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Unconventional Tragedy in Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*

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by

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Letter of Recommendation

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Abstract

The Seagull, Anton Chekhov's play, depicts the picture of a normal character, Treplov Constantine; a figure of non-heroic figure having capacity of meaningful struggle. Treplov suffers from problems in his ambitions to accomplish any meaningful goal. His repeated suicide attempt is because of his failure in his career as a writer and also because of his failure in love with Nina. He is the victim of outside exigencies of duty and frustration. Like modern hero, Treplov is the victim of over ambition, self-alignments and frustration and non-heroic death.

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I. *The Seagull*: Failure of an Individual

The present study takes Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's famous and successful play *The Seagull* for the study. The play depicts a young theatre artist, Treplev Constantine and his struggle against the established trend of presenting and acting in the dramas in the theatres during the early twentieth century; however, with little success. The play, thus, is the story of failure of a young artist, who in an attempt to make his voice heard conflicts against the then society and meets a tragic end. Taking this fact into consideration, the present research will look into the fact that the play as an unconventional tragedy.

The play is regarded as a unique type of tragedy, because it is far from unconventional values and norms. Chekhov's *The Seagull* portrays no heroic figure having the capacity of meaningful struggle, no heroic death, and no providential ending.

The play does not portrait any heroic characters of Aristotelian statures, nor depicts a strong-willed person, like that of Shakespearean hero, who can overcome the odds and turn the tide in his favour. Instead, Treplev is a normal character, who suffers from jealousy, envy and antagonism from the near and dear ones and, is also a part of all these humane errs. In this sense, it is the story of a normal character, like any one of us, who succumbs to the difficulties of life. So, it is not a Shakespearean or Aristotlean drama but the story of any one of us, but, still is a tragedy. It is a tragedy because Treplev, the protagonist in the process of making his voice heard fails and engulfs tragic end; tragedy of a common man. In the process, it is not an individual's failure but of a common man, whose ideas are not accepted by the society.

Due to Chekhov's unique plot development, there is neither a proper beginning nor a proper ending in *The Seagull*. However, Chekhov's emphasis is on action rather than plot. He develops a distinct plot development from the traditional convention to modern one. The theme of the play is mood, and the characters display the mutual unintelligibility so pronounced in his fiction.

The mere fact that the play ends with Treplov's death does not in itself commit us to call the play a tragedy, in conventional sense. A tragedy requires more than unhappy endings. Moreover, we have seen that the tragedy requires a dominant figure, a hero as a protagonist, who is capable of meaningful struggle. He must have a certain force. If we take Treplov to be the protagonist he hardly measures up in this respect.

Unlike Aristotelian hero who is the slave of fate and Shakespearean, victim of own weakness, Chekhovian tragic hero is the victim of outside exigencies of duty and frustration, very similar to modern man. Like modern hero, Chekhovian hero is the victim of over ambition, self-alignments and frustration, and non-heroic death. The triangular love affairs of the characters, their unrequited love, all characters' sad feeling and ending of the play with Treplov's suicide may claim tragic conventionality in *The Seagull*. But Chekhovian theory of tragedy was far from the conventional approach of either classicism or romanticism.

Despite few plays, Chekhov is a famous playwright. He is also one of the most studied dramatists in the Western drama. However, by profession, Chekhov remained a medical doctor, and ran a free clinic for the peasants and lower-middle class people. He started his career of writing as a comic sketch writer and explored it through short stories to full-length plays. His works reflect the frequently turbulent developments specific to Russia in the year leading up to communist revolutions, but their lasting

appeal lives in Chekhov's talent for exploring universally human situations with grace and insight. With a handful of plays, he overthrew the long-standing tradition of works that emphasise action and plot, in favour of dramas that treat situation, mood, and internal psychological states. The content and dramatic techniques of Chekhov's major plays inaugurated fundamental changes not only in the way plays, but also in the ways of acting. Chekhov, today, is one of the most influential literary figures in the west.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born in Taganrog, Russia, on January 17, 1860. The fabric of the Russian society was permanently altered when Chekhov was only one year old. On February 19, 1861, Russia's serfs were freed. Chekhov was the grandson of a serf. This overturning of traditional social order plays a central role in many of his writings. Anton Chekhov's father was owner of a small grocery business in Taganrog, the village where Anton was born. When the family business went bankrupt in 1876, the Chekhov's without young Anton moved to Moscow to escape creditors.

The young doctor-writer was an untiring worker who led a life of ceaseless activities, both among his patients and on his writing desk. Success began to overtake the young author rapidly. After publication of his first collection of stories in 1887, he got motivation for further writing. He began to compose comic one-act plays as well often adopting the plot from his short stories. *Ivanov*, his first full length play and another one called *The Wood Demon* were published and staged but they became unsuccessful. His first major work as a drama, *The Seagull*, was also a failure when it was staged in a disastrous 1896 production at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. A discouraged Chekhov vowed never to write for the stage again. However, two years later, in their debut season, the Moscow Art Theatre mounted an

acclaimed revival of *The Seagull*. This revival established both Chekhov as an accomplished playwright and the Moscow Art Theatre Company as an important new acting troupe. This gave a good impression for his writing career. He wrote all other full-length famous plays like *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* due to spirit of success of *The Seagull*.

Though, a celebrated figure in Russia, at the time of his death, Chekhov remained internationally unknown. However, after the First World War I, Chekhov's writings were translated into English, which soon earned him an international stature. Today, Chekhov is more renowned for his short stories, which depicted the happenings of the lower middle class people and their sufferings in a simple, but descriptive manner. He is also highly regarded for his concerns, and technique he adopted for presenting dramas in theatres. He wanted to change the trend of presenting and depicting plays in theatrical world, very similar to Treplev, the protagonist in *The Seagull*; however, with little success. His ideas were appreciated in the western nations, rather than in his own homeland.

Critical Response to *The Seagull*

The Seagull is Chekhov's one of the strongest plays that depicts his personal desire and plans on about the need of changing the ways dramas were presented in the time. Chekhov jumbled comic and tragic elements together to show the bitter and sweet aspects of human life, in his plays. Justine Amberlake takes this idea cum technique as a unique contribution to the world of dramas. He opines, "This practice of Chekhov became an important contribution not only to theatre, but also to 20th century literature in general" (32). Chekhov publicized his ideas on the want and necessity to change the dramas of his era through his characters, who acted as his mouthpiece, like Treplev, in *The Seagull*.

Chekhov is also known for the emphasis he placed on dialogue and off-stage action. The audience experiences the most important events by hearing about it afterwards. He used ordinary conversations, pauses, miscommunications, inaction, incomplete thoughts, to reveal the truth behind trivial words and daily life. Chekhov considered his mature plays to be a kind of comic satire, pointing out the unhappy nature of existence in turn-of-the century Russia. He presented bad and dreary lives of then Russians in his plays. His characters seem sympathetic in the audiences' eyes. There is no villain in *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Characters have their real antagonism with existential problems rather than with human beings.

Anton Chekhov's writing became influential because of simplicity and its realistic sketching capability. *Encyclopaedia Americana* says about his writing:

The dream of a life is one of the main themes not only of Chekhov's later short stories but also of his plays. His early dramas are mainly plays of direct action in which the dramatic action takes place in view of audience. His brilliant plays are with indirect action. In these, the main dramatic action takes place off-stage, attention being concentrated entirely on the reaction of the characters to the dramatic events of their lives. (361)

Chekhov was first a writer of prose narrative and believed that he could not write a good play, yet his prosaic presentation gets appraisal as his unique dramatic techniques.

The Seagull is the first play in Chekhov's second period of writing for the theatre that of last few years of his life - in which he penned his widely acknowledged dramatic masterpieces. The play was first staged in St. Petersburg in 1896, but it was very badly received. The audience were unwilling to applaud a work that in

technique and style countered the traditional kind of play. They seem simply not ready to accept a work that seemed to violate almost all dramatic conventions. About the first failure production of *The Seagull*, Stephen Lucas writes;

This play, when first acted at Petersburg in 1896, inadequately rehearsed and insensitively cut, proved a dismal fiasco. The critics were mercilessly malevolent. But after five performances the play stopped. This new wine had burst the crude old bottle of Russia stage-tradition. Chekhov must wait for new style of Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre to get success. (38)

Thus, Chekhov's *The Seagull* gets a new life, in similar fashion to that of, old wine in a new bottle.

Chekhov's friend, Nemirovich-Danchenko and his co-director of the famous Moscow Art Theatre, Konstantin Stanislavsky, bought *The Seagull* to the stage again in 1898. This time, the play got a remarkable success. This success became a great blessing to Chekhov, for his dramatic career and to Moscow Art Theatre, which began its staging with *The Seagull*. Simone de Clark quotes the contribution of Chekhov to the Moscow Art Theatre, it's to Chekhov, as:

It would be idle to measure exactly whether Chekhov did for the Art Theatre or the Art Theatre did more for Chekhov. At any rate, the Art Theatre would not be what it is if it had not been for *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* and the problems they brought to the stages to the actors. It is equally true that were not for the Art Theatre, Chekhov would not have written at least *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* in the form of drama. (59)

The Seagull has since been performed successfully in many languages. As *The Wild Duck* was for Ibsen, so *The Seagull* was for Chekhov a symbol of shattered illusions and its fate was woven into the real plot.

The Seagull has been greeted by many critics with wild applause and criticized with loud hisses. Some critics have talked about thematic side of the play. Lucas says, "*The Seagull* might have for sub-title 'The Egoists', or 'Of Human Loneliness'; or 'Artistic Vanity and The Vanity of Art'; for such are its themes. It is about lonely people unhappy in love, and making others unhappy; observed with art, yet uncensored by it" (41).

In D. Magarshack's translation of *The Seagull*, there are Stanislavsky's original notes for its production. In his note, Stanislavsky says how an affectionate environment has been created to help the audience getting into the sad and monotonous life experience of the characters. He quotes the beginning of the play as:

The play starts in darkness, an August evening. The dim light of a lantern on top of a lamp-post, distant sound of a drunkard's song, distant howling of a dog, the croaking of frogs, the creak of a landrail, the slow tolling of a distant church bell, help the audience to get the feeling of the sad, monotonous life led by the characters. (Magarshack VI)

The very starting of the play paints the bleak side of the human-nature and earth-nature. Here, action is more important than the dialogues, if, the charm, what Chekhov intends to the audience is to be understood.

According to Heilman Hingley, *The Seagull* is modern drama, it has fragments of modernist play and has made use of modernist devices. He says:

Another 'Modernistic' feature of *The Seagull* is the interrupted play within the play of Act One. This rhetorical monologue by a world spirit is itself a fragment of non-realistic drama, such as his Russian contemporaries called 'decent'. We need new forms', proclaims Chekhov's Treplov, the author of that encapsulated pallet; this same sentiment was constantly on the Chekhov's mind when he was writing *The Seagull*. (15)

Brooks and Heilman took the play as a prominent love theme. For them the play has patterning of complicated love affairs as that is in *The Way of the World*. In this context, they distinguish different types of love such as glamour-struck love, unrequited love, hopeless love, ardent idealist young love furtive love etc. They say, "Chekhov has arranged its patterning for a different purpose than that of Congreve" (492). They further mention, "One of the most remarkable things about *The Seagull* is that Chekhov has made the patterning of the love affairs so intricate, and yet has managed to avoid the tone either of melodrama or of light comedy" (492).

However, the play also has traditional themes, as well. As, in his play, Chekhov introduces Treplov's mother and uncle as the members of land-aristocracy. He further elaborates that such societies are stable as they are bounded by a code of living. Similarly, Sorin, the uncle has served the state as a member of aristocracy, which elaborates the traces of traditional aspects of tragic plays. Commenting on *The Seagull*, Stanislavsky states, "This is the tragedy of the slaved seagull. This is the mockery and crudity of life" (15). Talking about Chekhov's style, Stanislavsky further mentions, "And even if that Chekhovian *What* has grown old and is unacceptable for the post-revolutionary period-in some works-the Chekhovian *how* has not even begun

to live full life in our theatres" (360). Regarding the significance of *The Seagull*, Jacobs writes:

The Seagull attracted the attention of the Moscow Art Theatre, which planned a production of it in 1898. Konstantin Stanislavsky, the Great Russian director and actor played Trigorin the lead character, but Chekhov felt he was overcasting. They often had disagreements about the playwright's work, but the Moscow Art Theatre supported Chekhov fully. (705)

These differences were part of making of the drama of a critical interest to the audience. Chekhov, a perfectionist believed that the feelings of the characters do not come from the words, but from the internal sufferings. This often led for bitter conflict between his cast groups and, self.

Besides, *The Seagull* was often compared to *The Cherry Orchard*, one of the Chekhov's evergreen plays. Richard Latham in the context writes, "Different attitudes to love, one of Chekhov's main comic themes, are handled here for more simply than in *The Seagull*" (832). Throwing light on the relation of the three plays, Peta Tai states, "Characters in Chekhov's drama, its inherent theatricality, have been described in relation to *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, and *Uncle Vanya*" (846). Commenting on characters, he further states, "The capacity of characters to interpret their emotional experience in relation to emotions depicted in theatre and art seems most apparent in *The Seagull*" (846). Commenting on Chekhov's play Simon writes;

The striking no-dramatic quality of his plays is not an innovation, as is commonly supposed, but simply a future refinement of a characteristic to be found in certain of the plays of Ostrovski and especially in those of Turgenev. In other respects Chekhov's plays are unique in that they

avoid subject matter, plot and action and strive to create a poetic atmosphere. The theme of the play is a mood, and the characters display that mutual unintelligibility so pronounced in his fiction. Again as in the stories the dominant note is one of gloom, depression, and futility intensified by an underlying emotional symbolism. (11)

Many critics have paid tribute to this writer for the use of existential issues, themes of traditional tone and structure of this tragedy. The issue of inquiry for the present study is to show the unconventional characteristics of a tragic hero (and subsequently, of the plot and action) through the comparison with Aristotelian, Shakespearean, and Modern concept of tragic hero. The categorization of this tragedy in unconventional sense is the central issue of this play. *The Seagull* abandoned the traditional concentration on a single star and on the strong dramatic crisis. It stands halfway between that earlier four-act play and Chekhov's mature drama. The play is not focused on the central character. There is rather multiple focus of the sort which occurs more frequently, making the drama an anti conventional tragedy, in the sense that it all depicts the failure of Treplev, a common man.

As such, the present research takes unconventional tragedy as the central issue to be analyzed in the present thesis. For the same, the first chapter is “*The Seagull: As a Failure of a Common Man.*” The second chapter is “Tragedy: A brief synopsis from Aristotle to Modern,” third, is “*The Seagull* as an unconventional tragedy” and the final chapter is “fall of a common man” as the conclusion and findings of the research work.

II. Methodologies for Tragic Hero's Study

Tragedy is a serious drama in which a protagonist, traditionally of noble position, suffers a series of unhappy events culminating in a catastrophe such as death or spiritual breakdown.

The classic discussion of Greek tragedy is Aristotle's *Poetics*. He defines,

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude: in the language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the term of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotion. (53, A)

Aristotle Tragic Hero

The protagonist in tragedy must be morally good (but not too good), of fitting heroic stature, true to life, and consistent in action. Aristotle, in his *poetics*, demands four things to be tragic hero.

. . . First and most important, it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character [...]. The second thing to aim at is a type of a manly valour [...]. Thirdly, character must be true to life: for this is distinct thing from goodness and propriety [...]. The fourth point is consistency: for though the subject of an imitation, who suggested the type, is inconsistent, still he must be consistently in consistent. (57-58)

The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres, such as comedy and the epic, is the 'tragic pleasure of pity and fear', the audience, he can not be either all good or evil but must be something the audience can identify with; however, if he is superior in some way(s), the tragic pleasure is intensified. His

Disastrous end results from a mistaken action, which in turn arises from a tragic flaw or from a tragic error in judgement. Often the tragic flaw is hubris, an excessive pride that causes the hero to ignore a divine warning or to break a moral law. It has been suggested that, because the tragic hero's suffering is greater than his offence, the audience feels pity; because the audience members perceive that they could behave similarly, they feel pity.

Aristotle outlines the characteristics of a good tragic hero. He must be "better than we are", a man who is superior to the average man in some way. In Oedipus' case, he is superior not only because of social standing, but also because he is smart. He is the only person who could solve the Sphinx's riddle. At the same time, a tragic hero must evoke both pity and fear and Aristotle claims that the best way to do this is if he is imperfect. A character with a mixture of good and evil is more compelling than a character who is merely good.

A tragic hero suffers because of his Hamartia, a Greek word that is often translated as "tragic flaw" but really means "errors in judgment". Often this flaw or error has to do with fate, a character tempts fate, thinks he can change fate or doesn't realize what fate has in store for him.

For Aristotle the most important part of tragedy is the plot or Action, which is the structure of the incidents. He says;

Plot is the very life-blood of tragic drama. Without action, there can be no tragedy, though it is sometimes possible to have a tragedy without character. Any tragic drama must be long enough to depict a reversal, or a change from good fortune to bad in the central figure. It must be so constituted that all its parts combine to form a unified and organic whole. (98)

The tragic dramatist must choose suitably heroic characters and place them in a well-constructed plot which aims at the imitation of such actions as will excite pity and fear in the audience. Those twin emotions are the distinctive efforts that tragedy aims to invoke. The downfall of a noble, well-renowned, prosperous, and basically good person naturally evokes pity "for his/her misfortune", it also evokes terror or fear that such misfortunes can easily overtake any human. This leads to an effect of catharsis or purging of the very emotions of pity and terror evoked by tragedy.

Shakespearean Tragic Hero

A distinct form of tragedy begins with the Shakespearian concept of tragedy. In Shakespearian tragedy, the hero has noble birth. He needs to be from Royal family or knight, Unlike Aristotelian tragedy; the central character always has a flaw in his character, which contributes to his downfall. In addition to characteristic flaws, what happens to the character is also contributory e.g. Iago's role in arousing Othello's jealousy. Regarding Shakespearian tragic hero, August Wilhelm Schlegel says:

One of the Shakespeare's modes of creating characters is to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then to place himself, Shakespeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet, he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a delicate balance-between our attention to the objects of our sense and our meditation on the working of our minds. (70)

Many critics assert that there is no moral dilemma in Shakespearian hero. Edger Johnson interrelates the protagonist as a hero whose complex dilemma is "to disentangle him from the temptation to break justice for the wrong reasons and in an evil passion, and to do what he must do at last for the pure sake of justice" (86).

The central character tends to learn by experience. Because the character learns from experience, it seems a waste that he should die e.g. Othello learns that we cannot trust appearances, but it is too late to do anything about it.

About the thematic notion and deviation of representing ideal and heroic norms of Shakespearean drama, Milton Crane says;

In Shakespearean drama the shift from one medium of expression to another is fairly constant and, if only in a general way, usually thematic Renaissance notions of decorum dictated that particular comic business, low-life situation, and madness - be presented in prose.

Therefore the shift from verse to prose easily represents a deviation of some sort from an ideal and heroic norms . . . (156)

For Antonio Artaud, the theatre must be a mystical and magical experience that reveals than analyses Shakespearean and his presumed preoccupation with psychology and plot. He says;

Shakespeare himself is responsible for this aberration and decline, this disinterested idea of the theatre, which wishes a theatrical performance to leave the public intact, without setting off one image that will shake the organism to its foundation and leave an ineffaceable scar.

Shakespeare stands as the supreme dramatist of the Renaissance period, equally adept at writing tragedies, comedies, or chronicle plays. His great achievements include the perfection of a verse form and language that capture the spirit of ordinary speech and yet stand above it to give a special dignity to his characters and situation; an unrivalled subtlety of characterization; and a marvellous ability to unify plot, character, imagery, and verse movement.

Taking into consideration, Aristotle ideas, any man with noble spirit can be the hero, who should not necessarily be of high class family and profile. The Chekhov heroes let them be of a high or low social status determines his nobility by his action and motivation to perform the greatest task, not necessarily it is by birth or profile. It is the individual's action that makes a man the hero. A noble man may or may not be heroic. Man may be heroic in spirit and aspiration and not by birth.

It is the individual's action that makes a man hero. A noble man may or may not be heroic. Man may be heroic in spirit and aspiration and not by birth. All types of poetry known in Greece in fifth century B. C. namely tragic, satiric and comic originated in the worship of Dionysus, the deity of wild vegetarians fruits and especially the wine. In his honour at the opening of spring season, dithyrambs, hymns were performed by the chorus. They used to dress like satyrs, the legendary followers of Dionysus. They also presented song and copy dance stories from the adventurous life of the God.

The word tragedy is often used to describe any sort of disaster or misfortune. More precisely, it refers to a work of art, usually a play or a novel dealing with the fortune of heroic character. The subjects of Greek tragedy were taken from legends and legendary history. The tragedies were acted in the great theatre of Dionysus at Athens. Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides were the writers of Athenian tragedies of the time. Out of their many plays, thirty three plays are still there in the theatre. In early tragedies the role of the chorus was vital. There was only the choral dance in tragedy. It was Aeschylus, who for the first time introduced a second actor and reduced the role of chorus and assigned the leading part to the dialogue. To bring two opposite or sympathetic characters face to face to exhibit the clash of principles by means of the class of personalities was change put forward by him in to a new word.

“Aeschylus was first introduced two actors and Sophocles increased the number to three” (Lewis II).

There were a few characters – two characters and a chorus in the early tragic plays. The characters used to be above the level of ordinary men. The protagonists and other characters used to be kings, queens, princes and princesses. The idea of ‘dramatic tragedy,’ in which the characters on the stage were ‘just like ourselves’ would have been quite strange to Greek tragedians. The murder and violent scenes or the evil deeds were done off the stage. The audience learned from the chorus of the messengers. The dress of the hero also differed from the modern one. The Greek tragedians did not include comic relief, and subplots to relax the tension of the audience.

Greek Tragedy and Tragic Hero

Classical Greek tragedy grew out of theatrical contests held in Athens in the 6th century B. C. During morning sessions of the annual winter festival, masked actors performed three related tragic plays and a satyr play, which often mocked the overall serious theme. The social importance of theatre competition in the life of Athens cannot be overstated. Private and public patrons gave vast amounts of funding each year to sustain it, and also regulated all aspects of its production.

Sophocles, another well-known tragic author, refined Aeschylus's tragic storytelling, infusing his mythic characters with a sense of irony and plausibility. In *Oedipus Rex* (430 BC), the horrid fate of Oedipus, who eventually blinds himself, is known to the spectator long before the protagonist unravels his violent and incestuous past. Oedipus's self-conscious vanity and restless nature seem strikingly familiar and plausible, making his self-mutilation at the end of the play all the more unsettling. Euripides, Greece's third great tragic dramatist, wrote the most provocative tragedies

yet known, although he was not as popular as Aeschylus or Sophocles because he worked against the expectations of his audiences. His trilogies challenged the accepted mythological canon, exploring different points of view in order to uncover novel and disturbing meanings. His *Medea* (431 BC), for example, allows the barbarian princess Medea to commit murder and infanticide without earthly or supernatural punishments: At the end of the play, Medea is whisked away to safety in a chariot.

Most Roman tragic poets adhered closely to their Greek models, often imitating the grand themes and language of the originals. Seneca, writing in the 1st century AD, also composed dramas on Greek subject matter and themes. But his works had a moral tone, with commentaries on the action punctuating the plays. This moral tone, along with his sensational treatments—witches, ghosts, and dead bodies populate the stage—made evident an innovative vision that powerfully inspired future playwrights.

Ibsen Tragic Hero

The characters in problem play are the example at general problem. The driving force is the exploration of some social problem like alcoholism or prostitution. The character defines or rejects the conventional view. Some problems arouse anger and controversy in audience and critics. Henric Ibsen, who helped to revive tragedy from its artistic decline in the nineteenth century, writes problem plays. *A Doll's House*, for example shows the exploitation and denigration of middle class women by society and in marriage. The tragedy frequently springs from the individual's conflict with the laws, values, traditions, and representative of society.

Ibsen changed the way of presentation against contemporary theatre. He made the private public and provided an advocacy for women. Regarding this Terry Otten says;

Henric Ibsen elevated theatre from mere entertainment to a forum for exposing social problems prior to Ibsen, contemporary theatre consisted of historical romance or contrived behaviour plays. But with *A Doll's House*, Ibsen turned drama into a respectable genre for the examination of social issues. . . . (178)

Ibsen's tragic hero is found of socialization. Regarding this Goone Till eke says, "The characters are preoccupied with work and money, leading to a reduction of values from a moral to material plane".

Modern Tragic Hero/Anti Hero

The definition of tragic hero in term of modern tragedy is complex and difficult task Arthur Miller defines tragic hero as one who does whatever, he has to secure his personal sense of dignity. This "personal sense of dignity" can also be seen as his pride. Tragic hero also bound with "Tragic flaw". The tragic flaw is the characteristic that the character has that makes him fail, whatever it may be. The character fails because he tries to overcome this flaw, but not succeed. Millar explains;

Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing and need to be nothing but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. (67)

Here Millar talks about the social status of the tragic hero. In the past, especially in the era of Sophocles and Euripides, the tragedy involves royalty and the

upper class, and doesn't have anything to do with the common man. Millar believes that the common man is equal to, if not better than royalty as the subject of a tragedy. Millar states;

I believe that the common man is an apt subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were [...] when the question of tragedy in art is not at issue, we never hesitate to attribute to the well - placed and the exalted the very same mental process as the lowly. And finally, if the exaltation of a tragic action were truly a property of highbred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it.

(29)

This can be interpreted as meaning that common man has more in common insinuates that the audience will feel more pity for the common man, than for royalty. They know nothing of the life of royalty, but they know everything about the life of a common man. Millar's definition is not as confining as Aristotle's, it has room for variation, but it is also specific.

The definition of tragedy is something that can be debated, without coming to a conclusion. There are so many different opinions, and there's no way to know or prove the "true" definition. The true definition is what the reader believes it to be, and that changes from reader to reader. Tragedy can be seen as a mixture of the opinions of the literary scholars while encompassing key factors, such as pity and fear from the audience, the main aspect of a tragedy, especially Arthur Millar's tragedies, is the tragic flow of the main character. In Millar's plays, the flow in the character is what causes the tragic event, whatever it may be, to occur.

Beckett's view of life and man's tragic place in the universe is illuminated by a passage from his study of Froust. He says;

Tragedy is not concerned with human justice. Tragedy is the statement of an expiation, but not the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organized by the knaves for the fools. The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his "socio-malorum", the sin of having been born. (52)

Here, the picture presented is an elemental one, in which social relationships are but one aspect of man's metaphysical anguish. He is a creature paying for a sin he did not commit, or was unaware of committing. God, the villain, either does not show up for his promised appointment, or what is worse, he does not exist, and man is left alone in a meaningless universe, attempting to find the reason for it all.

Absurd play makes comments on life in the modern world and question the values that the culture takes for granted. The theatre of Absurd assumes that the world is meaningless, that meaning is a human concept, and that individual must create significance and not rely on institutions or traditions to provide it.

Absurd hero gestures in order to create the sense of significance that people need to live. His awareness of an audience and his refusal to create a drama in which an audience can *lose* a comfortable surface of realistic illusion. Regarding this Martin Esslin says;

The world was beyond rational explanation, that the universe was chaotic, and that man had to commit himself to something important to make life meaningful. The Absurdist like Beckett, employed new techniques to communicate their ideas; while the static, stripped action

and dialogue may seem like bad performance art. They focused especially on silences and unspoken desire of humans, and the ways death dominates our thoughts. (57)

The struggles for equality and human dignity in the modern period undermined the average spectator's empathy with highborn protagonists. Playwrights instead investigated questions of social justice and of self-determination. These issues animate the serious dramas of Henrik Ibsen of Norway, August Strindberg of Sweden, and Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams of the United States. Although tragic elements certainly appear in the works of these master playwrights, none of their plays fit the definition of tragedy set down by Aristotle.

The modern concept of tragedy is a complex study and it covers a large sphere of literary analysis. Through many analytical views, it contains heterogeneous literary substances. Tragedy in the modern sense is hybrid of literary genres which grows more sophisticated both in its form and substance.

In modern concept, tragedy is considered new and radical literary genre because it is multi disciplinary study. Different tragic ideas need to be transferred from the very foundation laid in the previous period. In modern tragedy the hero is not like Hamlet, King Lear or Julius Caesar. In fact, the hero is an ordinary person: a fallible creature who has many weakness in him. The early concept of hero as a perfect ideal creature is no longer in vogue today. Modern tragic concept goes beyond the Aristotelian and the Renaissance concepts of tragedy. Now, tragedy has been a subject matter which adapts to new genres of literary arena. The study of tragedy, then, is various juxtaposed literary genres comprising various literary interpretations and inventions in the contemporary literature

Naturally, the study aims at attaining heterogeneous literary discipline. So, violation of early tragic concept brings a new strategy in the study of tragedy in the modern sense. According to Aristotle, tragic flaw occurs from the hero's mistake or his lack of capacity to choose between good or bad. But, in modern tragedy, we don't find clear mistake from the side of hero. Like in *Waiting for Godot*, the characters remain silent; and there is no clear tragic flaw in their actions. Without action, modern tragedy is supposed to have some beyond action plot. It transcends the visible plot in a drama. Rather, it amalgamates different character traits, exposing human physical, psychological, and socio economic confrontations in practical life. To look into comparative study of ancient and modern tragedy, we come across various salient features between them.

Concept of the hero of ancient tragedy is glorified notion. He is regarded as gifted person from high aristocratic family. He is the King or the Prince. As compared to this, the notion of hero in modern concept is humanistic because he is an ordinary person in a common society. Concept of plot in ancient tragedy is a story regarding hero's personal interest or his self esteem. Moreover, the ancient plot contains chronological events one after another. Claims of events proceed in a sequence that makes entire construction of the plot. Compared to this, a modern tragic plot is not a story of the hero and his actions.

Rather, it is never a chronological chain of events of characters in a drama. Commonly, conflict in ancient tragedy is struggle or clash between hero and villain. Whereas, modern tragedy is conflict is not pertinent factor in modern time. It is associated with visible as well as mental actions of the hero. Further, the tragic picture is an amalgamation of physical and mental status of the characters. So, it is not

external clash found in Shakespearean tragedies. And, we perceive tragic picture in various conflicting situations.

Substance of plot also attaches to some cognitive views regarding human psyche and inner insights by which it is made vague in explicit sense. According to the norms of early tragedy, the fortune of the hero plays a vital role and its transit from prosperity to adversity. This does not fully prevail in a modern tragedy. In *Waiting for Godot*, we do not find such a reverse of fate of the hero because the fate of the two characters remains the same from beginning to the end. A character presentation, in modern times, is a person: a member of a society one, who has to adjust to the different social complexes that arise on his path. And a character is studied in terms of physiological and psychological levels. Death was a vital factor in early tragedy because it is inevitable in the clash between the good and the bad. The concept of death was the main tragic culmination in Shakespearean tragedies.

However, modern tragedy doesn't attach to death. Today, the main crux of tragic flaw cannot be death only, but other inner complexes which lead the hero to an internal crisis. Tragic sense generates inner complex and instinctive qualities of the mind. So, a character seems torn into impulses in a quest for new thought and ideas. This quest cultivates an ironical picture: a witness of distance between the hero's expectations and the real world. The hero develops a sense of futility that increases his conflict and wrath. His raw nature is reflected in different ebbs and flows, culminating confused state of mind caused by external and internal forces. Because of discordant elements in the plot, tragic situation is less active in external, but powerful internal plot. The internal world substantiates the whole tragic spectrum showing some contradictory and discordant ideas together. Tragic flaw, in modern sense, deals with the cognitive function rather than with dramatic function. A character reflects the

tragic situation through the cognitive process of an audience. In other words, the tragic situation is understood by not visual eyes alone, but by cognitive process of the mind.

As the concept of tragedy developed, both its form and substance underwent a gradual transformation. Tragic substance in mystery and miracle plays was dominated by the religious content. Characters were tragic due to their weakness in religious faith in God and Godly duties. In the Renaissance period, Shakespeare and his contemporaries revived the tragic plot and substance. Shakespeare gave importance to the individuality of the characters. His heroes were noble persons like kings, princes and state leaders.

Later on, contemporary tragic ideas emerged with revolutionary outlook in the dramatic world of tragedy. Tragic substance is rather subtle and tricky in modern times. Tragedy consists of an admixture of different literary genres inter mingling each another.

Tragic picture is not reflected with dramatic presentation alone; it describes an elaboration of social, economical, psychological and emotional problems of a man. So, a text of tragedy explores dramatic presentation in visible and human inner conditions in abstract medium. Raymond Williams is of the opinion that modern tragedy is self-conflict and contradictions. He writes:

Man can achieve his full life only after violent conflict; man is essentially frustrated, and divided himself while he lives in a society, man is torn by intolerable contradictions, in a condition of essential absurdity. From these ordinary propositions, and from their combination in so many minds, it is not surprising that so so much tragedy has in fact emerged. (189)

This definition aptly presents modern tragedy a terrific human condition both physical and mental. A man becomes a man only when burn in fire; it fire that develops the internal of a man into manhood. In modern fiction, not only one factor but many factors group together to form tragic ideas.

In Chekhov's world the internal disputes has cast away all the traditional values of life. God and Christianity no longer could be the saviour of human being. Besides this, Nietzsche's declaration of the death of the God, and the rapid development of modern science have altered all the thoughts based on religion. In this Godless universe man could get no meaning of life. Since god does not exist, man must give up the futile search for standards outside himself. Man is alone in the universe. What we see is only anarchy, disorder meaninglessness and absurdity, so that his life does not signify meaning like the Shakespearean lines. Out of this absence, the Chekhov hero formulates a system of love to exist in this earth. But his mission could not long last. His dream is broken into pieces. However he hears it stoically and does not turn to anybody for help. The suffering of Treplev is never justified. His failure in his quest for meaning and order and his most agonizing defeat testify his greatness. The suffering of tragedy makes Treplev face the truth in all its terror and grandeur of his situation. It also gives him the moral strength to rise out of the grave of despair. This tragic suffering does not induce the feeling of resignation. Having the bitter experiences, Treplev after the elope of the heroine with one of his adverse, faces this bereft calmly without complaining anything. He faces the chaos of catastrophe in life. The tragic vision of life gives him courage to confront the unknown and the prospect of disaster.

Tragedy, as a literary genre, was born out of the tragic muse and developed in Greek. Previously in Greek, tragic music was celebrated in the name of old year.

Hence we can say that tragedy is born from the deep anguished spirit being modified in the school of suffering. Tragic vision is a vision animated at the bursting point. So to say in other words it is a sudden insight into the nature of things. The mystery of human suffering is the basis of tragic vision. The tragic vision is not a broad sum of insight of the artist. To Murray Kreiger the tragic vision is only Dionysian with no Apollonian restraint in it. Unamuno is of the opinion that tragic vision is the furious hunger for being against the power of non-being or death. In general the tragic vision tends to interpret man from two sharply opposite points of views. One of them is man who is equal to God like Prometheus, having great instinct and the other is he, who represents as being and part of nature like Chekhov's hero Treplov.

Though the Greek tragedy begins with the affirmation of faith in the will of Gods, it later begins to question the justice of their action. Through the tragic form, the Greeks expressed their tragic vision of life that would encourage human being to face the difficulties at the highest level. Likewise in the Renaissance, Shakespearean tragedy secular in the content focuses on the character of man, his ambition, his potentialities and pride. The 18th century English tragedy expressed their heroic vision of life. In Romantic and Victorian era tragedy does not flourish as a genre. Some novelists like Herman Melville, Fyodor Mikhail Dostoevsky, Emily Bronte, Thomas Hardy, etc. Present their tragic vision in their novel. The 20th century shaper of tragic vision beholds a universe, in which the Gods are dead since man no longer believes in them. Whereas the Greek tragedy depicts the struggle of the individual against divine powers whose will mysteriously triumphs in the end. The 20th century witnessed the banishment of god from the horizon of human consciousness. Chekhov like Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, Jaspers and Camus places emphasis on the importance of the individual as the only one genuinely vital entity of existence. He

sees that individuality is not a quality, which can be superimposed externally but it can be achieved by a decision of a person. Our age has lost the greatness of man. Modern mind is incapable in creating the highly exalted hero who will bear the passion and splendour of the tragic conflict. It is because he is alienated from nature and God.

For Chekhov as for certain existentialists like Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus and Heidegger, God is dead in our time and the traditional ethic is invalid. Modern hero is very much alone in the world because he has no god and no real brother. We can get only the dying flames of religion appear to glow for time to time, as in the prayers of Old Santiago, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and Treplev in *Farewell to Arms* in the novels of Ernest Chekhov. Similar is the case with Chekhov, whose heroes are haunted by the tragic destiny. But where the mind is clean and well lighted this trace of religion pales away and spiritual aspiration becomes absolute in our time. This shows that not only at night do Chekhov men feel the trace of religion because that time the mind is not well lighted and well ordered.

Similar is the case with Treplev; with no Gods in heaven, modern man becomes his own creator giving form of his own life. Treplev, a lone warrior forms self a new ethic, which will stand in an intimate relation to him alone. Treplev in the end of the novel bears the cruel blow of chance bravely and he moves alone to suicide. This suicide is tragic in the present world, unlike the Aristotelian and Shakespearean.

III. *The Seagull* as an Unconventional Tragedy

Despite the excessive presence of emotional misfortunes in *The Seagull*, it does not stand as a complete work of tragedy and neither it is close to melodrama. There are no great heroic figures having capacity of meaningful struggle, nor capable to turn the odds of life in their favour, yet, they create a state of sorrow and pathetic situation, in the play; a stark turn against the concept of Aristotelian and Shakespeare tragedy. Aristotelian and Shakespearean hero are the slave of fate and victim of own weakness, respectively; however, Chekhov's protagonists are normal man like characters, who succumb to the tragedy; an outcome of social and moral responsibilities.

Treplev Constantine, the protagonist in *The Seagull* is an ambitious artist, who dreams of making big success in shifting the traditional way of presenting and performing dramas in the theatres. However, he falls prey to external restraints from his own mother, Irina Arkadin, a former actress and his beloved Nina. Irina fails to understand her son's true sensitiveness and time and again mock at his writing calibre; whereas Nina gets lost in Trigorin, a famous writer cum actor's spell. Constantine, the lonely and self-centred true artist starves for sincere comments for his plays and vision, but fails dramatically.

The tragedy of Constantine is unconventional, simply because his mother Irina never hesitates an opportunity to throw a sarcastic comment on Constantine. In Act I, upon viewing a play composed by Constantine, she remarks:

IRINA. [. . .] Oh, for heaven's sake! I suppose he put on this performance, and choked us with sulphur, not as a joke, but to prove a point. He wanted to show us how to write and act. I've really had about enough of this! These constant outbursts and digs against me – well,

say what you like, but they'd try anyone patience. He's a selfish, spoilt little boy. (11)

Irina is indifferent to her son's feeling and desire. She is reserved in her own world; busy beautifying herself and falling in love with Boris Trigorin, a famous actor and writer. On the other hand, Constantine Treplev, the young artist is desperately trying to find a place for himself as a successful playwright. There's no one, but Eugene Dorn, a family doctor, who understand his revolutionary vision of changing the traditional aspect of composing and acting dramas. Constantine seeks new forms, new modes of expression in dramas. He is tired of the old academic ways, the beaten track; he is disgusted with the endless imitative methods, no one apparently capable of an original thought. Treplev expresses his apparition on theatrical dramas as: "[. . .] Yes, I'm more and more conceived that old or new techniques are neither here nor there. The thing is to write without thinking about technique – writer from the heart, because it all comes pouring out" (110).

Constantine has written a play; the principal part is to be acted by Nina, his beloved. He arranges the first performance to take place on the occasion of his mother's vacation in the country. She herself -- known as Mme. Arcadina -- is a famous actress of the old school. She knows how to show off her charms to advantage, to parade her beautiful gowns, to faint and die gracefully before the footlights; but she does not know how to live her part on the stage. Mme. Arcadina is the type of artist who lacks all conception of the relation between art and life. Barren of vision and empty of heart, her only criterion is public approval and material success. Needless to say, she cannot understand her son. She considers him decadent, a foolish rebel who wants to undermine the settled canons of dramatic art. Constantine sums up his mother's personality in the following manner:

TREPLEV: She is a psychological curiosity, is my mother. A clever and gifted woman, who can cry over a novel, will reel you off all Nekrassov's poems by heart, and is the perfection of a sick nurse; but venture to praise Eleonora Duse before her! Oho! ho! You must praise nobody but her, writes about her, shout about her, and go into ecstasies over her wonderful performance in *La Dame aux Camélias*, or *The Fumes of Life*; but as she cannot have these intoxicating pleasures down here in the country, she's bored and gets spiteful.... She loves the stage; she thinks that she is advancing the cause of humanity and her sacred art; but I regard the stage of today as mere routine and prejudice. When the curtain goes up and the gifted beings, the high priests of the sacred art, appear by electric light, in a room with three sides to it, representing how people eat, drink, love, walk and wear their jackets; when they strive to squeeze out a meaning from the flat, vulgar pictures and the flat, vulgar phrases a little tiny moral, easy to comprehend and handy for home consumption, when in a thousand variations they offer me always the same thing over and over and over again -- then I take to my heels and run, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower, which crushed his brain by an overwhelming vulgarity.... We must have new formulae. That's what we want. And if there are none then it's better to have nothing at all. (69)

With Mme. Arcadina is her lover, Trigorin, a successful writer. When he began his literary career, he possessed originality and strength. But gradually writing became a habit: the publishers constantly demand new books, and he supplies them. However, in his personal approach, he is “arrived artist.” He

says, “The slavery of being an “arrived” artist, forging new chains for oneself with every best seller!” (88). In fact, Trigorin hates his work as the worst drudgery. Exhausted of ideas, all life and human relations serve him only as material for copy.

In the preceding conversation between Nina Zarechny and Sorin, love interest and uncle of Treplev, respectively, we know that Treplev is in complete love with Nina. The conversation takes place in Act One Treplev says, “(Listening.) I hear footsteps ... (Hugs his uncle.) I can’t live without her. Even the sound of her footsteps is music. I’m so insanely happy! (Hurries to meet Nina.) My enchantress, my dream [. . .]” (43-44).

However the eccentric aspect of his love interest is -- Nina is a dejected fellow from her family of father and step-mother. She always has dreamt of being a great actress, and more than Treplev, she cares for her career and in later days falls prey in love to Boris. She is all heels in praise to Boris popularity, as she says in Act II:

NINA. What a wonderful world. If you knew how I envy you. People’s lives work out so differently. Some barely drag out their days in drab obscurity. They’re all alike and all miserable. But others, you for instance – you’re one in a million – have fascinating, brilliant lives full of meaning. You’re lucky. (88)

However, this girl, lost in glitter of charm and pomp of fame, also stands symbolic to a dead seagull killed by Treplev.

Treplev suffers from unusual antagonism from his own mother and her lover. Like, other artists, he longs for admiration for his talents and for his self. However, his ego is wounded by his mother when she dismisses his efforts. Still more, Trigorin his mother’s lady patronizes Treplev and steals away his beloved Nina, too.

Furthermore, he comments on Treplev's writing, as, "He's unlucky. He just can't manage to find his right style. His writing's strange, vague, some-times even like the ravings of a madman. None of his characters are alive" (85). This kind of patronizing behaviour from Trigorin adds to his agony. Such type of comment of Trigorin about Treplev's writing makes him feel inferior to Trigorin.

In Act One, before Nina performs the play, she says she feels nervous to perform before a famous writer, Trigorin. She asks him whether he is young and he tells her that he is young. Then she comments that Trigorin's stories are marvellous but Treplev's are rather dull. Nina's such type of comment further saddens him. The following piece of conversation between Treplev and Nina in Act One makes the point clear.

KOSTYA (*To Nina.*) You can go now, everything's ready for you there.

Are you nervous?

NINA. Yes very. Your mother's alright. I'm not afraid of her. But Trigorin's here. I feel so terrified and ashamed of acting in front of him... a famous writer. Is he young?

KOSTYA. Yes.

NINA. What marvellous stories he writes.

KOSTYA. (*Coldly.*) I wouldn't know. I haven't read them.

NINA. It's hard acting in your play. There are no real live people in it.

KOSTYA. Real live people! We have to show life as we see it in our dreams, not as it is, or as it ought to be.

NINA. There's so little action in it. It's all monologue. And I think a play should always have some love in it. (45)

In Act Two when Masha, a lady madly in love with Constantine asks Nina to recite something from his play she responds, "Do you really want me? It's so dull" (18). The above piece of conversation shows that Nina is infatuated by Trigorin and has started to dislike Treplev. In later days, Nina flees her home to become a successful actress and in the course she had an affair with Trigorin. She even bears a child from Trigorin, but, unfortunately died. After that Trigorin ill-treats Nina. In Act Four, after two years, the weather is very stormy. The weather has been terrible for nearly two days and there are enormous waves on the lake. Sorin is in his house but he is very sick so many people are gathered there. They are talking about Nina. From there we can infer that Nina has been badly used and deserted by Trigorin. Now she has come back and Treplev has recently met her. When Dorn (the doctor) asks about Nina's condition Kostya (Treplev's name) relates:

KOSTYA. She left home and had an affair with Trigorin. I expect you know that.

DORN. Yes.

KOSTYA. She had a child and it died. Trigorin lost interest in her and returned to his previous attachments, as one might have expected. As a matter of fact, he had never given them up. Being so spineless, he managed to keep them all going at the same time. As far as I can judge, Nina's private life has been a complete disaster. (27)

Dorn further asks Treplev about Nina's stage career and he informs him that she had fared worse. According to Treplev Nina used to write him letters and from them he used to infer that she was not happy even though she never complained. He says:

Her letters were intelligent, warm and interesting. She didn't complain, but I realized that she was deeply unhappy. Every line was like a tense,

aching nerve. And her mind seemed to be somewhat disturbed. She signed herself "the seagull". You know how the miller in *The Water Nymph* keeps saying he's a raven. Well, she kept repeating in her letters that she was a seagull. She's here now. (38)

Presently Trigorin and Arkadina also have come back to Sorin's house to see him for he is sick. After sometime all the people go for dinner and Treplev, alone, is in his room while Nina comes and knocks at the window. Treplev goes out and comes back with Nina. *Nina puts her head on his chest and begins to weep softly.* Here's a piece of conversation between Treplev and Nina from the last act, which further shows how badly Trigorin has used Nina and how she was disillusioned.

KOSTYA (*moved*). Nina! Nina! It's you! I had feeling you'd come. I've been so terribly restless all day. (*Takes off her hat and cape*) You're thinner...

NINA... I'm so tired. If only I could rest ... rest. I'm the seagull. No that's wrong. I'm an actress. Yes, that's right. (*Hearing Arkadina and Trigorin laughing, she listens for a minute, then runs to the door on the left and looks through the keyhole.*) He's here, too. (*Returning to Kostya.*) Yes, that's right. Never mind, He didn't believe in the theatre. He was always laughing at my dreams and little by little I stopped believing in them as well and lost heart. And there were all the worriers of being in love, jealousy, constant anxiety for the baby. I became petty and common ... I'm the seagull.

KOSTYA. Nina, you're crying again. Nina!

NINA. Don't worry. I make me feel better. I haven't cried for two years. Late yesterday evening I came to see whether our stage was still

there and felt much easier in my mind, much better. See I'm not crying anymore. (*Takes his hand.*) So you've become a writer. You're a writer and I'm an actress. We've both got caught up in it now. I used to be so happy, like a child. I'd wake up in the morning and burst into song. I loved you and dreamed of fame, but now? I'm leaving for Yelets early in the morning third class with the peasants. And in Yelets merchants who like a bit of culture will pester me with their attentions. How sordid life is! (46)

The above conversation shows that Nina and Treplev, both long for their pleasant past. They are not satisfied with their present situation. Even Nina finds her life sordid. Though they have obtained success to some extent, they are not happy with what they have. This piece of conversation clearly reflects their frustration towards their present way of living. The following extract from the last act of the play vividly shows the aggravating situation of Treplev. When Treplev meets Nina in his room he implores her to stay with him. He says:

Oh, Nina. I caused you, hated you, and tore up your letters and photographs. But all the time I knew that I was yours for ever. I can't stop loving you, Nina. Ever since I lost you and my stories began to be published life has become intolerable. I suffered agonies. It's as though my youth has suddenly been wrenched away. I feel like an old man of ninety. I call your name, I kiss the ground you trod. Wherever I look I see your face, the sweet smile that brought light into the best years of my life ... I'm quite alone, without the warmth of anyone's affection. I'm as cold as if I were in a dungeon, and whatever I write is

dry, harsh and gloomy. Stay here, Nina. I implore you. Or let me come away with you. (47)

However, Nina has a different view regarding the rest of her life. She says though she had suffered a lot in the past, she has changed by now. She tells him that she is prepared to struggle. She also tells him that her past life was awesome, especially after Trigorin started ill-treating her, but she has learnt to live her life now. At the same time she doesn't fail to express her nostalgic feeling regarding the time she spent with Treplev before she met Trigorin. She also tells him that now she has a faith which will help her to live her rest of the life. She says:

I'm different now. I'm a real actress. I enjoy acting. I revel in it. The stage intoxicates me and I feel I'm splendid. But while I've been living here I've been going for walks, walking every day. Now I know, Kostya, I realize that what matters in our profession, whether we act on the stage or write, is not fame, not glory, not the things I used to dream about, but the capacity to endure. To bear your cross and have faith. I do have faith and it's not so painful now, and when I think about my calling I'm no longer afraid of life ... Don't say anything to Trigorin when you see him. I love him. Love him even more than before. An idea for a short story. I love him passionately, desperately. It was so nice before Kostya! Do you remember? Life was so pure, so warm so gay and so innocent. Our feelings were like beautiful delicate flowers. (47-48)

Although Nina is badly treated by Trigorin and deserted she still finds her way to live her life she also declares that she still loves Trigorin passionately and desperately. She says that she has faith which will help her survive in her hardships. On the other hand,

when Treplev is dead sure that he is not to get Nina's love he finds his life useless and meaningless. Treplev reveals the fact that he is highly frustrated and has a feeling of utter loneliness. He says he has no faith to live on, and he is desperate, and is not yet able to find his path. He says (*Sadly*), "...But I'm still threshing about in a chaos of dreams and images, not knowing who needs it or why. I have no faith and do not know what my calling is" (48). He finds no meaning in his life and has no desire life to live any longer since there is no chance of loving other and being loved. He sees a kind of dead end in his life. He sees no purpose on living and he kills himself.

Nina, innocent of the ways of the world and saturated with the false romanticism of Trigorin's works, does not see the man but the celebrated artist. She is carried away by his fame and stirred by his presence; an infatuation with him quickly replaces her affection for Constantine. To her Trigorin embodies her dream of a brilliant and interesting life.

NINA: How I envy you, if you but knew it! How different are the lots of different people! Some can hardly drag on their tedious, insignificant existence; they are all alike, all miserable; others, like you, for instance -- you are one in a million -- are blessed with a brilliant, interesting life, all full of meaning.... You are happy.... What a delightful life yours is!

TRIGORIN: What is there so fine about it? Day and night I am obsessed by the same persistent thought; I must write, I must write, I must write.... No sooner have I finished one story than I am somehow compelled to write another, then a third, and after the third a fourth.... I have no rest for myself; I feel that I am devouring my own life.... I've never satisfied myself.... I have

the feeling for nature; it wakes a passion in me, an irresistible desire to write. But I am something more than a landscape painter; I'm a citizen as well; I love my country, I love the people; I feel that if I am a writer I am bound to speak of the people, of its suffering, of its future, to speak of science, of the rights of man, etc., etc.; and I speak about it all, volubly, and am attacked angrily in return by everyone; I dart from side to side like a fox run down by hounds; I see that life and science fly farther and farther ahead of me, and I fall farther and farther behind, like the countryman running after the train; and in the end I feel that the only thing I can write of is the landscape, and in everything else I am untrue to life, false to the very marrow of my bones. (23)

Constantine realizes that Nina is slipping away from him. The situation is aggravated by the constant friction with his mother and his despair at the lack of encouragement for his art. In a fit of despondency he attempts suicide, but without success. His mother, although nursing him back to health, is infuriated at her son's "foolishness," his inability to adapt himself to conditions, his impractical ideas. She decides to leave, accompanied by Trigorin. On the day of their departure Nina and Trigorin meet once more. The girl tells him of her ambition to become an actress, and, encouraged by him, follows him to the city.

The title of the play *The Seagull* is very much relevant to the unconventional urge of tragedy. The image of the 'seagull' changes meaning as the play develops. In Act One, Nina uses the *Seagull* to describe the way she is drawn to the lake of her childhood home. She says, "I feel drawn to the lake like a seagull" (44) suggests that

she is deeply in love with Treplev. In this context, the seagull represents freedom and security.

In Act Two Treplev shoots a seagull and gives to Nina. Treplev tells her that one day he will be dead in Nina's honour just like the seagull. This fact is conveyed in the following piece of conversation which takes place after Nina meets Trigorin and she falls in love with him and treats Treplev differently.

KOSTYA (*Comes in hatless, with a gun and a dead seagull*). Are you alone?

NINA. Yes.

(*Kostya lays the seagull at her feet*)

NINA. What does this mean?

KOSTYA. I did a dreadful thing today- I killed a seagull. I'm laying it at your feet.

NINA. What's the matter with you? (*Picks up the seagull and looks at it.*)

KOSTYA. (*After a pause*). I'll soon kill myself in the same way.

NINA. I simply don't recognize you.

KOSTYA. Yes, but only since I stopped recognizing you. You've changed towards me, your eyes are cold, and my presence obviously embarrasses you.

NINA. You've grown so irritable lately and keep expressing yourself in incomprehensible symbols. I suppose this seagull is a symbol, too, but I'm afraid I don't understand it. (*Puts the seagull on the bench.*) I'm not clever enough to understand you. (60)

Similarly, in the later pieces of conversation we find that Nina is exploited – mentally and physically by Trigorin. She even bears a child from him, but the child dies. When, he discards her after using for his momentary pleasure, she still cannot ignore him. In fact, even after the realization that she has been ruined and deserted by Trigorin, she cannot free herself from his charm. In Act IV, she expresses her unconventional love to Trigorin, as, "NINA. [. . .] When you see Trigorin, don't say anything to him. I love him – love him even more than before. [. . .] I love him, love him passionately, desperately" (114). Now, it is Nina, who is the 'seagull.' She left her family and village to acquire her dream as an actress and rejected Treplev's love in favour to Trigorin, but, neither she neither became an actress nor could hold Trigorin. The following piece of conversation between Nina and Treplev is in commensurate with the opinion.

KOSTYA: You're thinner . . .

NINA: . . . I'm so tired. If only could rest . . . rest. I'm the seagull.

He didn't believe in the theatre. He was always laughing at my dreams and little by little I stopped believing in them as well and lost heart.

And there were all the worriers of being in love, jealousy, constant anxiety for the baby. I became petty and common . . . I'm the seagull.

(89)

She expresses her nostalgic feelings to Kostya and she also declares that she still loves Trigorin passionately and desperately, even though she is badly treated by him. She says that she has faith which will help her survive in her hardships. On the other hand, Kostya is desperate; he is not yet able to find his path as he doesn't have any faith to live on. When he is dead sure that he is not to get Nina's love he finds his life useless and meaningless. He sees no purpose on living and he kills himself.

Thus, the seagull also serves as a foreshadowing device. Nina fulfils Trigorin's prophecy of destroying her just like the seagull and Treplev kills himself in Nina's honour at the end of the play when she still does not love him. Here, the 'seagull' symbolizes destruction in the hands of the beloved one. In Act IV Shamrayev, manager of Sorin, takes a seagull and shows it to Trigorin. At this juncture the seagull symbolizes Nina being transformed into Trigorin's destroyed victim. He no longer recognizes her after using her for his fun. The piece of conversation between Shamrayev and Trigorin brings the point into light.

SHAMRAYEV. (*Takes Trigorin to the cupboard*). Here's the thing I was telling about. (*Takes the stuffed seagull out of the cupboard.*) Your order.

TRIGORIN. (*Looking at the seagull.*) I don't remember (*Thinks for a minute.*) No, I don't remember. (91)

It is not only seagull, but also the lake has an avant-garde role in the *The Seagull*. To Nina, the lake magnetically draws her to it. She says, "I fell drawn to the lake like a seagull" (44). It is a place to roost, to feel secure and at home when there is no home to be found. To Nina the lake also represents curiosity and exploration of childhood. She tells Trigorin that she knows all of the little islands on the lake. In Act Two, Nina says, "It belonged to my mother when she was alive. I was born there. I've lived here all my life, by this lake, and I know every tiny island on it" (65). Treplev tells Nina that losing her love feels like the lake sunk into the ground. To him losing her affection feels like losing a recognizable place, a place of peace and renewal. Treplev's metaphor describes a life source-the lake-drying up and disappearing. In Act two Treplev says:

You've changed towards me, your eyes are cold, and my presence obviously embarrasses you...It all began that evening when my play was such a stupid flop. Women never forgive failure. I've burnt everything, down to the last scrap of paper. If only you knew how miserable I am. Your coldness is terrible. I can't believe it. It's like waking one morning and finding that the lake has dried up or its waters have disappeared into the ground. You say you're not clever enough to understand me. But what is there to understand? My play was a flop, so now you despise my inspiration and regard me as nobody, like hundreds of others. (*Stamping*) How well I realize that! It's as if a nail has been driven into my brain. Curse it and the pride that is sucking away at my life-blood like a serpent. (60)

This is how Treplev feels about his own life in relation to his loss of Nina.

Chekhov's setting of the play around a lake emphasizes its purpose with Treplev's setting of his play by the lake. In Act One, Chekhov writes:

The park on Sorin's state. A wide path, leading away from the audience to a lake in the background, is blocked by a rough stage, put up for an amateur dramatic performance. It hides the lake from view. To left and right of this stage -- bushes. A few chairs and a small table. (1)

The Lake represents both Treplev and Chekhov's desire to move to a more naturalistic theatre not limited by three walls. Furthermore, in the middle of Act One, Chekhov writes, "The curtain rises, revealing the view of the lake; the moon on the horizon is reflected in the water; Nina, all in white, is sitting on a large boulder" (47).

The lake means several different things to the play's characters. The lake is a place of reflection, respite as escape. Trigorin goes there in person to fish. Treplev goes to the lake to mope and reflect, perhaps also to get attention for his bruised ego.

Crisis in the Play

All characters in the play are in relation to each and other and hence the crisis in the play takes place between the members of the family, itself, as early as first act. Irina, the mother and her son Treplev are the major characters between whom the major tension takes place in the drama. In Act I itself, when the mother passes sardonic remarks on Treplev's play, we are introduced to the catastrophe of the crisis. But, in Act Two, we are made sure of the unconventional tragedy, when Irina says, "Tell me, what's the matter with my son? Why he is so moody and bad tempered? He spends whole days down by the lake and I hardly ever see him" (57).

But the fact is, it is she who has neither time nor good remarks about her son. She keeps on poking in between the dramas and doesn't hesitate to hurt her son. She says:

IRINA (to Trigorin). Sit by me. Ten or fifteen years ago there was music and singing by this lake almost every night. There are six estates on the shores. There was so much laughter, fun and shooting, I remember, and so many love affairs. But who was the darling and idol of all six estates? I pretend [nods towards Dorn] our doctor, Eugene Dorn. He's still charming, but in those days he was irresistible. Still, I'm beginning to feel rather guilty, why did I hurt my poor boy's feelings? I'm worried. [Loudly] Constantine, my dear! Constantine.
(11)

Another important symbol Chekhov uses in his play is 'weather' which he uses to create the tone in his plays. The weather reflects the characters' state of mind and foreshadows upcoming events. For instance, before Nina returns to visit Treplev the weather is stormy and windy as if the storm conjured up Nina and brought her to the estate. In Act Four, Medvedenko and Masha comment on weather:

MEDVEDENKO says, "What terrible weather! It's been like this for nearly two days now".

MASHA (*turning up the lamp*) says, "There are waves on the lake, enormous ones" (36).

In Act Four, Treplev and his mother's talk also reveals this fact. "KOSTYA. (*Flings open the window and listens.*) How dark it is! I can't understand why I am feeling so restless. ARKADINA. Close the window, Kostya. There's a draught" (45).

The writer makes use of elm tree which another symbol of eccentric outcome of *The Seagull*. The extract from the play in Act One makes the point clear.

Nina... (*Looks round.*)

KOSTYA. We're alone.

NINA. I think there's someone over there...

KOSTYA. No, there isn't. (*A kiss.*)

NINA. What sort of tree is that?

KOSTYA. An elm.

NINA. Why is it so dark?

KOSTYA. It's evening, everything gets dark then. Please don't leave early, I beg you. (46)

In this context, elm symbolizes carnal desire. In fact, Treplev's unconscious desire gets outlet through elm symbolically. Nina feels comfortable when she's with Treplev

and Treplev perhaps finds her sexually appealing and he wants her to be with him in the dark evening. When Nina asks him if there was anyone he assures her that there was no one around. She finds the elm tree very dark and the evening equally darks. She doesn't want anyone to interrupt them when they are together in the dark. This suggests that their unconscious is getting victory over their conscious. And both of them find each other sexually appealing.

KOSTYA. Then what if I come to your place, Nina? I'll stand in the garden all night gazing at your window.

NINA. You mustn't. The night watchman would notice you. Tresor isn't used to you yet. He'd bark.

KOSTYA. I love you.

NINA. Shush. (44-45)

In the above dialogue Nina brings the reference of a dog which is symbolically a faithful animal. When she says that the dog won't recognize him this suggests what she is not still faithful towards Treplev. At this point the dog might be symbolically referring to her unconscious which is not faithful to him, may be she's not aware of this fact.

In Act One, Nina says, "The moon was just rising" (6). At this point, the rising moon connotes her romantic mood, at the same time, the rising of tension amongst the characters. She was being romantic thinking about her lover, Treplev. In the same act, Treplev asks, "Is the moon rising?" (7) In this context the moon suggests the people's mood. He wonders whether people are mentally ready to have a look of the show that Kostya was going to present. He feels that the mood of the audience plays a significant role. Similarly, in Act Two Trigorin says, "I have my own moon" (20). At this juncture 'moon' connotes the source of writing and he enjoys the world of writing.

The act of fishing also can be taken as a symbol. In Act One, Trigorin says, "I'm very fond of fishing" (8). This is suggestive of him enjoying writing. He is a professional writer. He finds the lake very fertile place for the writer. He also makes notes to write a new story based on the seagull's life that is killed by Kostya. When Irina asks Nina about Trigorin she says, "He is fishing by the bathing hut" (8). This suggests that he is busy writing a new novel story to achieve stardom. However, his target of starting something new gets a major setback from within the family itself. His beloved Nina finds his play lifeless. She says, "There's not action, it's just a lot of speeches. I think a play really needs a love interest" (6). On the other hand, his mother, finds his plays, "utter rubbish." She comments, "I'm only sorry to see a young man spend his time so tediously. I didn't mean to hurt his feelings" (11).

Treplev's dream of creating a new and dynamic world of theatres shatters from within his dear and near ones. Treplev's vision of change in theatre is expressed as, "What we need's a new kind of theatre. New forms are what we need, and if we haven't got them we'd be a sight better off with nothing at all" (4).

Spiritual crisis in *the Seagull*

In Chekhov's *The Seagull*, the protagonist Treplev's failure in getting his beloved Nina's love, attracting his mother's attention, approval and admiration, and becoming a renowned writer kills away his spirit and desire to live. He loses his faith in human values; he has no faith in social and moral values. He feels inferior to Trigorin and he feels alienated and frustrated. In such an emotional state he kills a seagull all of a sudden without any intention. The killing of the seagull, anticipates his own tragic death. Treplev's killing of the seagull symbolizes spiritual crisis Treplev has undergone in the play *The Seagull*.

In Act I, Treplev presents a play which he has written, and in which Nina is the only performer. The performance of the play brings critical comments from Irina, and Treplev is angered by his mother's sarcasm. This point is made crystal clear from the piece of conversation mentioned below.

NINA. Men, lions, eagles and ... anew.

ARKADKINA. (*in a low voice.*) This is something in the Decadent line.

KOSTYA. (*imploring reproachfully*). Mother!

NINA. I am alone. Once ... eyes

ARKADINA. There's a smell of sulphur. Is that right?

KOSTYA. Yes.

ARKADINA (*laughing*). There's an effect for you.

KOSTYA. Mother!

NINA. He is bored without man....

POLINA (*to Dorn*). You've taken your hat off. Put it on again, or you'll catch cold.

ARKADINA. The doctor's taken off his hat to the Devil, the father of eternal matter.

KOSTYA (*loudly, in a rage*). The play's over. Stop! Curtain!

ARKADINA. What are you angry about?

KOSTYA. Stop! Curtain! Bring down the curtain! (*Stamping.*)

Curtain! (*The curtain falls.*) I'm sorry! I forgot that only a select few are allowed to write plays and act on the stage. I've interfered with their monopoly.

IRINA... (*is about to say something else, but gives a hopeless wave of the hand and goes off left.*) (9-10)

Constantine has in the interim matured considerably. Although he has made himself heard as a writer, he nevertheless feels that life today has no place for such as his: that sincerity in art is not wanted. His mother is with him, but she only serves to emphasize the flatness of his surroundings. He loves her, but her ways jar him and drive him into seclusion.

Treplev is spiritually hollow, as he is distant from anyone who understands him; his mother and his beloved Nina are far from understanding him. And when Nina, has returned to her native place, broken in body and spirit, he still shows her his passion, but to no result. Partly because of the memory of her past affection for Constantine, and mainly because she learns of Trigorin's presence, she is drawn to the place where two years before she had dreamed of the beauty of an artistic career. The cruel struggle for recognition, the bitter disappointment in her relation with Trigorin, the care of a child and poor health have combined to change the romantic child into a sad woman.

Constantine still loves her. He pleads with her to go away with him, to begin a new life. But it is too late. The lure of the footlights is beckoning to Nina; she returns to the stage. Constantine, unable to stand the loneliness of his life and the mercenary demands upon his art, kills himself.

To many people such an ending is pessimism -- defeat. But, often, however, apparent defeat is in reality the truest success. For, is not success, as commonly understood, but too frequently bought at the expense of character and idealism?

As such, *The Seagull* is not a defeat of Treplev Constantine. As long as there is still such material in society as the Constantine -- men and women would rather

prefer to die than compromise with the sordidness of life. It will forever bring hope and strength in life, to struggle and make their voice heard. If Constantine perishes, it is the social fault of our indifference to, and lack of appreciation of, the real values that alone advance the fuller and more complete life of the race. It is Constantine, at the end that principally stands for his vision and ethics, compelling the society to ponder, if, it is not time for a change.

IV. Fall of a Common Man

The present study has presented *The Seagull* as an unconventional tragedy. The play contains various unconventional pictures like, no heroic figure possessing the capacity of meaningful struggle, no heroic death, no providential endings; however, sufficiently tragic to evoke the emotions and sympathy to the hero, Treplev Constantine. Among most of the dramas, the tragic hero is the key element, determining the genre of play, whether tragic or not, but, *The Seagull* is far different from Aristotelian and Shakespearean concept of tragic hero.

The study has tried to show how and why Treplev underwent spiritual crisis and killing of own self as the non-heroic death of protagonist is the failure of a common man. Treplev failed in getting his mother's affection and approval in his activities related to dramas and theatre. He had a beloved who changed her behaviour towards him when she found Trigorin, a famous Moscow based artist. Though in course of time, Trigorin ill-treats her, she still loves him and conveys this truth to Treplev. When Treplev is quite sure that he is never to get her love and affection he finds his life meaningless and useless. He finds no purpose in his living, as, all the loved ones of him, either neglect or avoids him. He loses faith in human values as a result he has no belief in social and moral values. His desire to love and being loved remains unfulfilled, which leads him to the path of frustration and alienation.

Moreover, his greatest desire of amending the ways dramas were presented in his time, were never heeded any attention from all the concerned sectors of people. Amid this adversity, he, all of a sudden he kills a seagull being in a state of emotional and spiritual turmoil. Then, he loses faith in everything and has no desire to live any longer. Though he kills a seagull, he symbolically declares that he will be killed like

the seagull one day. The seagull is a victim in a literal sense but symbolically, it is Treplev's soul that has been killed by the external world and its people.

In the play, Nina, Treplev's beloved says she is a "seagull" which also suggests that she was a victim whom Trigorin destroyed. Nina loves Trigorin but she can't get his love back. However, she still loves him and is ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of Trigorin. Similarly, Treplev loves Nina and when he is sure that he is never to get her love back, and he sacrifices himself for her sake. In fact the killing of Seagull is the manifestation of the mental state of many of the characters, including the hero.

The play ends with the suicide of Treplev and the failure of his ideas and vision. It is in fact symbolic fall of a common man, whose desire are generally neglected or given no attention to. In the sense, the drama is a tragedy; however, an unconventional tragedy, as it is not the demise of a tall and noble figure, but of any one like us – a common man.

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