Top Class Theatre Studies

Morgan McDermott monologue transcript

*The Sea-Gull* by Anton Chekhov

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Monologue from pp. 7-9, 11-15

**Nina Zarietchnaya**

It can’t be that I am late? No, I am not late.

I have been in a fever all day, I was so afraid my father would prevent my coming, but he and my stepmother have just gone driving. The sky is clear, the moon is rising. How I hurried to get here! How I urged my horse to go faster and faster! I am soglad to see you!

It is nothing, nothing. Please do let us hurry. I must go in half an hour. No, no, for heaven’s sake do not urge me to stay. My father doesn’t know that I am here.

My father and his wife never will let me come here; they call this place Bohemia and are afraid I shall become an actress. But this lake attracts me as it does the gulls. My heart is so full of you.

Isn’t that some one over there?

What is that tree?

Why does it look so dark?

That would be impossible; the watchman would see you, and Treasure is not used to you yet, and would bark.

Hush!

I am not so much afraid of your mother as I am of Trigorin. I am terrified and ashamed to act before him; he is so famous. Is he young?

What beautiful stories he writes!

Your play is very hard to act; there are no living characters in it.

There is so little action; it seems more like a recitation. I think love should always come into every play.

All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish that inhabit the waves, starfish from the sea, and creatures invisible to the eye—in one word, life—all, all life, completing the dreary round imposed upon it, has died out at last. A thousand years have passed since the earth last bore a living creature on her breast, and the unhappy moon now lights her lamp in vain. No longer are the cries of storks heard in the meadows, or the drone of beetles in the groves of limes. All is cold, cold. All is void, void, void. All is terrible, terrible— The bodies of all living creatures have dropped to dust, and eternal matter has transformed them into stones and water and clouds; but their spirits have flowed together into one, and that great worldsoul am I! In me is the spirit of the great Alexander, the spirit of Napoleon, of Caesar, of Shakespeare, and of the tiniest leech that swims. In me the consciousness of man has joined hands with the instinct of the animal; I understand all, all, all, and each life lives again in me.

I am alone. Once in a hundred years my lips are opened, my voice echoes mournfully across the desert earth, and no one hears. And you, poor lights of the marsh, you do not hear me. You are engendered at sunset in the putrid mud, and flit wavering about the lake till dawn, unconscious, unreasoning, unwarmed by the breath of life. Satan, father of eternal matter, trembling lest the spark of life should glow in you, has ordered an unceasing movement of the atoms that compose you, and so you shift and change for ever. I, the spirit of the universe, I alone am immutable and eternal. Like a captive in a dungeon deep and void, I know not where I am, nor what awaits me. One thing only is not hidden from me: in my fierce and obstinate battle with Satan, the source of the forces of matter, I am destined to be victorious in the end. Matter and spirit will then be one at last in glorious harmony, and the reign of freedom will begin on earth. But this can only come to pass by slow degrees, when after countless eons the earth and moon and shining Sirius himself shall fall to dust. Until that hour, oh, horror! horror! horror! Satan, my mighty foe, advances; I see his dread and lurid eyes.

He longs for man—

I see that the play will never be finished, so now I can go home.

Good evening.

It is the dream of my life, which will never come true.

I am delighted to meet you. I have read all your books.

It was a curious play, wasn’t it?

Why, I should think that for one who has tasted the joys of creation, no other pleasure could exist.

I must go. Good-bye.

My father is waiting for me.

If only you knew how hard it is for me to leave you all.

[Interpretation Statement]

When making dramaturgical decisions, I decided to have a large focus on props, costume and dialect as I believe those are the stagecraft areas where research can be most highlighted. The worn-out script, pocket watch and woven bag reflect the era of the 1890s and Nina’s poorer status. The costume covers my entire body with a knee length skirt and long sleeve high-collared shirt in full white to represent the purity in Nina’s personality and also replicating how women were expected to appear modest and conservative. Nina has a Russian dialect to notify audiences of the setting she was born into.

I purposely manipulate rhythm, going from a slow to fast paced dialogue, to create a sense of subtle panic within audience members, replicating the state of Nina’s mind as its static and unable to rest due to her anxious personality.

The scene takes place in Act One, but the given monologue is 3 separate scenes from the act. I melded all these together to flow as one continuous scene even though she speaks to Trigorin, Treplev, performs the play and accepts her ‘praise’ from Arkadina and Trigorin. By having no obvious breaks, the monologue is viewed coherently from the audience.

Nina is in awe of fame and theatre and she believes she will love herself. But in the opening of the monologue, I play her flustered and anxious before the play, but bring a sense of focus while she performs.

A symbol I highlight is the seagull. Nina uses a seagull to describe the way she’s drawn to the lake of her childhood home on Sorin estate with “this lake attracts me as it does the gulls”. Here, the seagull represents freedom and security.

*The Seagull* is in the theatre style of Realism, but I added elements of poor theatre through the minimalistic set. Having the symbolic door frame (signifying the start of the performance) it brings more attention to the acting.

Chekhov concentrated on creating a haunting and lyrical atmosphere, describing the Russian life using obtrusive literary devices. When performing Treplev’s play, all her lines are metaphors as she compares men to animals and how nature represents women up against men.

But by the end, she rises against Satan (the strongest form of a man) and feels empowered, something that was not common of women to do in the 1890s, especially in Russia.