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The Seagull by Anton Chekhov and “ Chekhov for Children” by Philip Lopate.

Chekhov's *The Seagull* is known to reject the conventional dramatic subjects that dominated the theater at that time. The intensely dramatic events are not seen on stage, and *The Seagull* brought about a fundamental change in not only how the plays were written but also how they were acted. Chekhov for Children by celebrated writer Phillip Lopate is an inspiring reflection about his experience with the child actors and how he teaches them. This is an assessment of the nature of childhood and evokes the question as to how does one demarcate between experimentation and self-indulgence. The choices made by teachers and parents for their own children and students on a daily basis are broadly social and intimate. In “ *The Seagull*”, one finds a use of dark humor to explain the larger issues of life. Different generations of characters - adults and children *The Seagull* contains several generations of characters that are divided by the lines of youth and age. The older characters are Arkadina, Trigorin, Sorin, and so on. Nina, Konstantin and Masha belong to the younger generation. Old ambitions and future aspirations are seen to intertwine in the structure of the play as it leads from the present to future. Konstantin (Chekhov) looks up to Trigorin who is a mediocre writer. Nina looks up to Arkadina and ends up being a mediocre actor. Masha takes significant steps towards being more like her mother. In *Seagull*, we find an unescapable anxiousness about success or failure in all sorts of ways. The characters in *The Seagull* are tormented by the thought that they are spending their life in vain, and it is perhaps already too late. They reach out for love, falling in love with the wrong character and are

bitter about life in a comical way.

It is important for the children to know the other side of the adults in their lives that they think are perfect. The children should look at the adult futility and get a realistic view of life, no matter what. Adults always draw lines for children, telling them what to do and what not to do. Most children experience their childhood enclosed within four walls that have been erected by adults, and this leaves them inexperienced and weak.

“ Chekhov for Children” by Philip Lopate is an honest exploration of the nature of childhood. It looks at the public school education that is focused on exams that are thrust upon by the adults on the children. The children in those times seem to wrestle with many of the problems faced by the youth today. The characters played by school children cope with the regrets and gone hopes of middle age. Chekhov for Children meditates upon some of the universal themes like mentoring and parenting and the gap among generations.

One can see Chekhov’s influence in “ Chekhov for Children” where the complexity of the adult world is looked into. The young actors with their puppy love affairs add a fresh perspective to the complexity of the intricate interrelationships. Works by Chekhov hold a clear resonance about the youth who are experimenting the world and its possibilities. The themes in Chekhov’s work apply to children who have begun thinking about their place in society and their expectations.

Chekhov for Children is Lopate’s experiment with alternative teaching and was experimental in the sense the play questions age and death. He comments as to how the children acting in the play often struck a

Chekhovian note amazingly. One would look in apprehension in so many directions while others would wander off, total self-absorbed. There seemed to be a bigger connection between the children's world and Chekhov's world (Lopate 189-219), and it was the indolence of waiting for something to happen. The play was a unique experience for them.

Lopate admits that he was more comfortable identifying with that child who was imperfect as compared to the one who seemed more perfect for life with traits as being popular with girls, and athletic. He feels that one of the oddities of working with children was that the whole plot seemed childish. Chekhov seems a juvenile write to him with a repetitive mind. He shares that the children in the play seemed to act for themselves, rather than the audience. Perhaps the instinctive performance of the children evoked the Chekhovian mood.

In "The Seagull" by Anton Chekhov, the younger generation is not given much freedom by the adults. A good example can be seen in (Chekhov and Van Itallie) Arkadina and Chekhov wants the audience to believe that Arkadina loves her son, but it is her guilt for treating him badly. It is the structure of The Seagull and how the structure relates to its underlying themes that make it a masterpiece. We find two generations in the play struggling with their ideas and how their stories intertwine. The son in the play is an ignored one by his mother, Arkadina, who is an established actress. She is an adult but is busy fighting her own personal and professional jealousies.

Lopate speaks about the educational experience of the children in Chekhov for Children. The children indeed gained a vocabulary and improved their

memorizations kills. They must have learned a great deal on acting and literature. But at the same, time, perhaps it was labor extensive too and kept the children away from other activities. Lopate feels that the children should be given challenging atmosphere that motivates them to explore their capacities. He feels the Chekhov's lines touch the reality of life in some ways as he sees those adults leading meaningless and helpless lives. His play touches on the perspective of the dark world of the adults and the awareness that time is thinning out for the characters (Lopate 189-219). Children should get a chance to see the follies that exist in the world of adults. The objective is to prevent them from wasting away their lives and time as they get a more realistic view of the life. With Lopate, children get a chance to play Uncle Vanya. He was still to see how good the children were in doing their bit and whether they were able to comprehend the complexities of the world of grownups.

Lopate would have agreed with Chekhov regarding the perspective on the vanity that exists in the world created by the grownups. Chekhov would also appreciate the learning experience the children got with Lopate and surely must have learned important lessons as they get a chance to be part of the world of adults. Lopate feels that the children were able to follow the rich undercurrents in Chekhov and were not just child-puppets reciting some lines.

Work cited

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