Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*: Classical Tragedy in Modern Perspectives

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Abstract

Since its birth in ancient Greece, tragedy as an important dramatic form has always attracted the attention of those who have a tragic sense of life. Although many scholars of tragedy put forward a bleak view regarding the possibility for the continuance of tragedy in modern times, two great dramatists, Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov, showed that tragedy can still be created in modern times provided that writers can adjust their tragic visions with the spirit of their age. This paper is an attempt to analyze the ways in which Ibsen and Chekhov portrayed the tragedy of man in the modern world in plays like *The Wild Duck* and *The Seagull* which deal with new tragic themes and concepts. The present article would also offer a brief glance at Greek tragedy to examine the relationship between these modern works and those of the ancient past.

Key Words: Modern Tragedy, Classical Tragedy, Ibsen, Chekhov, *The Wild Duck*, *The Seagull*.

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Introduction

Tragedy, as a dramatic genre, came to existence in ancient Greece, a civilization which built the foundation for the development of western drama in general. This highest form of dramatic art has attracted the attention of authors and critics alike for many centuries, and attempts to create and interpret tragic works of art have never ceased since its birth in ancient Greece. One of the periods in which significant tragic drama emerged was around the late nineteenth-century when the Norwegian Ibsen and the Russian Chekhov created dramatic works worthy of being defined by the name of tragedy. Their tragic works, however, do not conform to the classical standards of tragic drama; standards which, being mostly derived from Greek examples, were dominant for many centuries. These dramatists knew that ancient tragedies, despite their significance, no longer offered satisfactory solutions to the problems of modern man's existence; hence, they helped to develop a new form of tragedy which presents new perspectives on man and life. The present work is an attempt to analyze the ways in which Ibsen and Chekhov have expressed tragedy of man in the modern age. It also tries to indicate the tragic themes and concepts with which they have dealt in *The Wild Duck* and *The Seagull*. In order to better understand tragedy in its "modern dress", as presented by Ibsen and Chekhov, it seems useful to examine the relationship between these modern pieces of tragic art and the classical works written in this genre. Therefore, we begin the discussion with a very brief view of the notion of tragedy in its classical sense which provided subsequent generations of authors and critics with certain criteria regarding how to create and evaluate tragic works.

Discussion

Greek Tragedy

One of the fundamental ideas of tragedy which has always obsessed the minds of writers of tragedy whether classical or modern is necessity; the idea that man's life is determined by forces which are beyond his control. In Greek tragedy,

necessity, being a metaphysical concept, is usually presented in the form of fate which refers to the idea that everything in the universe takes place according to some inevitable and immutable divine laws and patterns which can neither be foreknown nor be altered by human means. The notion of fate in Greek tragedy, as Schlegel points out, "is so much the dominant feature that is, so to speak, the very soul and spirit of the whole genre" (104). It is noticeable that despite the significant role of fate in Greek tragedy, man is not portrayed as a passive victim devoid of any measure of will or determination. Generally, Greek heroes are strong-willed human beings who do not give up under any condition and show resistance against the very powers which are determined to destroy them. They are decisive, resolute characters who pursue their goals with adamant will and do not waver with doubt and hesitation as most modern figures do. Actually, the notion of heroic ideal which emphasizes the god-like elements in human nature is indispensable in Greek tragedy as a whole. In general, as D. D. Raphael states, man in Greek tragedy though defeated "remains great, sublime, in his fall" and his sublimity "is superior to the sublimity of the power which overwhelms him"(196).

One of the significant aspects of Greek tragedy is the fact that despite portraying the irreparable human disaster it does not usually give rise to a total sense of waste and despair. As a matter of fact, the spectators of Greek tragedy experience some sort of catharsis, or sense of elevation or satisfaction at the end of most Greek plays, although not always in the way which Aristotle states; that is, the rise of pity and fear together with their purgation, but usually in terms of some restored order or regained reconciliation which though transient and unstable offer positive counterbalance to the dominant sense of doom and despair. According to some critics, including Krieger, it is the very restoration of order and its imposition upon what threatens it that "allows these dramas to be properly called classical in the best sense" (21). The sense of satisfaction and elevation that Greek tragedy engenders in the viewers can be also due to "man's ability to achieve wisdom through suffering" (Corrigan 403) or it may be due to the spectacle of human greatness and the triumph of human soul over misery and adversity. As a matter of fact, Krutch is right when

he says that "for the great ages tragedy is not an expression of despair but the means by which they saved themselves from it. It is a profession of faith, and a sort of religion; a way of looking at life by virtue of which it is robbed of its pain" (276).

The classical conception of tragedy was dominated for many centuries; however, with the emergence of the Enlightenment thinking in the 17th century the fundamental notions and concepts which formed the basis of Greek tragedy gradually disappeared from western man's consciousness. Due to the rise of the scientific way of thought, the belief in fate, the gods, the metaphysical order, and the heroic ideal which were regarded for centuries as the prerequisite for the creation of tragedy gradually yielded to rationalism, progressivism, religious disenchantment, and the loss of man's glory and dignity. Furthermore, in ancient times, as Heller points out, there was "a tacit agreement on what the nature and meaning of human existence really is" (qtd. in Steiner 113) which enabled Greek dramatists to address a rather homogenous audience with a common worldview. After the 17th century, nonetheless, the audience was no longer an organic and unified community with which the author could share common ideas and values. For these reasons, many tragic scholars suspected the possibility of creating tragic works in modern times. However, in the late 19th century, dramatists such as Ibsen and Chekhov, who truly conceived that it was no longer possible to write tragedies based on the classical conventions, helped develop a new form of tragedy which was totally in line with the modern consciousness and spirit and, at the same time, captured the depth and power of the ancient tragedies.

Ibsen's The Wild Duck

With Ibsen drama turned more to human soul and character, to man's mental obsessions and inner tensions for its subject matter not those ostentatious bloody events that influence the life of a whole nation and occur on the stage of classical drama. Therefore, the source of tragedy in many of Ibsen's plays is set within man himself. In many of his plays, Steiner says, "the most dangerous assaults upon man's reason and life come not from without, as they do in Greek and Elizabethan tragedy"

but they "arise in the unstable soul" (293). Of course, attention should be paid to the significant role of external elements in determining the tragic condition of man in Ibsen, especially in his early realistic plays in which the destructive forces of society, which are embodied in the form of false values, conventions, and institutions, replace the blind forces of fate in Greek tragedy and stand against man's will and desire, bringing about his suffering. As Northam argues, the tragic vision requires the tragic hero to be portrayed in conflict with powerful forces that are hardly controllable by human means (1965:93). Such forces are differently represented in different ages, he continues, and for "the generation of Ibsen the great opponent of man was seen to be society" (Ibid.). However, Ibsen's interest in inner elements as the source of man's disaster gradually increased in his later plays in which the forces that paralyze man and bring about his destruction rise from within. In *The Wild Duck*, the destructive forces are mainly the drive to self-deception and escape from reality, which is represented by the Ekdal family, and, on the contrary, the uncontrollable drive towards idealism; presented here by Gregers Werle's thirst for truth and his attempt to impose it on people who are not strong enough to bear it. Here, Ibsen demonstrates the disastrous consequences of blindly sticking to either of these drives.

From the beginning, it can be seen that the members of the Ekdal family, especially Hjalmar, have a tendency to evade the unpleasant truths; to retouch the reality, or in Goldman's word, "*to make the picture come out right*- to adjust reality so that it 'looks good'" (493). Their retreat from oppressing reality into the imaginary world of the attic best characterizes this family's life style which in Johnston's view is based on "concealment and subtle evasion of unpleasant truths" (2007). On the other hand, Gregers, an adamant idealist whose catchword is life based on truth, regards their life dishonorable. He takes upon himself to make his friend Hjalmar whom he identifies with the wild duck liberated from the poisonous influence of delusion. But the tragic irony lies in the fact that Gregers himself is blind to the realities around him. He does not realize that the forceful imposition of a disturbing awareness on those who are not strong enough to bear it or making universal

demands regardless of person or situation can have disastrous consequences. In fact, his "claim of the ideal" is itself some sort of illusion which blinds him to the fact that most people, just like himself, need illusions to give purpose and meaning to their lives. As Hialmar can only live by his illusory image of himself as the "righter of wrongs" and the "lonely man of genius" which, in Trilling's words, sustains and comforts him, and conceals "from his own perception and that of the world the fact that he is a man of no talent or distinction" (26), Gregers needs ideals to conceal the emptiness of his soul and to alleviate his sick conscience. However, Gregers' transcendental claim of the ideal, says Robert Raphael, is an illusion which is not life-sustaining but destructive in questioning the meaning and value of man's existence (124). According to Raphael, Ibsen shows that an individual's noble attempt to synthesize reality with a transcendental ideal is only "a heroic self-deception, and one that always proves to be a fatal error", because it destroys both the individual and those who are subject to his vision (123); as Gregers' attempt to raise his fellow men to his desired high moral level brings only doubt, gloom, and the eventual death of Hedvig.

It should be noted that here tragedy is not only that of the Ekdal family who have based their lives on the unreliable foundation of lies and illusions. There is also another aspect from which the tragedy in *The Wild Duck* may be explored. Gregers Werle can be taken as a tragic figure too; as a high-minded individual who is tragically caught between an ideal which is compelling but absent and a real world which is present but morally worthless. The world Ibsen portrays in *The Wild Duck* is an alienated space standing against man's ideals and desires from which he can only take refuge in "an Other world of compensating fantasy"(Johnston 2007), that is to say, an illusory world. In such a frustrating situation even the individual who attempts to establish truth becomes another victim of illusions. And tragedy, observes Raymond Williams, exactly lies here in the fact that in Ibsen the hero defies "an opposing world full of lies, and compromises, and dead positions, only to find, as he struggles against it , that as a man he belongs to this world, and has its destructive inheritance in himself" (124).

As Bermel states, a common argument runs that in *The Wild Duck* Ibsen repudiates his former ideas regarding the importance of truth and freedom in favor of encouraging illusions, or as Dr Relling, Ibsen's supposed spokesman, says, life-lies (21). Such arguments can be justified in some respects; however, it should be remembered that Ibsen was always aware that only through encounter with reality can we hope for genuine salvation although in this work he also suggests that few people have the ability to look at reality in the face. In *The Wild Duck*, he portrays the plight of our age when, as Eagleton states, most people "opt for an Eliotic evasion of tragedy"; such partly living Hollow Men or Women cling affectionately to their false consciousness since they are terrified of the death-dealing truth (58). After all, it seems that Ibsen tries to represent the tragic lot of man which makes him suffer whether seeking truth or plunging in illusion.

The study of *The Wild Duck* reveals some thematic affinities between this play and many of the Greek works: that man's purposes are outstripped by their effects, that man always acts in the dark, that he is crushed by various internal and external forces over which he has little control; to name a few. However, *The Wild Duck*, as a modern tragic work of art, differs in some significant respects from ancient tragedies. It should be remembered that this play belongs to its own age, a degenerated world which has little affinity with the glorious age of heroism, and portrays the tragic possibilities in the lives of ordinary people who have little in common with the great heroes of the classical tragedies. Despite having tragic potentialities, neither Gregers nor Hjalmar can be taken as tragic heroes. Although Gregers tries to assume a heroic pose, he only represents a caricature of this role. On the other hand, Hjalmar also, despite being always looked upon as a shining light, is in reality a complacent family man, an immature naïve person who can not act according to the promises he makes or expectations he arises. In Northam's view, he should not be thought of as the wild duck in nature, a free creature that should be restored, as Gregers thinks of him, rather he is like the domesticated wild duck as it actually is: "plump, contented, slightly damaged . . . and never restorable to its freedom and beauty" (72). In many of his plays, Ibsen presents noble characters

possessing heroic features, but the view of humanity represented in this play, though being true to the reality of contemporary man, is, for the most part, a despairing one; showing that, Valency notes, "the priest is drunk, the soldier is broken, the idealist is mad, and the doctor is ill," all having metaphorically sunk "into the ooze at the bottom of the sea" (174-5). Here, Ibsen portrays an exhausted civilization which cultivates human beings who lack the nobility of mind and character and the strong will and determination to resist the opposing forces as the heroes of the past did.

The other point of difference which deserves attention is Ibsen's fusion of tragic and comic in this play which challenges all predetermined assumptions about the nature of both tragedy and comedy. Therefore, some critics such as Foster argue that tragic works like *The Wild Duck* or Chekhov's plays which contain comic possibilities should be dealt with as examples of modern tragicomedy which has replaced tragedy itself as the aesthetic means of communicating modern humanity' s tragic experiences. In modern tragicomedies, however, the juxtaposition of tragic and comic elements, rather than producing comic relief, creates an uncomfortable state of mind. In general, *The Wild Duck* does not produce a tragic effect like that of Greek tragedy as a whole. According to Valency, it ends with no gain out of loss, with “no indication that out of these experiences will come a better life"(175). Instead of offering the cathartic effect of a reconciliation finally established, the ending of the play rouses only discomfort without providing any possibility of redemption or regeneration. Actually, the most terrible aspect of modern tragic works is the fact that bad things happen without making any difference at all. Gregers attempts to find meaning in Hedvig’s demise and redemption in Hjalmar’s soul by consoling himself that "Hedvig has not died in vain" but has set free what is noble in his friend. The sardonic Relling, however, undermines Gregers' statement by asserting that this nobility will not last: "Before a year is over, little Hedvig will be nothing to him but a pretty theme for declamation" (Ibsen 118).

Actually, Hedvig's act of self-sacrifice, resembling some sort of fertility ritual, has a Greek quality. But some critics, including Bermel, argue that it can not have the expiatory effect that such acts used to hold in ancient times. According to

Bermel, in Greek tragedies like Sophocles' Antigone the voluntary death of the tragic figure ennobles him or her and "elicits sentiments of awe from the other characters and from the Chorus" but nothing quite like this happens in this play (16). In any case, in this play Ibsen does not provide the audience with a clue regarding how to view Hedvig's death, on the contrary, the multiplicity of comments which are given by various characters in the final scene diffuse its focus rather than helping it to find the proper way of reaction to the presented disaster. Unlike the classical tragedies in which the chorus offered comments after the demise of the hero and thus provided the audience with a clue to the proper way of reaction to the presented disaster, in Ibsen, as Wallace notes, there is "no consensus about the significance of the tragic gesture" thus the "great acts of sacrifice which close many of Ibsen's plays go unheeded or misunderstood" (68). However, there are critics like Northam who believe that Hedvig's sacrifice offers a new possibility of heroism by showing that human dignity is still possible in this world (1999: 82). *The Wild Duck* is a gloomy work but it is irradiated by the beautiful figure of little Hedvig who, as Northam believes, is the only consolation Ibsen offers against the dominant sense of defeat and despair though even this little hopeful aspect is diminished by the fact that only an adolescent girl is capable of showing a tendency towards finer values while all the adults have undergone corruption of the spirit (Ibid. 86).

Chekhov's The Seagull

One of the greatest contributions of Chekhov to modern drama which is related to the subject of the present work is his creation of a new form of tragedy and thus helping to the development of this genre in the modern age. It is noticeable that none of his plays fit the familiar definitions of tragedy; they lack conflict and catastrophe in the traditional sense of the word, they are mingled with comedy, they represent feeble, passive, and insignificant characters who do not have any affinity with the great classical heroes; however, as Muller points out, Chekhov's tragedy "is a more complete picture of life, a fuller 'recognition' of tragic possibilities, than we find in any ancient tragedy except Shakespeare's". Since the author knows that "catastrophe

is not the normal lot and dying not the most painful experience"; his drama is a kind of tragedy that all men know and feel, "not merely an Oedipus or a Hamlet" (249-50).

The leading idea of modern tragedy in general is that tragedy does not necessarily involve rare unfortunate conditions but can lie in the daily life and the ordinary experiences of common people; an idea which is best embodied in Chekhov's drama. Chekhov is mainly interested in the common lives of unexceptional people and the cumulative tragedy of their daily life. He once said that

> Let the things that happen on the stage be as complex and yet just as simple as they are in life. For instance, people are having a meal at the table, just having a meal, but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being smashed up" (qtd. in Fen 19).

What constitutes one of the primary concerns of his drama is the gradual disintegration of human life in the routine cycle of day-to-day existence. In all his plays, Chekhov forms a community where everyone suffers but nobody develops, nothing progresses, and the dream of any positive change seems remote and inaccessible. The only tension in these plays results from the disparity between aspiration and fulfillment or between the ideal and the real; this disparity, in fact, constitutes one of the main sources of tragedy in Chekhov.

The Seagull is also about a group of frustrated people who, gathered together in a stagnant provincial state, spend their time either on regretting their wasted lives, or on complaining about lack of purpose and point in their dreary existence. As Storm's analysis of this play reveals, characters in *The Seagull* are caught between two divisive forces or drives, the conflict between which constitutes one of the sources of tragedy in this play. One of these forces is the tendency towards "mourning" which refers to a prevalent attitude shared by most characters in the play such as Masha, Konstantin, and Irina who all show a constant sorrow over the loss or the prospect of the loss of love, youth, opportunity, etc. The other force or

preoccupation is "desire" which is reflected in characters' ideal vision of a happier, more significant and interesting life (161). Though most of the characters experience the contrast between these strains, it is, as Storm believes, in the case of Konstantin "that one finds an embodiment of both forces in severe and concentrated opposition" to the extent that "they cancel one another out, leaving only a void" (171).

From one perspective, the chasm in Konstantin's personality is caused by the tension between his desire for an ideal self-image as a talented artist, respected and loved by those around him especially his mother and his beloved, and his mourning over his actual self as a nonentity; a weak-willed, impotent man whose private limitations thwart his yearning for greatness. From another perspective, however, the void in his personality is a result of a desire for meaning, purpose, and harmony and mourning for the loss of faith, certainty, and order. In fact, Konstantin suffers from an existential crisis which is shared by most of the other characters whose hopeless struggle to impose meaning and purpose onto life hardly leads anywhere. The existential crisis which Chekhovian characters undergo, as Wallace observes, can be rooted in the "angst of the turn of the century when old certitudes were being dashed and nothing appeared to be lasting or significant any longer" (100). However, it is not narrowed down to the specific Russian case and reflects the condition of modern humanity in general: alienated from divinity, lacking faith in some metaphysical source of consolation, and deprived of the old transcendental frame of reference based on which he can decide which direction he should take in life, modern man confronts an overwhelming sense of absurdity and despair.

In Kierkegaard's view, it is only through faith in God that man can overcome the annihilating sense of despair and find peace of mind and spiritual serenity. However, living in an age when the "community of belief which enabled the Greek or Elizabethan hero to face his destiny with high-hearted courage is no longer available" to man (Glicksberg xiii), Chekhovian characters neither possess nor can achieve such a faith to help them go beyond despair. Many of them try to console themselves with the idea that their pain and suffering is not in vain but is the price they have to pay for bringing a more meaningful and happier life for the following

generations. As Lavrin remarks, such flashes of faith, however, cannot redeem the drabness of the present which these characters have to put up with (222). Neither can these characters take the heroic posture of existential heroes by trying to exercise their power of choice to go beyond their degraded condition. All these characters can do to overcome their sense of futility and despair, not unlike the characters in *The Wild Duck*, is to assume an escapist attitude towards life by taking refuge in some illusory ideals. Such ideals are here embodied in the forms of art as a means of experiencing a higher mode of existence as well as love as a spiritual power which can make the pain of existence tolerable by bringing happiness and meaning to man's life. Chekhov sets up such romantic ideals only to reveal later their vainness and futility. Whereas Chekhov does not deny the elevating role that they can play in man's life, he clearly shows that an excessively idealistic view of art or love may be misleading in that it turns them into illusions which can merely provide man with a temporary refuge from reality rather than enabling him to experience a truly meaningful life.

Here again we see that one of the main problems with which man has to face is that of the ironic gap between illusion and reality. In *The Seagull*, Chekhov shows man entrapped in illusions while it asserts the necessity of man's confrontation with reality. One of the few Chekhovian characters who has the ability to get rid of her illusions and come to terms with the real world is Nina who, in the course of the play, becomes aware of the inadequacy of her ideals and realizes that they are nothing except mere illusions. In contrast to most Chekhovian characters that are unable to give up their illusory ideals, though being disillusioned, Nina puts her illusions away so that she can face life as it really is. Jackson compares Nina to "Plato's wanderer, who leaves the magic world of illusions to make the difficult journey ... to reality, to know, to quintessential meaning" (14). She represents the possibility of change as she struggles against the adverse forces of life while the other characters represent only lack of change; like Sorin, who still regrets his wasted life, and Masha, who is still entrapped by her futile love for Konstantin, and especially Konstantin who is "still drifting in a chaos of day dreams and images"

(Chekhov 181-82); unable to abandon his idealistic dreams. In contrast to these characters, Nina has found her way in life which, as Storm says, "may or may not lead to success or fulfillment" but, at least, will "lead away from the world of mourning and victimization" (170) where other figures are trapped. She has been enlightened with the knowledge that the most important thing is to endure, to suffer and yet to preserve one's faith, as she tells Konstantin that

> I now know, Kostia, that what matters in our work . . . is not fame, or glamour, not the things I used to dream about- but knowing how to endure things. How to bear one's cross and have faith. I have faith now and I'm not suffering quite so much, and when I think of my vocation I'm not afraid of life (Chekhov 181).

This can be regarded a triumph in Chekhov's world where people behave as if they have no faith in themselves or in their world, and suffer from doubts and hesitations about what they should do with their lives. However, while most of these people try to persuade themselves that life is still meaningful and worthwhile to be lived, Konstantin, failing to achieve any of his aspirations or becoming what he desires to be, is overcome by a deep sense of nothingness and despair, or the "sickness into death" in Kierkegaard's term, and commits suicide. It should be noted that Konstantin's death marks a significant point of departure from the traditional conclusions of tragedy because his suicide rather than invoking an ennobling effect is merely a wasteful death which neither restores order nor elevates the status of hero but only testifies to the character's admission of defeat. However, some critics like Lukas regard the death of a man "who kills himself in self-disgust and despair, as a hopeless failure" more tragic than the glorious ending of an ancient hero who leaves the stage still unbowed (63). What makes the ending of Chekhov's plays seem more desperate is the lack of any significant increase in characters' awareness or insight which can offer a positive stimulus to compensate somehow for their pain or to make their suffering seem meaningful. In *The Seagull*, Konstantin's suffering does not induce in him any purgation, or some kind of recognition; of course he

comes to know the fact that his dreams never come to pass, but such a realization does not make any change in his attitude towards life. Actually, in Chekhov, as Muller states, characters at most "arrive at a somewhat clearer, sadder perception of their frustration, which they were aware of at the outset" (244); a sober realization which, in Striedter's view, may lead "to resignation and pessimism rather than to the desired Aristotelian catharsis" (576). Despite the appalling sense of human waste, and the apparent lack of the traditional cathartic effects; however, Chekhov's work is not a tragedy of unmitigated despair. Like Ibsen, Chekhov offers some traces of consolation by affirming worth of life through the figure of Nina who decides to go on living, to endure, and to keep her faith in life and in herself despite the unpromising prospect of her future. And these are the positive and redeeming values in Chekhov's worldview which are manifested in all his plays.

Conclusion

Based on what has been said thus far, it seems that tragedy as represented in modern works like those of Ibsen and Chekhov is different from the plays written by Greek dramatists in many respects. To begin with, these modern playwrights turned to the portrayal of the common experiences of the average man, enacted by the characters who have little in common with the great heroes of Greek tragedy that show largeness, power, and heroism in the face of adversity. Here, it should be noted that while Ibsen's characters lack the sublimity of the classical heroes they are not usually devoid of noble features. Most often they try to break free from the restrictions imposed on their lives and show resistance against the overwhelming powers which destroy their lives. Chekhov's characters, in contrast, are merely passive sufferers who are so weak and helpless in the face of opposing forces that their submissiveness and lack of will at times seem ridiculous and call to mind the inertness of the absurd figures of Beckett's tragic-farces. Therefore, it can be said that though both Ibsen and Chekhov discarded the ideal vision of man, Chekhov, being a physician with an aloof and scrutinizing view, treats his characters with more detachment which lets the spectators witness a disturbingly true imitation of

human nature.

These works also mark the internalization of tragedy in the modern era which has resulted in the replacement of plot, which was supposed to be indispensable from the concept of tragedy for many centuries, by internal action. An Ibsen play, as Henry James observes, presents "the picture not of an action but of a condition . . . of a state of nerves, as well as soul, a state of temper, of health, of chagrin, of despair" (qtd. in S.Williams 172). Chekhov surpasses Ibsen in this respect by creating a kind of drama where nothing happens on the stage except the dull repetition of the characters' monotonous daily existence. In fact, Chekhov managed to write a kind of steady state drama in which tragedy, as Eagleton notes, involves "the sheer dreary persistence of some hopeless, obscure conditions" (11) not any poignant catastrophe falling upon the protagonists.

The study of *The Wild Duck* as well as *The Seagull* as two significant examples of modern tragedy also reveals that the kind of tragic vision represented by modern dramatists is somehow darker in comparison with classical examples. These works leave the spectator less with a concept of restored reconciliation or a sense of human exaltation than with an immersion in chaos, frustration, and despair. As a result, some critics like Krutch claim that modern tragedies focus mainly on the despairing aspects of human condition while classical tragedy "deserves its name by achieving a tragic solution capable of purging the soul or of reconciling the emotions to the life which it pictures" (Krutch 278). Truly, the chosen plays lack the cathartic effect usually experienced in Greek tragedy; yet, the way Ibsen and Chekhov end their works is more compatible with the realities of their age. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that these plays do not simply end in bitterness and despair because both Ibsen and Chekhov believed in life and the essential potentialities of man as well as the possibility of achieving a better future for mankind, to all these one should add their sense of humor, especially that of Chekhov, which enabled them to see things whole not as pure tragedy or pure comedy, and to be aware of the fact that there is no absolute judgment of man's life but everything depends on the point of view from which we observe and interpret human experience. On the whole, it can be said that

these dramatists succeeded to create some kind of drama which can hold the balance between hopeful and cynical attitudes towards the world, and such a balance is what is usually seen in all the great tragedies of the history of drama.

As it was shown, the analysis of *The Wild Duck* and *The Seagull* reveals noticeable differences in both vision and form between these modern examples of tragic art and works of Greek tragedians; however, an underlying affinity can be also discerned between them. What puts these authors in line with classical tragedians is their going beyond their specific time and place by touching upon concepts and themes which constitute the basis of Greek tragedy in particular and tragedy in general. With great force and skill they communicated with the modern audience such eternal concerns as the possibility of freedom despite the reality of human limitation, man's need to live up to his ideals, the eternal human quest for meaning and happiness, as well as the tragic belief in the irreparability of human suffering, man's lack of insight, and the unbridgeable gap between aspiration and fulfillment. While Ibsen and Chekhov deviated from many tragic conventions, they met the fundamental requirements of tragic art by approaching their subjects with high seriousness, refraining from mere pathos by studying social and psychological causes, and making individual calamity a means for achieving significant revelation about human condition in general.

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