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The Seagull

Anton Chekhov · *1896 · Marian Fell translation (attributed; 1912)*

On the country estate of an ailing civil servant, Peter Sorin, his sister, the famous actress Irina Arkadina, spends the summer with her lover, the fashionable writer Boris Trigorin. Her son Constantine Treplieff, a young would-be playwright, stages a new kind of play with a young woman, Nina, as the actress. Chekhov's first great play began a new age in the theater.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does it cost to want to be an artist, and what does it do to the people who love the artist?

Treplieff wants new forms in art, and his mother mocks him. Nina wants to be an actress and falls for the writer Trigorin, who makes a note of her for a short story and then leaves her. The play is told in four acts that show what each person wanted and what each got. The seagull of the title, shot by Treplieff and laid at Nina's feet, is a symbol of a life destroyed by an idle man's whim.

KEY CHARACTERS

Constantine Treplieff
A young playwright who wants new forms.

Nina Zarietchnaya
A young woman who wants to be an actress.

Irina Arkadina
His mother, a famous actress.

Boris Trigorin
A successful writer.

Dr. Dorn
The physician, a calm observer.

Masha
The steward's daughter, who loves Treplieff.

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
The Performance in the Park
ACT I

Treplieff stages his symbolist play with Nina as the actress. His mother mocks it, and he stops it. Nina meets Trigorin, and Masha, the steward's daughter, admits her unhappy love for Treplieff.

- The play within the play is a manifesto.
- Arkadina's interruption wounds her son.
- Masha's love is unrequited.

02
The Seagull
ACT II

On the lawn, Nina talks to Trigorin about fame and writing. Treplieff places a dead seagull at her feet, and Trigorin makes a note for a short story about a girl destroyed by idleness.

- Nina's admiration for Trigorin is clear.
- The seagull is an offering and an accusation.
- Trigorin's note is a writer's coldness.

03
The Bandage and the Departure
ACT III

Treplieff has tried to shoot himself, and Arkadina dresses his head. She and Trigorin prepare to leave. Nina asks Trigorin to take her with him, and he agrees.

- Arkadina's tenderness comes in a quarrel.
- Trigorin weakly agrees to Nina's wish.
- Treplieff's despair is open.

04
Two Years Later
ACT IV, FIRST PART

Treplieff has become a published writer and is still alone. Nina returns, ruined, and speaks of the strength to endure.

- Treplieff's success gives him no peace.
- Nina has been through hardship.
- She says the point is to endure.

05
The Shot
ACT IV, ENDING

Nina leaves. A shot is heard offstage, and the doctor tells Trigorin that Treplieff has shot himself.

- The shot is heard from another room.
- Dr. Dorn's response is quiet.
- The play ends without a speech.

Art and Life | Love Unreturned | Fame | The Seagull

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. Chekhov called this play a comedy. Ask why.
2. The seagull appears in several forms. Follow it.
3. Trigorin's notebook is a clue to the artist's detachment.
4. The ending is a shot offstage. Ask why Chekhov does not show it.

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