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Chekov's *The Seagull*: Moral Decadence as a Strand of Modernity

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By

ArjunPalli

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Central Department of English

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Chekhov’s *The Sea-gull*: Moral Decadence as a Strand of Modernity” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Arjun Palli has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Mr. Raj Kumar Baral

Internal Examiner

Mr. Mahesh Paudyal

External Examiner

Prof. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota

Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Arjun Palli

Abstract

This research paper brings out the features of modernity affecting the morality of the characters in the play, The Sea-gull by Anton Chekhov. The characters in the play are in the influence of the experience of modernity but at the cost of their integrity and proper conducts. Their inclination towards modernity causes them to follow its aspirations as deeply absorbed in their passions. In essence, Chekhov portrays the characters with different prototype physiognomies of modernity proposed by Charles Baudelaire, like the boheme, dandy, suicide and other physiognomies of passions. The characters in the play are attracted by the experiences of popularity and fame, beauty and fashion, the crowd and city's world, in an extreme limit so that they derail from their stable life in a way as directed towards the situation of the moral decadence. The excessive vocation for the passions and ambitions create struggle and crisis in the way of life of the characters as they fall into moral decadence.

Key Words: *boheme, the crowd, dandy, fashion, moral decadence, modernity, suicide*

Chekhov's *The Sea-gull*: Moral Decadence as a Strand of Modernity

The Sea-gull (1896), a play written by Anton Chekhov (1860 – 1904) presents a story about some people living with the complex situation of moral decadence brought about by the experience of modernity. In the play, its characters from Moscow and from an estate near to Moscow represent such intricate life of moral depravity provoked by modernity. The setting of the play is an estate which is near and in reach of Moscow, the capital city of Russia and it is a city in the play too. The estate and Moscow have a connection and sharing, through some characters. Two people from Moscow regularly visit the estate and the play moves forward along with their participation in almost all acts. Along with these visitors, many things go on, as in a way that almost all of the characters' personalities and attitude towards life provide decrepit controversial notions to the general concept of morality. So, the sense of moral decadence emerging through the effect of modernity's influence in the life of the characters forms the content of the play.

On reading the play, the experience of modernity opens with only in a trickling hints for Chekhov, predominantly, mixes it with the crises of his characters through the theme of moral decadence. But, the combination of modernity and morality in the characters of the play becomes more conspicuous when a reader acquaints with these words of Walter Benjamin, as he notes them for the items in *feuilleton*: “[c]ity gossip, theatrical intrigues, and "things worth knowing" were their most popular sources” (60). These identical elements are the thread ware craft of Chekhov in the *The Sea-gull* too. Its characters gossip on the experience of city life, discuss on fashion and beauty, fame, ambitions and passions while they entangle their

life in the macabre of love, for which Chekhov seems to be curious to depict it as a quality of life in the modern times. Chekhov appears to be dexterously weaving modernity's affinity with the characters' decadent nature. This is where this research mainly focuses on, for an attempt to examine how Chekhov can have a linkage to modernity, and in most essence, how *The Sea-gull* on its theme of moral decadence can have its affiliation to modernity.

The play also brings in the idea of change, like it is frequent in Chekhov's works. The change in life and the world, change in person, characters, attitudes, change about something like- 'a new way of life', is experienced dominantly, which is present in the play too. As a writer about real life, it can be simply assumed that Chekhov should have really, in person, observed such life. A PhD. Scholar in Russian history, Walter G. Moss mentions Chekhov's life as one that emerges forward along with "a larger program of economic modernization undertaken by Tsar Alexander II . . . Chekhov's life also spanned a period of increased economic modernization" (3-4). This modernization process in Russian life appears already emerging before Chekhov's early literary career, as Moss further admits, "[c]ompared to the half century before his birth, modernization indicators like population growth, urbanization, literacy, industrial output, and the size of the middle class all increased at a more rapid pace" (4). The subject of modernization, which has spanned through Chekhov's own life, therefore, cannot be a subject aloof from his sense and visions. Therefore, Chekhov stays close to the experience and study of modernity.

The term 'modernization' and its experiences on the life and world has been the reason behind the origin of the study of the modernity in literature. Though the word modernization more implies to the experience and expression of the literal elements and structures of the world, a movement in literature and art- 'modernism'

has devised a scope of a vast textual account on the phenomena of modernization advancing the study of modernity. Thus, modernity in literature has evolved as a response to modernization, as its simple example can be realized in Thomas Hardy's words, "to denote what he (Hardy) called a general and unwelcomed creeping industrial 'ache of Modernism'" (qtd. Childs 14). Hardy has overlapped modernization with modernism, though his notion is about modernity. Therefore, while expanding in quite a bit detail on modernism and modernity, Peter Childs' further words are more befitting here as he states that the modernism in the literature is not just about the change in life but also about the crisis, and its relation to modernity is termed to represent and account a way of living and of life experiences that arise "with the changes wrought by industrialisation, urbanization . . . its characteristics are disintegration and reformation, fragmentation and rapid change, ephemerality and insecurity. It involves certain new understandings of time and space: speed, mobility, communication, travel, dynamism, chaos and cultural revolution. This societal shift" makes up the experience of the modernity (16). Such similar social and life experiences, shifts and crises can be realized in the *The Sea-gull* too, that it discusses on the changing world reflecting on the city and the crowd, presents talks on travels, on chaos about life and its change, and also on the ephemeral elements of life like passions and will for beauty, fashion and popularity and fame, and also about the sense of insecurity and loss in the individuals. So, centering to this idea of modernity, the main objective of this research paper is to identify the textual elements in the *The Sea-gull*, where they can confer Chekhov as an author with modernist attributes. At the same moment, the research would further dive-in to explicate the play's characters' moral decadence pertinence with the personalities a character can experience in the modernity. And lastly, the research would formulate a concluding

remark on the tendency of the moral decadence with the experience of modernity.

Many reviews have been written in the play *The Seagull*. The scholars have observed on much of the similar issues of unrighteous human being. A review work, by Barry B. Witham, questions rhetorically on *The Seagull*: "[i]s this a play about creative people or facile hacks?" (413). Witham's inquiry stresses that Konstantine (is Trepleeff in the play), is not as what he says in the play. Konstantine is rather a "Facile hack", that he is too no less duplicate than Trigorin, while Witham also claims that "Nina's faintly hysterical outbursts about how she has learned to endure do not qualify" (413) as well. Witham speaks on the characters' superficial state of being. Moreover, Witham also inspects on the petty aspects of the characters depicting their nature as:

[t]here are so many victims in *The Seagull* that it is difficult to take sides.

Irena (Arkadina) clinging to a youthful Trigorin in as much the "seagull" as Nina, Masha, or the inept Medviedenko. No one can really help anyone because they are all so absorbed in their own problems. I was captivated by this moving and gently humorous production which depicted a group of imperfect human creatures trying to find a share of happiness. That they were writers or actors or farmers seemed superfluous. (413)

Implying every character in the play as superfluous, Witham's understanding about *The Seagull* is a play about miserable beings. But there is something in the play which Witham might have missed, the rise of new generations, Trepeleve (Trepleeff) and Nina who challenge assumed morality and conventions, in the way that Trepleeff does not like old mode of theatre. The rising new generations and their aspiration to modernity had not been observed by Witham.

In an another review, LuranaDonnels O'Malley, interprets *The Seagull* as with

more vulgar world of women life as she relates the play having a "dark and silent man, a literal sex symbol . . . sensuously dancing a smoldering tango with Masha, as well as with Nina and Arkadina . . . at once bizarre and compelling" (383). O'Malley also marks at base human aspects. But she too, has not properly remarking on the other pressing situations of these women, that Arkadina, Masha and Nina, all of them in the play live at least struggling to find their aim, despite the pressure of modern life. That, Masha lives with a hope for Trepellev (or Treplieff) who instead loves Nina; Nina, who has but changed her mind for Trigorin keeps her wish to pursue her actress-ambition in Moscow. Modernity shapes the characters' destinies; this point is missing in O'Malley's review.

Annette Kramer has interpreted more extensively about the issues of love, rejection, despair and loss in the play, as she describes:

Chekov's plays most commonly focus on the characters' struggles with themselves, other characters, and the world [. . .] that people frequently deceive themselves, love those who rejected them, or long only for past [. . .] characters stop moving, they die. Like planets, each character has an orbit determined by his or her desire . . . the pressure from the outside world threatens to crush them in entropic despair. Jenkins (Richard Jenkins) points out that . . . the Chekovian Universe has no moral component. (389)

Kramer exactly depicts the characteristics of the people of the Chekovian universe, as like in *The Seagull*. The desire for material life so much strongly works in the characters of *The Seagull*. The wants for desires, passions and fame engulfs them and their morality gets drown in the want of possessions. However, Kramer does not employ that if modernity is acting on the characters' such situation.

Likewise, Ray Schultz comments that Chekov's characters are often terrible,

though they are not inhumane. Schultz writes:

The failure of humans to connect may generally be considered a hallmark of Chekov, yet his characters rarely avoid making contact in such as studied or self-conscious manner. Rather, his characters, although often failing almost always strive to make contact- no matter how socially inept or emotionally repressed they may be. (112)

Schultz marks that the characters of Chekov lack close bondage though they try to keep reaching to each other. Schultz's opinion reflects at the much endeavoring desire of Chekhov's characters, who are struggling as much to attain ones' wish, but he does not point at what leads them to be disconnected and discontent with own people and family can be the modernity's cause.

Keith Sagar, but explains quite closely about Chekov's characters' falling life states. He writes, "[B]ut in *The Seagull*, perhaps uniquely, he (Chekov) seems to offer the possibility of a personal escape route, here and now" (446). Quoting further Walter Stein's terms, Sagar asserts on "Chekov's naive social optimism" (446). This assures Sagar's reading of *The Seagull* as much from the point of the hopeful vision, but he also does not elaborate much about the modernity's influence on the characters.

Although all these reviewers and critics have observed the play from different points of views, none of them has illuminated on the moral decadence in relation to the experience of modernity. Therefore, the study of moral decadence in terms of modernity appears yet to be discovered in the play, to which this researcher takes a move to attempt.

Based on the literary analysis approach, this research becomes an intertextual analysis on discussing the play, *The Sea-gull*. The textual evidences from the play, especially analysing the characters and also other elements in the play are included as

the main sources of the study. From the concept of the modernisation's influence in the life, and the modernity's evocation in the *The Sea-gull*, the researcher is inspired at the observation of the play's characters' disparities followed by the role of modernity's elements and issues. This observation would assign Chekhov as an author aware of the features of the modernity, as the one following the imprints of other modernists, and like Charles Baudelaire's. Thus, in an attempt to put the affinity of the *The Sea-gull* with the visions of the modernity, the researcher has sought to borrow Baudelaire's insights on the modernity.

Charles Baudelaire, a French poet and a critic on the literature of the city, stands as one pioneer in the evolution of the 'theory of modernity'. He writes on almost all concerns of the city. Paris had been his central textual landscape. Observing the daily life of the city, and working on them, Baudelaire used the term, 'modernity' in his literary works which got a movement passed down to the preceding modernist writers. Baudelaire's sets of ideas in the 'theory of modernity' postulate the visions on the different features, characters and issues of the city life and its people. The concepts like, boheme, conspirators, flaneur, the modernity, hero, physiognomy, are Baudelaire's principal ideas. While, the ideas on the beauty, the concepts on dandy and dandyism, fashion and women, and the suicide, are also the introductory elements for his 'theory of modernity'. Bringing out these features and figures of city life into light, he writes in his text "The Painter of Modern Life" that the "modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" experience (ch. 1, sec. iv). But life in the city is adverse and splenetic, which forms the central essence of Baudelaire's works. With the supports of these featuring views and principles, the researcher would argue on the reasons behind the presence of the spleen of the moral decadence in the *The Sea-gull*. However, as a major reader and critic of Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin's text

“The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire” offers the primary theoretical text for this research. Whereas, Benjamin’s words also play a mediating role between Chekhov and Baudelaire. Hence forth, putting the ideas and evidences from the play and interacting them with the visions of the modernity in the in-depth analysis section of this research below, the researcher would explicate on the moral decadence as issued out of the result of modernity. While, the researcher would also form out a conclusion determining the issue of moral decadence as one effect of the modernity.

In the play, *The Sea-gull*, Chekhov depicts his characters as affected of moral decadence while pursuing the modernity’s experiences and passions. There is a story in the play, about a new generation boy and a girl’s dream. One wants to be a popular author and other likes to be a successful actress. Like them, almost all characters in the play are also occupied with some kind of desires, and they seem to be chasing them, in a way that they even struggle with their own life to fulfill them. The passions for the spirit of modernity attracts them. In fact, the characters are inspired by new trends of life. They are caught in the fascinations of the modernity, its beauty and fashion, the city life, the popularity, and the passional aspirations and ambitions. But they cannot see at the evil and strenuous side of their pursuits, and even stake their life and relationships, like raising a notion about a question, ‘what it comes about the morality in such mode of life?’ Thus, the concept of modernity, as an obscure slice of the play becomes the main force for the momentums and the motives of the characters in the play, for Chekhov presents them in a way that they question the conventional mode of life and the moral decadence. Meanwhile, the setting of the play also provides the notion of modernity and its influence in the characters and their life.

The setting in the play forges the foremost reflection on the vision of the

modernity. It appears as Chekhov seems to be hiding it as a pith beneath the play's conflicts. But this picture of the modernity becomes more vivid when Shamraeff, the manager of Sorin's Estate reminds Arkadina as "the train leaves at two-five" (Act 3, 60), thus providing a perfect insight that the events and instruments of modernity has touched the characters' life in the play. However, the wishes, expressions and the experiences of the characters or their personalities illustrate more extensively on the visions of the modernity. The characters act in a way that they bear prototype of Baudelaire's insights on the modernity, like they represent the features of boheme, dandy and dandyism, flaneur and the crowd, suicide, heroic manifestation of woman, the beauty and fashion and others.

Trepleff represents the most remarkable features of modernity in the play. In him, Chekhov illuminates the images of boheme, the vision of new mode of life, and the suicide. As an amateur author in the play, with his prompt for new form of theatre, Trepleff epitomizes a vision for the forecast of the collapsing old mode of life. He is a young generation who daunts the nerves of his own mother, Arkadina, a leading actress. While, Arkadina negates Trepleff and his work saying, a "decadent thrash" (Act 1, 19), as portraying him like a bohemian person, "disintegrated, fluctuating" (Benjamin 47) away from the common established trend, conspiring the world. Wishing for a new kind of theatre, deviated from the traditional mode becomes a threat against the old generation. But Trepleff, a juvenile author becomes conspired instead. His own mother, whom he thinks close, dazzled with her actress vanities, seldom supports him.

Chekhov depicts in Trepleff, about a trend that how young generations consider the life as different from others. A young boy, recently completed his college study from Moscow, Trepleff expresses his repulsion after the superficiality of the

modern stage stating it as “merely the vehicle of convention and prejudice” (Act 1, 9). He further reveals that the little three-walled room stage exhibits only its mighty geniuses, high-priests of art people “in the act of eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing their coats, and attempt to extract a moral from their insipid talk . . . the same, same, same old stuff” (Act 1, 9), which he does not like. But, when he stands against the mainstream artists and the “playwrights . . . under . . . the same, same, same old stuff” (Act 1, 9), he happens to be like a boheme, a conspirator against an old system, like a person “in a more or less blunted state of revolt against society . . . shaking the foundations of this society” (Benjamin 54). Treplieff’s opinion for new art therefor becomes an expression of dissent against old mode of life and art, but he gets subdued before the tedious schemes and beliefs of old generation artists and authors in the play.

Like in the manner as Baudelaire describes the decrepitude state of life in his poem *Le Cygne (The Swan)*, Treplieff also depicts the fragility of life in his play. With an allegorical play, Treplieff demonstrates to his visions on new life like as similar in Baudelaire’s feature. Through Nina, an amateur actress, Treplieff relates his imagination to life as, “. . . all life . . . has died out at last. A thousand years have passed . . . All is cold . . . void, void . . . terrible, terrible . . . all living creatures have dropped to dust, and eternal matter has transformed them into stones and water and clouds; but their sprits have flowed together into one, and that great world-soul am I!” (Act 1, 17). Such view on life by Treplieff gives similar intonation as in *Le Cygne*, which represents for “[t]he condition of Paris is fragile . . . surrounded by the symbols of fragility – living creatures . . . and historical figures” (Benjamin 111). But such an apocalyptic vision of Treplieff and his attempt to observe the life from a new aspect becomes an uncomprehending idea to other artists. However, Treplieff’s new mode of

theatre reflects so much to the notion about Victor Hugo's "contact with the spirit world" (Benjamin 93). As Treplieff's play appears similar in the way as Hugo presents his contemplation for the spiritual world, Chekhov also appears to be implying, through Treplieff, about the loss of spirit and soul; while Treplieff also decries, in the play, against the old generation's tendency towards the material life. But unfortunately, unable to convince others, Treplieff becomes a tag of a decadent to them, and unable to become a good writer he suicides at last.

Uninspired by his writing career and also dejected from others and from the one he loves, Treplieff turns to meet with a disastrous experience, but a heroic one as Baudelaire reckons about the suicide. Baudelaire refers to suicide as a heroic will. Quoting an example by Walter Benjamin, "depicting an English worker who is taking his life because he despairs of earning a livelihood" (qtd in Benjamin 105), it can be assumed that how it happens to Treplieff to take his own life. Unable to find any loving one supporting him and getting gripped by his own writing ambition, he feels his "life has been almost unendurable . . . in a chaos of phantoms and dreams" (Act 4, 84-85). Treplieff's crisis occurs by unsupportive attitude of his mother, while he had to be dispossessed from his beloved girl, Nina too. Because his fashion haunted actress mother having "seventy thousand roubles in a bank at Odessa" (Act 1, 9) never cares for her son who wears "the same little old coat . . .for . . . years" (Act 3, 52), Treplieff's life gets seized with economic misery too and cannot stand independently. Seized with material and mental self-esteem, Treplieff pursues suicide which issues a question for the modernity in the play.

On such big question of suicide and its relationship to the modernity, Walter Benjamin but, assumes it as a plain modernity phenomenon. Individuals shackled in modern perils like Treplieff stricken with material and emotional deprivations are

common to suicide, implies Benjamin. The “[m]odernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion.” (104), attests Benjamin. This view of Benjamin’s on suicide settles evidently on Trepleieff’s situation. He seems really as an inimical person, who “attempted suicide” rather for twice (Act 3, 48). Trepleieff thus, appears as a character typical of the modernity, unveiling the passion for suicide. For the suicide will is “the achievement of modernity-in the realm of the passions”, further writes Benjamin (104). Hence, deprived of his wishes, Trepleieff resorts to suicide and becomes a stark example of the pessimism about life - a morally hostile representation to life. But, this one variant of modernity, the suicide of Trepleieff, is the only one form of passions in the play, that it seems, Chekhov is aware of other experiences of modernity as well.

Among the other physiognomy of the modernity, that can be extracted from the play is about the passion for the fashion. Arkadina is the typical character to it. Chekhov depicts her as a model of attitude who do not have any purposes, except her own beauty, fame, dressings and vanities. Once Trepleieff reminds about her enchantment for clothing which is more than her responsibility of motherly care after her son: “. . . You see, she doesn’t love me, and why should she? She likes life and love and gay clothes, and I am already twenty-five years old; a sufficient reminder to her that she is no longer young. When I am away she is only thirty-two, in my presence she is forty-three, and she hates me for it” (Act 1, 9). Though Arkadina is already in the other edge of her middle life age, she still seeks for her youthful appearance. She seems to be a prototype wearer of Baudelaire’s words: “how great and poetic we are in our patent-leather shoes and our neckties . . . the attire, the covering of the modern hero, . . . does it not have a beauty and a charm of its own?” (qtd in Benjamin 105). As

provokes these words, Arkadina exhibits her deep passion for fashion, as she once exalts own self-appearance, as she says, “I keep myself as correct-looking as an Englishman . . . carefully dressed, with my hair neatly arranged” (Act 2, 30). She is a leading actress besides, who also confesses that she has some money, but only for her: “expenses for dress alone are enough to bankrupt me” (Act 3, 52). Her fashion becomes not only a desire, but a way of life style and standard too, for as an actress her fame needs a spotlight always. But, concerning for only self-make-ups, Arkadina lets Trepelieff penny less and esteem less, her naked debauchery to the responsibility of parenthood.

Chekhov also keeps another look into the mode of passion about fashion. Different from Arkadina’s demonstrating and displaying one, it is of grief expression. It is Masha in the play who wears an apparel of sad emotions. She gets heartbroken of Trepelieff’s never accepted love and bears a mourning shade. “Why do you always wear mourning?” (Act 1, 5), asks Medviedenko, Masha’s husband. “I dress in black to match my life. I am unhappy” (Act 1, 5), replies Masha. Her choice of such color less clothes gives her a gothic image, but it is more about her utterance of suffering as an ordinary person, a trend typical of modernity. In terms of such trend, Baudelaire admits, “[i]s this not an attire that is needed by our age, which is suffering, and dressed up to its thin black narrow shoulders in the symbol of constant mourning?” (qtd in Benjamin 105). Rather he explains it further, but in an ironic way as a kind of “poetic beauty as an expression of the public mentality . . . of hopelessness And don’t the folds in the material- those folds that make grimaces and drape themselves around mortified flesh like snakes-have their own secret charm” (106). However ironically though, this trend, as Baudelaire states, has been part of the public experience as a common craze, which Chekhov also seems to be aware of, for he portrays this

physiognomy of modernity in Masha's situation. Masha lives an unfulfilled life, empty of her wishful love, depressed in the love quest passions.

However, Masha's condition in the play also represents another experience of the city's life. It is like Baudelaire's "The Ragpickers' Wine", but with the experience of "The wine of the barriers" (qtd. in Benjamin 53). Masha, in the play, feels isolated in love to Treplieff. Depressed in the love quest passions, unfulfilled life, she resorts to snuff (a narcotic, in Act 1) and in wine, and once drinking with Trigorin, she says, "Fiddlesticks! . . . Don't look at me with that expression on your face. Women drink oftener than you imagine, but most of them do it in secret, and not openly, as I do. They do indeed, and it is always either vodka or brandy" (Act 3, 48). This kind of experience that a woman's comforting self with wine can be inferred as a modernity's experience in the play, because as similar to Masha's manner, Benjamin also notes, "[t]here are women who do not hesitate to follow their husbands to the barriere [town gate] with their children who are old enough to work. Afterward they start their way home half-drunk and act more drunk than they are, so that everyone may notice that they have drunk quite a bit" (qtd. in Benjamin 53). Thus, Masha can be compared as such drunken women of the town gate, while Baudelaire could have called Masha, a heroic woman, for she appears as a surprise that a woman can drink openly during 1896's time. Moreover, such type of Masha's life also indicates to the boheme nature, while the play seems to be the world of bohemians absorbed in the phantasmagoria of passions.

Another passion of dandyism also features as next variation of the physiognomy of the modernity, in the play. Arkadina likes to be like an English woman. She also teaches about beauty, health and ageing to Masha and praises about dress. She is like, as Treplieff calls, just charm of "life and love and gay clothes . . . of

eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing . . . insipid talk” (Act 1, 9). She likes nothing except these things in life, rather she appears like “a psychological curiosity” (Act 1, 8), as Trepleieff denounces about her. These are her miserable and unproductive features. She clothes just an irony of dandy, for she only has a wok to praise her greatness and her actress ideals:

(Arkadina)

[To MASHA] Come, get up. [They both get up] Stand beside me. You are twenty-two and I am almost twice your age. Tell me, Doctor, which of us is the younger looking? (*DORN: You are, of course.*) You see! - Because I work; my heart and mind are always busy, whereas you never move off the same spot. You don't live. It is a maxim of mine never to look into the future- never admit the thought of old age or death, and just accept what comes. (Act 2, 29)

To such haughty self-attitude and actress-vanities of Arkadina, Benjamin comments aptly critically. He states that such “hero appears as a dandy. If you encounter one of these figures, who thanks to their strength and composure are perfect in their every gesture, you say to yourself: “[h]ere is perhaps a rich man-but more certainly a Hercules with no labors to accomplish.”” (qtd. in Benjamin 124). Exactly, Arkadina falls into the specimen who is only fond so much glad of her appearance and actorly greatness, that dandy’s perfectness. Arkadina is also a mother, but her actress vanities enrobe her much in the play, which robs her away from her motherly qualities.

Moreover, with the depiction of Arkadina’s actress dandyism superficialities, Chekhov also seems to imply at the quality of an irresponsible mother in her. When it happens to show her role as a mother to Trepleieff, she lacks the motherly worth of any kind. Rather, she only keeps her time and money just for own greatness. That’s why, Trepleieff does not like her, as he says that she thinks, “[s]he alone must be praised and

written about, raved over . . . extolled to the skies” (Act 1, 9). Such pridefulness of her own self, becomes more evident when Arkadina valorizes about herself:

And then I keep myself as correct-looking as an Englishman. I am always well-groomed, as the saying is, and carefully dressed, with my hair neatly arranged. Do you think I should ever permit myself to leave the house half-dressed, with untidy hair? Certainly not! I have kept my looks by never letting myself slump as some women do. [She puts her arms akimbo, and walks up and down on the lawn] See me, tripping on tiptoe like a fifteen-year-old girl.
(Act 2, 30)

Such desire of being like an English person is Arkadina’s meagre pomposity. Wishing for a modern get-up, avoiding the motherhood responsibility in the name of being an actress is just her dandy’s appearance. To her such wish of an English version life, it qualifies these words of Benjamin that “[t]he dandy is a creation of the English” (125), for whom Baudelaire also deems as “the last gleam of the heroic in times of decadence” (qtd. in Benjamin 124). Thus, Arkadina’s fascination to appear like an English woman is just like her inherent bourgeois impulse of imperialism’s expiring piece from Moscow. However, more than fashioning her with dandyism’s looks, Chekhov seems to point at the odd possibility, that how the motherhood can get degraded in the modernity.

Similarly, the nearly old leisurely doctor, Dorn also reflects the dandyism outlook. He looks to be a prudent person, but his habit of giving suggestions to others and philosophizing life simply marks him dandy’s stature. He appears as he is all plain inside his heart, with no worries and no issues. But he exclaims as if in loathing and remorse, when it comes to talk about the love, and he says, “I am fifty-five years old. It is too late now for me to change my ways of living” (Act 2, 36). Somewhere in

his heart he hides his feeling that if he had been young 'now', for he also shows his romantic gesture, that when Paulina prepares bed for the old Sorin, Dorn sings as with hints to her: "[t]he moon swims in the sky to-night" (Act 4, 70). Dorn is also a superficial hypocrite person, at this case. In fact, his exaggerative sagacity turns more faint, when he satirizes Sorin's desire for health, but gets flopped by Sorin's reply that "[o]ne still wants to live at sixty-five" (Act 2, 32). Interestingly, life is not easy and so is death, but in the middle of these two extremes of life one likes to live ever, which is, in real life also, every normal person's innate desire. Dorn lacks the experience like, of a man at sixty-five, but he demonstrates like he has seen everything in his fifty-fives. This is how dandy shines in him, for Benjamin quotes:

[t]hey combined extremely quick reactions with a relaxed, even slack demeanor and facial expression. The tic, which for a time was regarded as fashionable, is, as it were a clumsy, inferior manifestation of the problem. The following statement is very revealing: "[t]he face of an elegant man must always have something convulsive and distorted about it. Such a grimace can, if one wishes, be ascribed to a natural satanism". (qtd. in Benjamin 125)

Utterly, Dorn's disposition gives the similar expression and the experience, as Benjamin mentions. He always responds to every matter, abruptly at first hand that often he becomes short by mind in many issues, like he does not have proper answers on many aspects of life. Yet, he does not let go his 'The tic' manner throughout the play. He even displays this fashionable elegant speech sound designation when he supposes to propose a writing idea to Treplieff: "[t]ut, tut! how excited you are . . ." (Act 1, 25). A dandy's stylish *tic* spot is in him. Even he defies death, like a 'natural satanism' resorts in him (Act 4, 71). For he has been like a *commis voyageur* in his life as like Balzac's great conqueror gladiator (qtd. in Benjamin 103), he shares about

his abroad trips (Act 4, 69) and exhibits his greatness about knowing life like in the manner who possesses hold over everything and all know abouts. But Dorn also expresses a decaying life, in fact an idle doctor, only interested in dawdling around people like Arkadina.

From the presence of the doctor character in the play, Chekhov also tries to extend out his vision about the experience of modernity from the importance and opportunities of science and technology as well. The images of train, photograph, telegraph, development and market, wish for health care and medicine, are some examples that the characters expose in the play as a part of the modern way of life. That, the play suggests that the science and technology were encroaching into the Russian way of life too, in real. As in the play, Chekhov depicts how Trepleiff, so much absorbed in Nina's love, keeps her photo with him, but tears it after she elopes with Trigorin (Act 4, 83). This represents that one form of life experience becomes substituted by the technology; love is shared and experienced through the technology, material or commodity also, for the love experience too becomes of a new dimension with the invention of the photography. The application of technology and science therefore, generate new modes of experiences, both for life and literature. In the similar manner, Baudelaire also confesses for the science's significance in the literature, he states as, "[t]he time is approaching when it will be understood that a literature which refuses to proceed in brotherly concord with science and philosophy is a murderous and suicidal literature" (qtd. in Benjamin 74). Benjamin also approves on such aspect of the experience in the modernity, as he states, "[p]hotography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of human being" (79). When Chekhov presents this photograph's experience in Trepleiff's case, the photography opens a way, like Benjamin reckons here, for to trace, preserve and

amuse, even the most delicate element of life, the memories too. For Benjamin further writes:

In the early days of the process of identification, whose current standard derives from the Bertillon method, the identity of a person was established through his signature. The invention of photography was a turning point in the history of this process. It was no less significant for criminology than the invention of the printing press was for literature. (79)

Considering to the view that Benjamin lays above, his remark is for the way that the technology, or its one form, the photography, can bring new directions in reading, creating or experiencing the life and literature. The use of technology and science give more exact, impressive or sensational forms, appearances and truths to literatures. This is why Benjamin refers to Poe's way in writing his detective stories as “. . . the most momentous of Poe's technical achievements” (Benjamin 74), to which Baudelaire also favors as mentioned above. So, science performs as tools and modes also, which helps to gather and observe minute pieces of life for literature, which Chekhov seems to be aware too. In the play, when Arkadina insists on Sorin's health to take a proper care, and when Dorn suggests for wine and tobacco are harmful for one's life (Act, 32-33), this reflects Chekhov as the one dealing with the aspects of natural science too, for he also let it confessed through Trigorin as a writer “also of science” (Act 2, 43). In fact, Chekov also writes in one of his 1899's letters that he had “always tried where it was possible to be consistent with the facts of science, and where it was impossible . . . have preferred not to write at all . . . But harmony with the facts of science must be felt . . .” (qtd. in Moss 35). Thus, as a doctor in his real life and as a writer with sleights of mind and words, Chekhov appears as aptly acquainted on how science and philosophy can be, in many ways, a mode of experiencing life.

However, though Dorn acts as opposite to life and science, he appears only as a representation for a trend about a “serious doubts about . . . technological progress” (qtd. in Moss 70) in the play. In that case, Chekhov brings Dorn in humanity and science’s image, but Dorn just presents his inabilities and hopelessness, exhibiting only his disunity between own doctor persona and character who only passes around talks without any works, and is just better as a dandy instead.

The play also collects some inferences on the poet and author’s condition as a ragpicker, but Chekhov’s poet shows his triviality of passions. Trigorin, a popular author in the play appears in a poet’s ragpicker’s visage. The man with a notebook always in his pocket, loitering or fishing in the lake whenever in leisure, gathers a little bit as much of modernity’s poet’s ragpicker ideals. After being quite close to Nina, he opens everything by heart about the ordeals he bears during writings. When Nina adores his writerly life style as a popular man around the crowd (Act 2, 38) that “how a famous genius feels. What is it like to be famous? What sensations does it give” (Act 2, 40), then Trigorin negates her, “as it were, on a treadmill” (Act 2, 41). To such writing activity or the poet’s work, Benjamin relates that Baudelaire enjoyed it and took as “the features of the ragpicker” (108), and he quotes further as:

Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day's refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste. He sorts things out and selects judiciously; he collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or, gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry. (108)

This ‘job’ of poet as similar to the ragpicker’s, to gather trifles out from everything,

like in similar rhythm is not different from the tempo of Trigorin's experience on writing process as well. Like the ragpicker's way of sorting out things as he finds, Trigorin describes his condition alike:

Day and night I am held in the grip of one besetting thought, to write, write, write! Hardly have I finished one book than something urges me to write another, and then a third, and then a fourth—I write ceaselessly. I am, as it were, on a treadmill. I hurry forever from one story to another, and can't help myself. it is a wild life! Even now, thrilled as I am by talking to you, I do not forget for an instant that an unfinished story is awaiting me. My eye falls on that cloud there, which has the shape of a grand piano; I instantly make a mental note that I must remember to mention in my story a cloud floating by that looked like a grand piano. I smell heliotrope; I mutter to myself: a sickly smell, the colour worn by widows; I must remember that in writing my next description of a summer evening. I catch an idea in every sentence of yours or of my own, and hasten to lock all these treasures in my literary store-room, thinking that someday they may be useful to me. (Act 2, 41)

Comparably similar are the features of Trigorin's writing work and Baudelaire's ragpicker's job. Like the ragpicker looks for things around, searching and sorting, Trigorin also expresses the similar circumstance in his writing process. However, Baudelaire's ragpicker is his own counterpart, a poet's physiognomy, while Trigorin is Chekhov's, and these two display a vast gap for their class background, yet their way of working condition keeps them as similar. But, Trigorin in the play, is a debase person instead, for Chekhov might be striking at such vice aspects of his time, that Trigorin with the man of such genuine intellectuality, as Nina aspires before, gets prisoned with the obsession of love which was hindered by his writing career in his

youth, and he bring out its destructive part into Nina that he becomes a conspirer to love.

As the play also dwells especially in this ideal subject of love, Chekhov seems to have something to suggest about it too. It is the idea about the 'love stigmatized'. This form of experience is also notable in the play, which Chekhov might be implying at. Forms of love are shown in the play as pure, corrupted, of indifference, of conspiratorial, and of indulgence type too. Treplieff's love to Nina is pure, her, in return, is conspiratorial and opportunist. Nina's love to Trigorin is also of dubious kind, for she is more motivated of own career, though she confesses, in the last lines of the play, it is pure; while Trigorin's to her is purely corrupt one. Similarly, almost all characters are spotted with this stigma of 'the love'. To such love of a problematic type, Baudelaire, in his sonnet, "To a Passer-By", has been interpreted by Benjamin, through the concept of love of the *stigmatized* nature, rather Benjamin writes it from the aspect of "the refuge of love" (77-76). Benjamin further states that "[t]he delight of the city-dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight" (77). This is how Trigorin in the play acts about his love to Nina, for he is "a man of the city besides" (Act 2, 43). Thus, Trigorin exhibits his love, as from Benjamin's word, only of the love of first sight's kind, of a moment's kind, but not of the life-long kind. Rather, Trigorin reflects to the category as what Benjamin calls, "the life of the eroticist" (77). He only likes Nina for some time, and he aborts her, for it is his violent obsession that he was suppressing from his youth writing career, that he only expresses his erotic and destructive love to Nina. In fact, Trigorin becomes only as 'the refuge of love'. Hence forth, looking at Trigorin's love and also others', it can be concluded, at least merely, that the characters in the play depict, as Benjamin relates, "love itself as being stigmatized by the big city" (77). For the characters in the play

act as they are too much affected of passions, attitudes and the way of city life, while some appears as conspirators and some as opportunists too, the characters present the love as of material quality. The love, in the play, appears like in the nature of exchange value, of a commodity's nature, and also of a gambling's nature.

Like the love becomes of gambling nature, in the modernity, so becomes the gambling as a part of modernity's experience, where individuals are only affected to own wishes. Chekhov has not kept this form of experience untouched in the play as well. Delicateness of his writing vision, that how he has exhibited it, as the part of modern people's life, but of the futile nature and consequence; that he might be mocking humorously at the people and characters of qualities and varieties, by presenting his one group of characters consumed in lotto-card-game at one corner and another individual intense in his writing's twist at the next corner (Act 4, 75-77). This indifference-ness of the characters, their nature, are a watchable curiosity. While, similar characters are also introduced by Benjamin, when he quotes about a lithograph by Senefelder, representing a gambling club, as he notices that "[n]ot one of the individuals depicted is pursuing the game in the customary fashion. Each man is dominated by his affect: one shows unrestrained joy; another, distrust of his partner; a third, dull despair; a fourth evinces belligerence; another is preparing to take leave of the world" (qtd. in Benjamin 83). This equally comparable description of the gambling men in the lithograph qualifies with the attitudes and the dispositions of Chekhov's characters in the play. That, the lotto-card-game reflects the play's world too, with its absurd characters, like some in unrestrained joy, another in distrust, a third of dull despair, a fourth with belligerence, another preparing for leave. A hotchpotch of nature and characters comprises the modernity's world, so appears in the play, all characters entangled in a medley of passions. For, Chekhov in the play,

using this image of lotto-game, seems more suggestive about the indifference of characters among each other's life and destiny, that they are just content to their own individualities.

The experience of the crowd, in the play, also reflects on Chekhov's vision on the modernity, but from his crowd an economically lavish and dissipated person appears. The words, *the crowd, theatre, abroad*, names of cities and towns (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Genoa, Odesa, Eltz) are often quoted in the play, implying Chekhov as a person well-known of cities and places and travels too. By a most specific image in the play, with Dorn's talking with Medviedenko and Treplieff, Chekhov through Dorn's words, gives a glimpse of the crowd's experience from a city in Italy, Genoa (Act 4, 72), the city which comes in the memories of Charles Dickens, as well (qtd. in Benjamin 81). Dorn describes the experience as an excellent feeling in Genoa. He relates it as "there is such a splendid crowd in its streets. When you leave the hotel in the evening, and throw yourself into the heart of that throng, and move with it without aim or object, swept along, hither and thither, their life seems to be yours, their soul flows into you, and you begin to believe at last in a great world spirit" (Act 4, 72). To such divinely force of the crowd, Baudelaire also consents, as he reveals it as a "pleasure. . . a mysterious expression of the enjoyment of the multiplication of number" (qtd. in Benjamin 88). However, Baudelaire quotes it for his flaneur, but the experience both his flaneur and Dorn express are somehow similar in nature, for Dorn admits the spectacle of crowd of genoa "is such a splendid" (Act 4, 72) sensation too. But in the play, Dorn happens to be a person spoiled by his lavish life style as he himself admits that he has spent all his saving in travelling (Act 4, 69). This is how Chekhov seems to represent a frugal and superficially extravagant quality of life in Dorn, that Dorn appears just an idle doctor in the play.

Moreover, from the representation of the crowd experience of Dorn, Chekhov also seems to imply about the presence of flaneur's situation in the play. When Dorn expresses his feeling of the crowd in Genoa as an elemental part of self and one's self as the crowd's part, the vice-versa phenomena is typical to the experience like Benjamin relates of E. T. Hoffmann's "enormous crowd in which no one is either quite transparent or quite opaque to everyone else" (80). Rather, when Dorn says that to move in the crowd is like an aimless swept along- throwing one's life as others and other's in self, this gives a sense of 'an empathic soul' like Benjamin notes to Marx's concept of commodity-soul occupied with an empathy, an experience of a nature of the intoxication, to which flaneur abandons himself in the crowd, enjoying "with the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else" (qtd. Benjamin 85-86). This similar experience of crowd in Dorn represents, by some way and to some limit, that Chekhov is in alignment to such experience of the crowd and flaneur as Baudelaire's kind. But unfortunately, such form of life with the aimless *flânerie* experience is what Chekhov seems to be humorously satirizing in the play, for he depicts his characters of higher persona, like the doctor Dorn, only spend their time idling.

Chekhov also depicts the experience of the crowd as a space dwelling with devilish sprit. When he extolls on the crowd's experience, he also seems to be contemplating at the form of idle life; but more seriously, he seems to relate about how a person from a crowded world or the city can be motivated with destructive nature. Trigorin, the popular author in the play, reflects such nature. He mentions himself as a man of the city (Act2, 43). Being a man of the city, he destroys Nina's life. This evil feature of him is observable in Hugo's crowd-experience as Benjamin relates it that it "appears as a bastard form which shapeless, superhuman powers

create from those creatures that are below human beings” (92). As a man of the city and crowd life, Trigorin thus shows such low human creature nature in the play, who cannot be kept unrecognized for his splenetic deeds he tried on Nina’s destruction. Hence, providing a brief view on the crowd and also some tint sense on the flaneur, Chekhov in the play, also tries to represent at the adverse face of modernity’s crowd-experience as well.

With the notion on how the crowd can occupy a destructive person, Chekhov also presents with a ‘dupe’ persona emerging into Baudelaire’s ‘heroic’ character. It is from Nina’s character and role that Chekhov is so much sensitive and affective about the city’s life and its nature, and makes her comprehend with city’s dark aspect and struggles, and also shows her resiliency to become more stronger person. Nina, in the play, is also most passionate about her acting and actress dream, like Trepleieff for his authorly career. “It is a dream!” (Act 2, 45), she says, to become a successful actress. To meet this dream, to begin “life anew . . . going . . . to Moscow” (Act 3, 62), Nina follows Trigorin. But in Moscow, she gets cheated by Trigorin and becomes a victim, like Baudelaire’s *dupe*. For this victim, Baudelaire “refers to someone who is cheated or fooled, and such a person is the antithesis of a connoisseur of human nature” (71), writes Benjamin. Whereas, this duped moment in life turns Nina as an expertise and a connoisseur of her own life and dream, as more vivaciously and zealously. Benjamin further explains on the dupe’s crisis and struggles that “[t]he more alien a big city becomes, the more knowledge of human nature-so it was thought one needs to operate in it. In actuality, the intensified struggle for survival led an individual to make an imperious proclamation of his interests” (71), so appears Nina too, at the last dialogues of the play, who learns now, that it was Trigorin who chanced to pass in her life “and destroyed it out of idleness” (Act 4, 85); but she returns to Trepleieff, as a

changed person who does not suffer now and does not fear of her life's calling and is ready to travel to Eltz for her dream by her own self (Act 4, 83-85). This is how Chekhov represents a *dupe* person in Nina who rises again from her difficulties and losses. In fact, Chekhov further portrays her with Baudelaire's *heroic* woman. Though Benjamin illustrates Baudelaire's representation of woman as a hero, mostly from the perspective of lesbian nature and androgyne quality, but also implies the representation applies on a normal woman as well. When describing the French painter Victor Eugene Delacroix's painting of a woman, Baudelaire speaks, somewhat elliptically, of "the modern woman in her heroic manifestation, in the sense of infernal or divine" (qtd. in Benjamin 119), quotes Benjamin. This sense of *divine* woman can be inferred in Nina's character too, who becomes purged out of the sever experience she meets in Moscow and steps further towards her career at last. In fact, Baudelaire seems to keep open space for the discussion of women of all kinds as he considers them with different virtues, like a woman of philanthropist nature or a writer or a republican poetess or a poetess of the future (qtd. in Benjamin 121). Such peculiarities of the woman nature, with unique potentials like those of men, has been realized by Chekhov in Nina too. Nina, as a rising actress reflects to those future poetess and divine woman of Baudelaire, whom Chekhov gives a form of life in the play. However, as Nina's life evolves out of the crisis she meets in Moscow's life, Chekhov does not conclude the end of her life, for he appears to imply to the severity of life in the modernity can still be possible for wherever she goes.

At last, through the representation of the passions for the life from modernity's experience in the play, Chekhov has depicted his characters with the typical features of Baudelaire's modernity's physiognomies, but in a way that the characters are accursed with the decadence of their moralities out of the pursuit for the modern life

and modernity's aspirations. Some characters find themselves content in dandy's greatness, some appear as bohemians and conspirators, some enjoy beauty and fashion, some enjoy crowd while some become lost and victim in the crowd, and some resort in suicide. With these forms of life depicted in the characters of the play, Chekhov tries to illuminate the decrepitude effects of modernity, for these features in his characters reflect the depraved conditions of life. As a realistic writer who assumes to "depict life truthfully . . . show to what extent this life deviates from the norm . . . life as it is" (qtd. in Moss 46), Chekhov in *The Sea-gull* presents his characters absorbed in the experiences of the modernity rarely maintain their morality in life, rather they reflect their decadent natures.

In conclusion, the theme of moral decadence becomes a factor by-product of the experience of modernity in the play, *The Sea-gull*. All most all of the characters are inspired by the passions of modernity. Some are excited by the fame and fashion of the city, some are attracted by the popularity around the crowd, some are charmed by city and crowd's spectacle, while some are enchanted by the careers and better life, and some even consume love as a material form. But while pursuing their desires, the characters express their personalities in the deviated forms. A mother neglects and even mis-behaves her own son for sake of her pride of being an actress, a doctor only keeps away his time in strolling around talks and women, a renowned author exposes the corrupted city soul in terms of love, a lover cheats another for want of acting career and fame, and a next one destroys own life amid the strains of life, which are the issues of decaying moralities that result from the characters' inclination towards the modernity. In essence, by depicting his characters with the outlooks of bohemians, decadents, conspirators, dandy, and also with other physiognomies of passions like beauty and fashion, and suicide, Chekhov has indicated how the characters and their

life induced by the modernity and its aspirations turn into decrepitude condition as they display morally deplete life and attitudes. Chekhov also portrays his characters driven by the properties of the crowd, where some characters even contemplate for the spiritual loss, like suggesting about the fragility of life amid the modernity. Thus, by representing the characters' deteriorated life while traversing through the crowd, city and passions, Chekhov demonstrates in the play that the moral decadence can be the effect of the modernity.

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