rejecting needing anything

Town/Country

Too much sleep/not enough sleep

Generous/selfish (Arkadina)

She loves me/She loves me not

43/32

Seriousness (Kostya)/light irony (Sorin)

conventional/unconventional

sacred art/prescriptive and routine art

ashamed/proud

famous writer/minor writer

married/unmarried

Scene: 3 Full Hearts Pgs: 14-17

Tempo/Adjectives:

Fast, breathless, expectant, nervous, quivering, showing off, excited, passionate.

Action Summary:

The writer and the actress prepare for the opening night of their play. Nina has escaped her prison.

Analysis:

We see and feel the power and size of youthful love as it attempts to vault over all forms of parental prisons. Konstantin's faceoff with his mother's jealousies and need to show her he is of value and worthy of her love. This place and these people represent freedom and life and the idealized objects of her hopes and dreams.

Oppositions:

Parental jealousy/Innocence of their children

Crying/laughing

Strong voice/unpleasant voice

Nervousness/embarrassment

Scene: 4 The Old Lovers Pgs: 17-18

Tempo/Adjectives:

Worried, slower pace, forward-but-should-go-back, yearning, holding, rejecting, soothing, holding, jealous

Action Summary:

Dorn and Polina, the sometimes lovers, find themselves alone in the clearing and Polina expresses her jealousy and desire for Dorn.

Analysis:

We are exposed to the long, adulterous affair between old lovers. A lopsided affair that no longer smolders like the youthful puppies who paw and slobber at one another (Konstantin and Nina), but the unresolved and unfulfilled Polina searching for Dorn's affections. How Arkadina has and still looms large in their relations.

Oppositions:

Doctor who doesn't take care of himself

Shrugging/Seizing

"Oh my darling"/"Don't"

Alone/together

Scene: 5A Opening Night-The Audience Arrives Pgs: 18-20

Tempo/Adjectives:

Anticipation, urgent, excited, nervous, irritated, expectant, inquiring, hasty, settling, impatient

Action Summary:

Interrupting the passionate pleas of Polina, the audience arrives for the play.

Arkadina performs Gertrude in an excerpt from Hamlet.

Analysis:

We are introduced to Arkadina, Shamrayev and Trigorin and get a keen sense of who wants and needs attention—Arkadina. Konstantin plays into the Hamlet

reference by retorting Hamlet's 'enseamed bed' lines in a poke at her relationship with the much younger Trigorin, who remains silent.

Oppositions:

Famous actress/"The theatre isn't what it used to be"

Excitement/boredom

Audience/Stage performers

Hamlet/Gertrude

Professional/amateur

Scene: 5B Konstantin's Play Pgs: 20-22

Tempo/Adjectives:

Mysterious, meditative, breathing, slow, wonderment, alone, fearless, lonely, interruptions, rudeness, decadence

Action Summary:

Nina performs Konstantin's play that is interrupted by Arkadina and so Konstantin brings down the curtain.

Analysis:

To see the earnest presentation that Konstantin and Nina have created with the help of Yakov and the Maid. To see what symbolism and idealism Konstantin has been reflecting on and his inner turmoil and solitude. "Like a prisoner cast into an empty well." "...No one hears me." (Gill, 2000) The casual reception and interruptions from the family, specifically his mother, pushes Konstantin to stop

the performance and then become emotionally overwhelmed where he has to leave the scene.

Oppositions:

Life/death

I am everything/There is nothing

Angel/Devil

Water/stones

Insider/outsider of the monopoly of actors

Scene: 5C The Curtain Falls Pgs: 22-24

Tempo/Adjectives:

Speedy, misunderstanding, confusing, regret, frustration, anger, guilt

Action Summary:

Arkadina tries to recover after Konstantin leaves the 'theatre' and the audience members discuss the play. She attacks Konstantin and then is reminded by Sorin of how much he wanted to 'please' her. We are also introduced to some history of the estate and the antics of a younger Dr. Dorn and how it relates to the ladies. Singing from across the lake reminds the older generation of the past and the carefree, romantic interludes that they reveled in. "Vanity of youth."

Analysis:

We see Arkadina overstep herself and falter. She has to recover from her seeming insensitivities to her son. We see Arkadina masterfully turn the attention back onto happier memories in which she is centre stage and flirting

with her former suitors. This does not allay Arkadina's guilt however and she sends Masha to bring Konstantin back which allows us to recognize the sensitivity and sadness that shadows this mother and son relationship. We finally hear from Trigorin for the first time and it is in defense of the play and writer.

Oppositions:

Jokes/attacks

Spirit/matter

Selfishness/generosity

How it was/how it is/how it will be

Scene: 6 The Introduction of Nina Pgs: 24-27

Tempo/Adjectives:

Warming, encouraging, bolstering, quick, light, breezy, naive

Action Summary:

Nina is introduced to Trigorin and congratulated by Dorn, Sorin, Medvedenko and of course Arkadina who directs the proceedings. Nina realizes the time, becomes upset and must get home. They speak about Nina's family and how she has been treated very poorly.

Analysis:

We get to see the older, famous actress meet the new generation of actresses in Nina. Arkadina's nature, honed from years of notoriety and egoism, is confronted with the vivacious, unsullied youth of her young fan. The shamelessly self-aggrandizing Shamrayev brings this into higher relief as he wrestles with

Arkadina for the spotlight. We sympathize with Nina and realize why she became upset when she had to leave-her real home is with this group.

Oppositions:

Young actress/old actress

Talent/Luck

Curtain up/down

Fame/Shyness

County obscurity/City fame

Fishing/The JOY of Creation

Leaving/staying

Rich fortune/poor child

Ordinary/extraordinary

Scene: 7 Dorn Counsels the Youth Pgs: 27-30

Tempo/Adjectives:

Thoughtful, reflective, anxious, anxiety riddled, chased, chasing, surprise
realizations, building confidence, over-excited

Action Summary:

Begins with the first aside of the play when Dorn expresses how much he liked the play. It surprised him. We also see how Dorn is an important confidante to Konstantin and Masha. He seems to be able to build their confidence, which they both desperately need. Masha proclaims her love for Konstantin.

Analysis:

We see a parallel between the desperation of Konsantin and Masha, two people both running after someone that does not love them in the least. Howling at the moon. We also see how Konstantin's words actually DO speak to Dorn and affect him. Perhaps Konstantin's skills as a writer and director must not be written off. Dorn can see this and he has the good and gracious sense to nurture it. Dorn sees an artist. Masha proclaims her love for Konstantin to Dorn. We also sense there might be a deeper relationship between Dorn and Masha—is she his child?

Oppositions:

Loneliness/"Mashenka has been looking for me all over..."

Naïve, fresh/insufferable

Talented/failed

Contented/over-excited

ACT 2: People Get Burned

One week after Konstantin's play, Friday August 25th, 1895, Noon.

The garden near the house where there is a verandah. It is very hot.

- Hot
- Vacation, relaxation, boredom
- Familial strain
- Exposure. Burnt...ego's getting burned
- Overheated, or things are heating up
- Gathering, getting called
- Betting
- Building pillars and cutting them down
- Shade, getting away from the heat.

Scene: 1 Arkadina shows off Pgs: 31-32

Tempo/Adjectives:

Hot, sweaty, bored, showing off, prancing, elocution, performing, slumping,
reading, dripping

Action Summary:

We find Arkadina, Sorin and Masha in the garden reading Sur l'Eau by Maupassant aloud. Arkadina decides to give Masha a lesson in keeping herself up and how to enhance one's appeal. This may be for Dorn's benefit, but he seems to not take the bait.

Analysis:

We see how Arkadina controls most of the situations she is in and the level of self-centeredness she exudes. The selection they're reading aloud points out how women throw themselves at writers which Arkadina does not seem to acknowledge and in fact she points out how she is considerably different than Maupassant's example. We also see how Dorn is not just a follower of Arkadina's self-aggrandizement, but sidelines her tendencies.

Oppositions:

Old/young

43/15

Flattery/criticism

Russian women/French women

Calculating strategist/falling head over heels in love

Scene: 2 Boredom of the Country Pgs: 32-35

Tempo/Adjectives:

Laid back, hot, happy, slow, languid, something amiss, unsettled, sleepy, argumentative

Action Summary:

Sorin, Nina and Medvedenko join the others out in the garden. Nina's parents have gone away, leaving her free for three days to come and go as she pleases. Sorin dotes on Nina, which Arkadina puts a stop to, and Masha urges Nina to recite from Konstantin's play. The major event in this scene is the bickering of the old men, and one does sense that Dorn is dealing with his own health issues as he's not too sympathetic to his old friend Sorin's complaints.

Analysis:

There is an undercurrent of the jealousies these people have for one another that bubbles to the surface in interesting ways, particularly in the disagreement that Sorin and Dorn have about aging. We also see how Sorin is being followed by a wheelchair, pushed by Medvedenko, indicating his health has deteriorated since Act 1. It always seems to be better somewhere else. Nina adores Arkadina and seems quite indifferent to Konstantin's play...has this changed since it failed with everyone? When Masha leaves to get lunch it becomes apparent that everyone knows her need for alcohol is serious.

Oppositions:

Too much praise/ill luck

Full life/nothing life

Town/country

Alcohol and tobacco/health

Philosophizing/real life

With the family/Learning lines in a hotel room

Scene: 3 No Horses Pgs: 35-37

Tempo/Adjectives:

Fast, gallop, irritating, frustrated, angry, begging, pushing, storming

Action Summary:

Shamrayev, will not or cannot give horses to Arkadina and Polina to go to town.

So Arkadina gets furious and says she is walking to the station and will never come back.

Analysis:

We see how, ultimately, these landowners are really at the mercy of the work that needs to be done. And they are stuck. Shamrayev is incredible sarcastic and this denial of help and horses seems to be an ongoing frustration. Shamrayev quits, Sorin explodes and the whole event highlights the power inversion on the estate.

Oppositions:

Town/country

Love you/refuse you

Walk/ride

Arkadina fuming/Nina calming

Scene: 4 Dorn Refuses Polina Pgs: 37-38

Tempo/Adjectives:

Urgent, desperate, kind, gentle, irrational, sweet,

Action Summary:

Polina and Dorn are left in private and Polina pleads with Dorn to 'quit the lying' and to be together. Dorn says he is too old to change. While Polina takes this quite well, she continues on. Nina appears to be coming to get the doctor and interrupts...she covers by picking flowers, which she offers to Dorn. Polina rips the flowers apart.

Analysis:

There are some parallels to Masha's rejection of Medvedenko in the first scene when Dorn tells Polina he can't be with her. It is love rejected, but Polina has lived with this hope for so long she seems unable to understand it. A quick tone shift from Polina's distress and heartfelt request to the comedy of her furiously ripping the flowers.

Oppositions:

Flowers/ripped apart

Carriage horses/field horses

Lying/honesty

Too late/not enough time

Scene: 5 Dead Seagull Pgs: 38-40

Tempo/Adjectives:

Thoughtful, confusing, oddity, new steps, illuminating, sad, dismay, violent, pushy, rejection, unfathomable, sad, injured, dark, shadowed, needy,

Action Summary:

Nina has the second soliloquy or aside at the top of this scene where she expresses how confusing and weird it is that someone would refuse the famous Arkadina. The major event in the scene is Konstantin giving her the dead seagull. Nina tries to wiggle out of her attachment to Konstantin, and he becomes very angry and hurt. Trigorin enters and we get another Hamlet reference and sneering contempt at how it makes Nina smile. He exits.

Analysis:

We see how Nina idolizes these famous people. Konstantin's entrance is desperate and he is out of step with his emotions and feelings with no regard for Nina's entreaties. He knows he's done something vile in killing the bird, but he can't help himself he is so desperate for Nina's attentions and love. You start to get a very profound uneasiness in how the situation is not rational.

Oppositions:

A dead seagull/flying seagull

Denied celebrity/undeniable celebrity

Clever/confused

Ordinary/extraordinary

Birth, wealth/Merit

Scene: 6 A Brilliant Life Pgs: 40-46

Tempo/Adjectives:

Fast, debate, quick, jumping from stone to stone, frustrating, illuminating, hot, observational, exaggerated, idealized, unreasonable, mythologized, youthful, untrusting, trusting

Action Summary:

Nina puts Trigorin, his occupation and status as an artist on a pedestal and he dives off. (Somewhat like Konstantin puts Nina on a pedestal in the previous scene, and she won't have it.) We find a man obsessed with his writing, like Konstantin is obsessed with his need for love.

Analysis:

The desire for fame from Nina and the complicated prison that it has been for Trigorin. Nina also is guileless and in her insistence of perceptions of Trigorin's world, he has to or' leap the idea and consequently realizes some things about the situation. For a man that does not talk, we are now aware that he is ALWAYS listening and thinking. Anton Chekhov is surely in the words of Trigorin.

Oppositions:

Trusting/untrusting

Toil/boredom

Obsession/interest

Fame/obscurity

Youth/age

Wisdom/innocence

Brilliant/tedious

Significant/insignificant

INTERMISSION



Figure 10: Mercedes de la Zerda and Matt Kennedy. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson

ACT 3: The Leave-Taking

Wednesday August 30, 1895, 11:45 am. At the front door with the dining room off to the side.

- Leaving
- Konstantin has SHOT himself
- Packing up and gathering the remains
- Laying the cards on the table
- Honesty
- NEED TO GET OUT
- Too much, need for escape

Scene: 1 Just One More Pgs: 47-48

Tempo/Adjectives:

Contemplative, intimate, boozy, slow, wrapping it up

Action Summary:

Just before the scene, Masha has been telling Trigorin how much she loves Konstantin among other things. The most important thing that happens is she tells Trigorin that she is going to marry Medvedenko. We also find out why they are leaving: that Konstantin has tried to kill himself and has challenged Trigorin to a duel. Things are getting very uncomfortable. On Nina's entrance, Masha wraps it up and perhaps for her benefit tells Trigorin she is going to marry Medvedenko. Masha's drinking comes on stage and, as Dorn says in the second act, one becomes not "I" but "He" when drinking. We see Masha as she removes her desires and wants and will choose to replace the "I" for a "she".

Analysis:

We get to see what has transpired over the past week and how things are very out of balance. Curiously, Trigorin is not writing any of this down in his book as he usually does; instead he's eating a late lunch. What was he doing that he is eating late? Masha seems to understand him, calling him "...a simple man." Seeing the man not the fame. The personalities and needs of the characters, rejections and connections are creating havoc. Everyone knows everyone else's business, and we are seeing how this 'storm' is picking up speed.

Oppositions:

Tearing love out/getting married

Secretly/In the open

Sulking/preaching

Old forms/new forms

Scene: 2 Advice Pgs: 49

Tempo/Adjectives:

Quick, youthful, shy, impetuous, decided, alluring,

Action Summary:

Masha asks for his books and says a formal goodbye when she sees Nina arrive.

Nina is seeking Trigorin's approval of her decision to abandon her life by the lake.

She gives Trigorin a medallion inscribed with his initials, his book and some lines

from it which indicate her willingness to sacrifice everything to him. Trigorin

reiterates what he'll remember of her that is her in a white dress next to a dead seagull.

Analysis:

The power of love and a decision made is no match for any reasonable discussion. We see life taking its course over the inhabitants. We also see how everyone knows what is going on, but the shame of it all silences them. Nina slips out trying not to be noticed, but Arkadina is too smart for that.

Oppositions:

One pea/two peas

Days/nights

He loves me/I feel sorry for him

Odd/even

Scene: 3 What's the Cost Pgs: 50-53

Tempo/Adjectives:

Steady, the train is heading out, momentum, regret, fear, remorse, urgency, desperation, denial, lying, cheapness, sneaky, honesty, guilt, worry

Action Summary:

We know from Arkadina asking about Nina that she knows what is happening and wants to get going as soon as possible. Sorin is feeling ill, but very sad and concerned to see her going. Perhaps he thinks this might be the last time as his health is deteriorating quickly? The most significant event is him asking, on

behalf of Konstantin, for money to get the boy out and motivated away from the obsessive compulsions that seem to be drowning him. Sorin collapses.

Analysis:

There is an enormous amount of tension and worry as the family tries to clear out before any more harm can come to Konstantin. At the same time we see the swelling attraction between Trigorin and Nina. We also see the divide of the brother Sorin and his sister Arkadina and they're fundamentally different abilities to love Konstantin. Arkadina shows a cheapness in the emotional spectrum as much as the monetary. I think that Arkadina's refusal to give financial assistance is of great significance. The play and these lives could have turned out differently—or would they? Konstantin does end up making a lot of money, and STILL haunts for Nina's love and affection.

Oppositions:

Death by suicide/love by medallion

Devoted/sponger

Advice/Request

Generous/cheap

Standing/swaying

Sorin trying to rescue Konstantin/Konstantin rescuing Sorin

Scene: 4 Bandaging Pgs: 53-57

Tempo/Adjectives:

Shifts, explosive, mine field, pain, trying, banging, helping, wanting, tactless, childish, impulsive

Action Summary:

Konstantin asks for money to help Sorin, and so soon from Sorin asking for Konstantin—Arkadina explodes. Konstantin asks her to help change his head bandage which draws Arkadina right to the site of his self-abuse. He feels her hands, he needs her touch and impulsively kisses her hands...he remembers Arkadina as a sort of super helper to all. However, she only remembers the artists she's helped. How old was Konstantin when this happened? Konstantin cannot help himself though and he launches into an attack on Trigorin and his character which Arkadina tries to explain and defend. When Arkadina moves to attacking Konstantin's talent the two explode again to name calling and a subsequent emotional collapse of Konstantin. Arkadina apologizes and once again they try to recover, but this time there is a level of honesty about why they are leaving. This will separate Trigorin and Nina, in which case Arkadina promises that Nina will return to Konstantin.

Analysis:

We see how desperate all these characters are and how, even with the best intentions, they will never allow the other to change their direction. There is so much anger, guilt, pride and self-protection. We see how love takes flight with ease and freedom, while loss of love, both Konstantin's and Arkadina's, brings out the cheapness, anger and desperation of the ones left behind. Nina could never go back to Konstantin and Konstantin and Arkadina are living in 'a dream' as the

train has left the station, the horses are out of the barn and the die is cast.

Arkadina never does finish replacing the bandage. It is sad.

Oppositions:

Silly/shooting oneself

Turban/bandage

Actress/banker

Worship/love

Honorable/coward

Talent/pretentions to talent

Decadent/cheap

Sinful mother/honourable lover

Duel/wimp

Scene: 5 Trigorin Tries to Leave Arkadina Pgs: 57-61

Tempo/Adjectives:

Soft, revelatory, beautiful, awful, astonishment, bitter, reductive, angry, pushing, exploding, begging, soothing, resisting, pleading, pitiful, seduction, lying, smoothing, tightening the grip, proud, confident, changed

Action Summary:

Trigorin finds the book and is repeating the lines that Nina has referred to on the locket inscription. He gets the courage up to ask Arkadina to stay a bit longer, which she knows means the young Nina has gotten dangerously under Trigorin's skin. But the real event is that he is honest and asks her to "Let him go." This sends Arkadina into begging and throwing herself at Trigorin. She is shameless in her desperation. He capitulates and she, on regaining her composure, in a

gorgeous moment of sheer arrogance and majesty, tells him he could “stay if you want to.”

Analysis:

We see Arkadina’s need for Trigorin and the lengths of self-degradation and humiliation she will go to. We also see a master reversal when he acquiesces. She recovers, but you know these two will never be the same. When Arkadina says “...you are the last page of my life”, you feel the truth in this.

Oppositions:

Go/stay

Old, ugly/young, pretty

Belong/loose

Master/servant

Mad/sane

Weak/strong

Mine/hers

Together/alone

Scene: 6 Goodbye and a Rouble Pgs: 61-62

Tempo/Adjectives:

Leaving, laden, sing-song, quick, late, finality, sweeping, closing, a slash of light, a chance, just in the nick of time

Action Summary:

Shamrayev comes to say goodbye with a long-winded story. Arkadina ignores him. The staff and Polina come to say goodbye, and they go out to the carriage without saying goodbye to Konstantin.

Analysis:

They are getting away...maybe. Polina says, "Our lives are slipping away." The tension is building.

Oppositions:

Cheap/generous

Caught in a trap/caught in a flap

Crying/stop it

Slipping away/holding on

Scene: 7 The Die is Cast Pgs: 63

Tempo/Adjectives:

Rushed, breathless, excited, unstoppable, sexual, love, fast, possible

Action Summary:

Trigorin comes in to get his cane...or is it a ruse to come back, and meet Nina?

She tells him she is going to Moscow and will be leaving her life to become an actress. He tells her where to go, she puts her head on his chest and he kisses her.

"A lingering kiss."

Analysis:

This is the one of the key hinges of the play in my analysis. After this the die certainly is cast and none of their lives will be the same. From this point two years of history must play out before we get to the rest of the play.

Oppositions:

New life/leaving everything behind

ACT 4: Two Years Later-Coming Home

Two years have passed.

Tuesday November 11, 1897, 5:30 pm. A sitting room that has been turned into

Konstantin's study. Outside it is windy and cold.

- Cleaving
- Fragility
- Sickness
- Gathering of family
- Humanness
- Dark and damp
- Forgiveness
- Searching
- Desperation
- Hurt hearts

Scene: 1 Masha Will Not Leave Pgs: 64-67

Tempo/Adjectives:

Howling wind, nightman knocks, searching, irritating, cold, dark, lost, pleading,
wind, waves on the lake

Action Summary:

Masha and Medvedenko enter. They are looking for Kostya. Medvedenko asks repeatedly for Masha to come home for the baby. She has not been home in three days.

Analysis:

We find out where the characters are since the last time...two years later— actually 22 months. Masha and Medvedenko have had a baby. Medvedenko has more at stake, and Masha can't just brush him off as she did. We find out the stage is still standing and the weather is terrible. Medvedenko displays some perseverance in the face of Masha's disdain. They seem unified in their concern for Kostya with the knowledge that Nina has returned.

Oppositions:

Home/stay

Bore/philosophizer

Light/dark

Scene: 2 Mother and Daughter Pgs: 65-67

Tempo/Adjectives: strained, hasty, efficient, yearning, kind, sad, morose, helpful, encouraging, advising, irritated, experienced, heartbeat, tearing the heart out

Action Summary:

We find out how ill Sorin is and how he not only wants to be closer to Kostya in the study, but also for Arkadina returning from the station with Trigorin. Polina is very motherly to Konstantin and asks him to be nice to Masha. It is a very direct point she makes, and we can't help but see what has transpired with her and Dorn, playing out between her daughter and Konstantin. Konstantin leaves, Masha berates her mother for her comments and tells her that she and Medevenco will be moving. Konstantin starts playing the piano in the study and Masha starts dancing.

Analysis:

We find out Konstantin has had some success as a writer and Masha is still in love with the man who runs from her. The silent dancing Masha is a great image—beautiful and desperate. There is a heavier tone now with these people and, as Sorin's life is ebbing away, so too are the connections of these people to this place. The stage flapping in the storm represents a memory that needs to be 'taken down'.

Oppositions:

Mother/daughter

Good girl/woman in need

Hopeless love/tearing out love by the roots

Piano music/silent dancing

Scene: 3 Sorin and Dorn and Life Pgs: 67-69

Tempo/Adjectives:

Slow, painful, warm, helpful, self-conscious, sentimental, searching, frustrated,
happy

Action Summary:

We find out that Dorn has been abroad where he has spent all his savings.

Medvedenko hasn't left the estate to go back to care for the baby. Sorin needs a great deal of help, and he is realizing that he is very sick.

Analysis:

We realize that Sorin is very ill and all are gathering for this event. We are also able to see how the lives lived of these older men are very different and strangely similar. Both have never married, long serving good careers, but they see things differently. Dorn is more careful and directed, while Sorin is long-winded and just lets it all hang out, but never satisfied. There is a gentleness and kindness that exudes from Sorin, thanking Polina for setting up the bed to the moment of silence when Sorin asks how ill he is.

Oppositions:

Day/night

Savings/nothing

Horses/walking

Indifferent to life/all one wants out of life

Law/folly

Wanted/just happened

Writer/speaker

Illness/health
Medicine/valerian drops
Wanting to/not being able to
Fear of death/living a good life

Scene: 4 Where is Nina Mihailovna Pgs: 69-72

Tempo/Adjectives:

Settling, inquiring, yearning, good intentions, soothing, wondering, slow,
warming

Action Summary:

We find out what has happened to Nina in the past 22 months. Her affair with Trigorin, the baby and its subsequent death. Her acting career in small inconsequential towns and that Konstantin would go to find her and be with her, but she would not see him. She wrote to him, however, and signed her letters “the Seagull.” We also find out she is in town and her parents will not see her, but Masha went to her. To the disgust of most, we find out that after the affair with Nina, Trigorin resumed his relations with Arkadina.

Analysis:

The passing of two years and the incredible love that these people have for one another and the lost souls among them. We see Kostya’s unending adoration and his almost monk-like dedication to the pursuit of Nina. There is a more formal and mature tone to Konstantin telling Dorn about what has happened, a resignation to his fate.

Oppositions:

Birth/death

Universal soul/individual

Aimless/direction

Summer theatre/Moscow

Warm, interesting/very unhappy

Professional/personal

Coarse/delicate

Scene: 5 The Welcoming Pgs: 72-74

Tempo/Adjectives:

Forced, pleasurable, welcoming, warm, trying too hard, putting on a good face

Action Summary:

We see the arrival of Trigorin and he and Kostya's attempt at civility. There is flattering and urging. Konstantin is barely hospitable. He sort of floats in this scene. Masha has to beg her father for a horse so Medvedenko can get home. He finally leaves...on foot.

Analysis:

We get to see the shift of power to the new writer, Konstantin and his success.

We also see the tensions of Arkadina and Trigorin's relationship. They are well past the due date. The maturity of Konstantin to shake Trigorin's hand. Trigorin is weakened by his need to assert his successes.

Oppositions:

Welcoming/unwelcoming weather

Cruel/calmer
Blond hair/brown hair
Older/younger

Scene: 6 Lotto Pgs: 74-78

Tempo/Adjectives:

Game, warming, quickening, competitive, getting more tense, who will win, money, angry, disillusioned, confirmed

Action Summary:

As everyone pulls up to play a game of Lotto, Konstantin realizes the magazine Triggorin has given him hasn't even been read. The story he wrote in it untouched by his mother and her lover. He leaves and we find the group of Polina, Shamrayev, Dorn, Arkadina, Triggorin and a sleeping Sorin trying to win. Arkadina goes on an egotistical rundown of all her accomplishments for, perhaps, Dorn. Sorin is helped to get up and they all leave for dinner with Arkadina actually seeming to talk to Shamrayev. She has had to stoop to converse with him.

Analysis:

We see the gulf between the mother and son. She has given him up, perhaps long ago, for her unfaithful lover. There is a tear in Konstantin that gets ripped further with Arkadina's flaunting of Triggorin. Konstantin throws open the window, Arkadina says close it. These people are trying to keep peace for the sake of their beloved Sorin, but the tensions are intense. The idea of fate and luck are interesting.

Oppositions:

Winning/loosing

Fast/not so fast

Lucky/unlucky

Written/read

Stuffed seagull/knowing how to dress

Scene: 7 Nina Returns Pgs: 78-84

Tempo/Adjectives:

Breathless, wet, longing, found, joy, purpose, exaltation, weary, confused,
memory, place, love, arching love

Action Summary:

Konstantin sits and rereads some of his writing, expressing how Trigorin is better than he. He also is able to articulate that writing should come from one's soul. Is he achieving this? There is a knock outside, and Konstantin goes out to return with Nina. She has come back to him. She has returned. She is tired and hungry. She asks him to lock the doors as she knows Arkadina is there. Konstantin tells her how angry he is, but he forgives her and pours his heart into her lap. She recoils and says he should want to kill her, not love her. She calls herself a seagull, clarifying "that's not it" each time. Suddenly, she hears Trigorin's laughter...and describes what he did to her. Nina gets an odd type of strength in this telling of her relationship with him and her art. She says she has found her place and "the capacity to endure." She also avows her deep enduring love for Trigorin. She will never be Konstantin's; she will always be someone else's. This

love is about possession, and for a boy who has never felt the love coming from his mother or Nina, it is over for him.

Analysis:

We see the icon, the love of Konstantin's life return—Nina. However, she is still in love with Trigorin...after it all, the child who dies, him returning to Arkadina, and she still loves him. Did Nina know Trigorin was there as well? Why is Nina caught up on the seagull reference? I am starting to see the connection between Nina speaking some of the text of his play to him again, beautifully perhaps or perfectly to him killing himself in the next scene. Perhaps it is the beauty he knows he will never see again. Hopelessness for Konstantin and nowhere to go.

This is the longest sustained exchange between two characters in Chekhov's major plays.

Oppositions:

Cold/warm

Old forms/new forms

Alone/together

Hope/despair

Youth/age

Was/is

Love me/kill me



Figure 11: Natasha Zacher as Nina & Thomas Elms as Konstantin. Photo Credit-Nancii Bernard

Scene: 8 The Shot Pgs: 84-85

Tempo/Adjectives:

Tension, ending, suspension, breathlessness, casual, everyday, forced, a shot.
Memories, Life, Love. Gone.

Action Summary:

Everyone returns from dinner with the exception of Sorin. They drink and try and relax. Shamrayev gives Trigorin the stuffed seagull that he asked for, which Trigorin says he cannot remember. A shot off right. Arkadina swoons, Dorn goes to see what it is and on returning to the room he lies and tells everyone a bottle of ether exploded. He takes Trigorin aside and tells him to get Arkadina out as “Konstantin Gavrilovich has shot himself.” End of play.

Analysis:

This is not a happy ending. Sorin, is he still alive? We see a man who decided that going forward was not an option. We see who he leaves behind, and they are left with one another.

Oppositions:

Locked/open

Stuffed/alive

Alive/dead

CHAPTER 4: Reflections

I was extremely happy with our production and I think overall we achieved a nuanced, committed, funny and very moving show. I specifically selected *The Seagull* because I wanted problems and puzzles, obstacles and heights to test my ideas and perceived abilities. I wanted to squeeze out as much learning as I could from the great teacher that I knew Chekhov's writing to be. I wanted to encourage this company of actors to work hard, and in the direction we'd found, to most fully tell the stories of these characters—and with that deep understanding of the paradoxes of human nature that Anton Chekhov infuses in his plays. I set out to work with my designers and dig deeper, articulate more fully into the spirit and possibilities of this play. And finally, I wanted to move audiences to an identification with the people on stage, or to enjoy the three hours they'd spent with them...or perhaps both.

Quite frankly I was scared. Maybe terrified which, in hindsight, spurred a lot of extremely useful investigation and helped fuel the preparation demanded by the MFA Directing program. These elements were all invaluable, and they have laid an important foundation for my directing process. I found I loved the dreaming and scheming and the incredible wealth of information available about Chekhov and his contemporaries. This study had the effect of making me more open and confident about how I saw this play, especially as I moved into the preliminary conversations with my designers and in structuring my rehearsal plan.

This ensemble of actors was so terrific, brave and dedicated. I could not have asked for a better group of individual budding artists with whom to dig into this world. They came to

rehearsal with ideas and ready to work. They tried crazy experiments, and in their eager hunger to be better and more committed, they made me work harder and raise my game every time I entered the rehearsal room.

The conversations with my advisor, Stephen Malloy, throughout pre-production and rehearsal were not only terrifically invigorating and fun, but his questions spurred some valuable and significant insights and solutions. “Don’t be afraid of making it messy,” he advised. Time and time again these words swished through framing the piece and Chekhov’s world. I think I was getting ‘general’ half way through, when he reminded me not to forget about what real life looks and sounds like. Not every line is important.

Differentiate the habits of the actor as opposed to the character. These characters are following vocations with all the luck they can muster. He pointed out the difference of characters blaming each other or themselves versus a group of people blaming Life—and in this milieu they are all up against Life.

I loved working in the Telus Theatre which, quite frankly, would not have been my first choice for the venue. What that space demanded of the performers and myself was precisely what I was trying to create: a 360-degree, from head-to-toe immersion of character and ‘aliveness’. They had to tell a story as much with their bodies and their backs, and with the tilts of their heads, as they did with their words. The physical story needed to be strong, and that articulation of what they were doing with their bodies at every moment helped with the emotional depths we were able to achieve. Looking back, I wish I’d had more time to go even further with this work, as it would have created a stronger pattern of play and hence more consistency with some of the performers. These

actors grew tremendously, and it really was incredible when they ‘got it’ and could be centered in that vast room with people all around them and be utterly compelling from every seat. A number of the performers had to play characters considerably older than they were, and I was greatly aided in this work by Cathy Burnett and Stephen Malloy.

The vocal attention, detailing and support from Gayle Murphy was absolutely essential for my cast and myself as we moved into tech work. She was incredibly supportive. Her rigorous work in helping the actors with articulation and clarity in those last two weeks—when we’d moved into The Telus, a terribly difficult metallic tin of a playing space — greatly increased our confidence during this daunting transition.

My analysis of the events, themes and character generally held me in good stead. There are a number of large and looming questions in this play that one must answer as a director. Foremost is finding the reason for Konstantin’s final suicide. This was one case where we found the answer in rehearsals and which changed from my initial thinking. I felt very satisfied with what Natasha, Thomas and I discovered. This is a ‘what’s the trigger’ question. In my analysis I had pinpointed it to the exchange between Nina and Konstantin where she says she has faith and he says he has none. However, as we were working towards that moment of turning for him, a breakthrough came. We were nearing the end of the rehearsal process and had moved onto the deck. When we ran that scene, I had blocked Nina to turn back to him just before she walked out the raised French doors (her ‘stage’ from Act 1). Then it happened! That moment when the play speaks and all you’ve worked for culminates in an undeniable truth. Konstantin was below her, looking up at his muse as she recited his words from his play two years before, as if these were the deepest gifts ever

given to her. There, somehow, we saw the perfection of that moment and those words and what they meant to Konstantin. I felt like we saw, for the first time perhaps, true love between these two individuals as artists: the writer and the actor. He cannot hold her. The long and methodical destruction of his papers—his creations—with our addition of the ink being poured over things left only the moment of aliveness with Nina. Beyond that is nothingness.

I found some of these young actors tentative when they needed to dig into the most personal stuff such as sexuality, yearning and loss. Predictably, they didn't want, or know how to find, the incredibly vulnerable places the script asks for. I reminded them that this was, in fact, the time when these characters were most like themselves and precisely when they needed to find a personal connection to these stories. At times I got them to chuck the lines and just speak their sub-text and then lines in their own words. This turned into one of the most useful tools for the group. I spent a lot of time needing them to stop showing me the work, instead teasing it out actively in their actions and intentions. A good example of this was how daunted Matt Kennedy was in playing Trigorin's big speech in Act 2. The character does not start out to talk a great deal, but his need to speak his ideas, the speed of his thoughts and questions spur him on beat by beat. Like many actors, Matt was taking a big breath and heading for the hills rather than looking at every detail along the way. I know Trigorin can be played as a manipulating seducer on the young Nina. However, I found this scene to be far more effective by letting the scene play them—in essence, letting them breathe the same air of enchantment. When Matt found a Trigorin with this deep need to be understood, coupled with the detailing and pace of thought, the scene flew.

The design process was overall very successful in its cohesion. We did, however, suffer from some larger-than-anticipated learning curves and busy schedules. The most successful collaboration was with Elliot Squire on the set. He demonstrated incredibly professional standards, and he was time sensitive. Most importantly, he brought a terrific sense of the play, its themes and the underlying poetry of the piece. It was wonderful to watch his imaginary forces work out the knots and incorporate my ideas, suggestions and revisions. We worked for a long time on the concept, which began with a painting I found, and then explored how that canvas might be the world on which this played out. Also, I was quite adamant that I wanted to use the same stage used in Act 1 for Kostya's play for the last scene between Nina and Kostya just before he kills himself. This is really a play *about* the theatre and its inhabitants, and Elliot's set balanced this with the hints of Russian style and versatility to create the magic I craved for this play.

I had asked the designers to find texture wherever they could, and I felt this presence throughout. Lauren Stewart's lighting was beautiful. I thought her selection of colours and tones heightened the play by enlivening the senses. Daniel Tessy also built a multi-cultural and ageless design that somehow encompassed old Russia to UBC circa 2014 and everything in between! The music made me smile and want to play. Sian Morris on costumes was likewise able to implement a depth of texture to help the actors.

Overall I felt *The Seagull* succeeded in giving me a much stronger directorial presence and impetus! I felt the methods I utilized helped the actors and story come to life in a very full and robust way. I also learned a great deal about how to time and pace the process. I learned that internal experiences and their physical expression are inextricably united. I

wanted to 'light a fire' under this play. In actuality, I lit a fire under myself. Long may it burn.



Figure 12: Thomas Elms as Konstantin. Photo Credit-Tim Matheson

Appendices

Appendix A: Notes for First Day of Rehearsal

December 2, 2013, The Telus Studio Theatre.

We are unfamiliar. We are meeting for the first time. We need to grow this play, the characters, our ensemble, our imaginations and our creative selves. We are gardeners.

Drama is about meetings and moments between characters.

From Mike Alfreds:

"The actor manifest our capacity to be vulnerable and daring, sensitive and strong, perceptive and compassionate, to be expressive and to be beautiful. The actor not only stimulates our empathic imagination but also reminds us of our inexhaustible potential as human beings. We all have something of everyone else within us. When actors transcend themselves, so will the audience. The purpose of theatre is the revelation and confirmation of the breadth, heights and depths, the multi-dimensional richness, of our shared humanity." (Alfreds, 2007)

"Yet Chekhov denies his characters the grandeur of tragedy, grounding them in a quotidian reality and qualifying theatrical suffering with astringent irony." (Loehlin, 2010)

Introductions:

- Introductions of collaborators using everyone's full name and any titles they wished.

I was Kathleen Joy Duborg, director.

- Before the full reading of the play: Please try and *hear* the play. Try not to *perform* it...this is difficult, but we are all together listening and you must HEAR it too. Get out of your way.

Anton Chekhov:

- **SHORT STORY WRITER:** It is my sense that Chekhov's work on short stories which demanded very dense characterizations and situations fueled a freedom he applied to the theatre with it's cast of living and breathing humans at his authorial beck and call. His extraordinary detailing and mastery of silence will tell us a lot.
- **A DOCTOR:** As a doctor as well he deeply felt for the weakest of humanity and the black humour he affords the hubris of ego is certainly from the realm of the morgue.
- **TERMINALLY ILL:** First signs of tuberculosis in 1884-Chekhov age 24 years. After a severe lung hemorrhage he is officially diagnosed in 1897, age 37 years. He died seven years later in 1904 at the age of 44 years.
- **SELF DEPRICATING:** "Do you know," Ivan Bunin recalls Anton Chekhov saying to him in 1899, near the end of his too-short life, "for how many years I shall be read? Seven." "Why seven?" Bunin asked. "Well," Chekhov answered, "seven and a half then." (Bunin, 2007)
- **A GARDENER:** It is the gardener who plants the seeds with the anticipation and then watches patiently, for the showing of full colours and textures.
- **FAMILY:** His father was a true disciplinarian and rising merchant in the newly free post serf emancipation of Russia and yet he fell into bankruptcy and ruin when they moved to Moscow in 1857. This tower of paternal respect falls and it all seems so frail. His sister Masha took care of him and lived with him throughout his life.
- **CONTRARIAN:** Maybe that is why his characters and stories keep talking to us for long, long after you've seen or played one of these flawed, human people. Chekhov

provides no answers, as he famously said, “seeking rather to formulate questions correctly.”

What are some of the themes we will be investigating as we launch into *The Seagull*?

- LOVE: Unhappiness in love. Love unfulfilled. Love extended. Love lost. Love unrequited. Do not try and hide yourselves...these characters ask—demand a truth. You must fall in *love* with *them*.
- GENERATIONS of family and friends. How this group of people are comprised of very long, close and complex relationships. We have the aging demographic comprised of Sorin, Dorn, Polina, Shamrayev and, with great resistance, Arkadina. In between the older and younger generations stands Trigorin who also is the only stranger amongst the entire group. The younger characters are Konstantin, Nina, Masha, Medvedenko, Yakov, the Maid and the Cook.
- DESTROYED DREAMS: Fate and luck.
- ART: Theatre, writing, painting, acting, directing, fame, terror and the faith of one's vocation.

How will we get there?

- Anyone could read this play. Or watch the movie. So why do they need to see it LIVE?
- Why do we need to do it?
- Ensemble building, this is a play of 13 people and everyone is intrinsic to the whole.
- Preconceived notions of 'Chekhov' ...what have they heard, experienced, been told or

expect of this play?

- This is a sensual play. It is seen. It is heard. It is felt.
- Opposites or direct contrasts that exist inside the personality/scene/relationship/play. Chekhov plays with direct extremes and opposites.
- So how do we show or tell it? Example what does falling in love SOUND like or LOOK like?
- Improvisation
- The more specific we are in how we move, or what we need to tell another person or how we HEAR what someone is saying to us—the more fun we will have and the more FUN and engaged the audience will be. This is perhaps why people keep coming back to Chekhov.

PLEASE ASK QUESTIONS! There is no bad question--Every decision comes from a conversation!

Rehearsal room etiquette--Please stay concentrated on the work when you're in the room. This means that if the actors who are working can see you, then you need to witness their endeavor and it is considered rude if you are on a cell phone for any reason. Cell phones are to be off or on silent, no vibrating. You are more than welcome to be in the room and looking at your script.

We are always experimenting. When I say try this or could you adjust that or make something clearer-I'm not saying 'on top of'--it is a way of finding another layer or colour. It may work→it may not.

Terms: What do they mean to ME...What do they mean to YOU?

- "Play it where it lands"
- "Act less"
- "Actor secrets"
- "Emotional underpinnings"—what you're fighting for
- "Letting the air out of the scene"
- ...and "driving a truck through that"
- "Play against that"
- "You have to carve the corners"-- "You have to ski between the flags". "Make your mountain higher".
- "What is the humanity?"
- "Stop acting"—as in *demonstrating* what the character *might* do or sound like...just do it.

A rough rehearsal hours breakdown:

119 hours Tuesday-Dec 21

30 hours on improvisations, exercises and movement

75 hours to work through scenes twice

14 hours for 3-5 partial or full runs.

I will be dividing the first week:

35 hours, with some full company work in the

Tuesday & Wednesday -- table work at Telus.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday at Binnings we will work on facts and questions, plus scene work with staggered calls.

2 runs we know we'll be aiming for will be on Saturday Dec 21st time TBA

Sat January 4th.

Appendix B: Director's Program Notes

“The place where Chekhov had chosen to build his house was far from the sea and the port and the town and was in the fullest sense of the word a wasteland with a few pear trees. But because of his efforts, his love of everything the earth produces, this wasteland little by little became a wonderful, luxuriant, highly varied garden.”

Olga Knipper

As a short story writer, Chekhov gave us exquisite windows into worlds where the human condition is condensed to a stark, essential specificity with moments that reflect out to the fullness of the world, like the ripple of a stone thrown into a lake.

As a doctor, Chekhov was intimately familiar with the vulnerabilities and failings of the human physical being. He was dying from tuberculosis for most of his adult life, finally succumbing to the disease at the age of 44 in 1904. Thus he had a sharpened vision of how lives are lived and wasted—the spinning, two sided coin of life and death.

He was also a brother, lover, husband, gardener, fisherman and philanthropist. Somehow he brought all these roles, experiences and passions to the worlds he built as a playwright—as if the characters were seeds that he buried deep in the ground. He then piled up the, ahem, ‘fertilizer’ to see how everyone would grow. I believe he saw the theatre as a laboratory where he got to experiment with life. Here the setting of mood, his stylistic innovations and his take on tragedy and comedy’s curiously shared dance in the face of life’s turns has placed his four great plays close to the heart of theatergoers.

Chekhov was an unparalleled teacher for my young acting self when I performed in *The Seagull* here at UBC twenty-five years ago. Although we enthusiastically applied the tools being taught then, the process was, in the beginning, terribly confusing and unfruitful. On surface, *The Seagull* is a story of seemingly insignificant events about fairly ordinary people—albeit very passionate people. But gradually our work found a focus, and the true story emerged, like the slow unfolding of a master detective novel. That was when I began to feel the activation and possibilities of inhabiting a character. So when it came time to choose a play for my directorial thesis, I sought not just a great story, but also a great teacher. Chekhov, with his large casts full of beautiful and heartbreaking characters, sat at the top of the list and stayed there.

But why *The Seagull* again? Because to me, the themes of love and the pursuit of artistic aspirations are the core of what it means to practice theatre today. I think it is curious and beautiful that, as we perform *The Seagull* here, this play is also being mounted in Calgary, Winnipeg, Montreal and next winter in Toronto. I hear a loud, collective voice proclaiming the importance of artists and the pursuit of cultural conversations about identity and interpretation.

I believe *The Seagull* is a perfect play for burgeoning artists to tackle, and I am deeply indebted to this group of talented young actors, designers, stage managers, and crew who have worked so hard to bring this story to life. Along with faculty and staff, they have brought wonderful energy, purpose, questions and insight to the process, and I am richer for their contributions. My thanks to Stephen Malloy, my thesis advisor, for his gracious

wisdom, humor and insightful guidance and Gayle Murphy for her invaluable knowledge and vocal coaching.

Appendix C: Production Credits

The Seagull by Anton Chekhov
Translated by Peter Gill

Directed by Kathleen Duborg

Set Design by Elliot Squire
Costume Design by Sian Morris
Lighting Design by Lauren Stewart
Sound Design by Daniel Tessy

Stage Managed by Ndola Hutton
Assistant Stage Managers Becky Fitzpatrick and Kaylin Good

Cast (in order of appearance):

MASHA *Marya Ilinichna*--Helena Fisher-Welsh

Semyon Semyonovich **MEDVE DENKO**--Nick Preston

YAKOV--Zach Wolfman

MAID--Ghazal Azarbad

KONSTANTIN *Gavrilovich*--Thomas Elms

Pyotr Nikolaevich **SORIN**--Javier Sotres

NINA *Mihailovna Zarechnaya*--Natasha Zacher

Irina Nikolaevna **ARKADINA**--Mercedes de la Zerda

Boris Alekseyevich **TRIGORIN**--Matt Kennedy

Yevgeny Sergeyich **DORN**--Daniel Meron

POLINA *Andreyevna*--Naomi Vogt

Ilya Afanasyevich **SHAMRAYEV**--Nathan Cottell

COOK--Demi Pedersen

Bibliography

- Alfreds, M. (2007). *Different Every Night*. London: Nick Hern Books.
- Allen, D. (2000). *Performing Chekhov*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, D. (1983). *Backwards & Forwards*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ball, W. (1984). *A Sense of Direction*. Hollywood: Drama Publishers.
- Benedetti, R. L. (1985). *The Director at Work*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Bogart, A. (2001). *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*. New York: Routledge.
- Bunin, I. (2007). *About Chekhov*. (T. G. Marullo, Ed., & T. G. Marullo, Trans.) Evanston, , Illinois, U.S.A.: Northwestern University Press.
- Donnellan, D. (2002). *The Actor and the Target*. London: Theatre Communications Group/Nick Hern Books.
- Eyre, R. (2009). *Talking Theatre: Interviews with Theatre People*. London: Nick Hern Books Limited.
- Gill, P. C. (2000). *The seagull: A comedy*. London: Oberon.
- Hodge, F. (1971). *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication and Style*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Kaye, N. (1996). *Art Into Theatre: Performance Interviews and Documents*. Amsterdam: OPA.
- Loehlin, J. N. (2010). *The Cambridge Introduction to Chekhov*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, K. (2009). *The Director's Craft*. London: Routledge.
- Mitter, S. (1992). *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook*. London: Routledge.
- Rayfield, D. (1999). *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chkhov's Prose and Drama*. London: Bristo Classical Press.

Smith, G. (Director). (2007). *The English Surgeon* [Motion Picture]. U.S.A.

Wangh, S. (2000). *An Acrobat of the Heart*. New York: Vintage Books.

Whyman, R. (2011). *Anton Chekhov*. New York: Routledge.