

12-1-2012

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Brian R. Johnson. (2012). "Evans's 'The Turducken' And Chekhov's 'The Seagull'". *CLCWEB*. Volume 14, Issue 4.
<http://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-russian/32>

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Recommended Citation

Johnson, Brian R "Evans's *The Turducken* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.4 (2012): [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1836>](http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1836)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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Volume 14 Issue 4 (December 2012) Article 5
Brian R. Johnson,
"Evans's *The Turducken* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss4/5>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 14.4 (2012)**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss4/>>

Abstract: In his article "Evans's *The Turducken* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*" Brian R. Johnson approaches *The Turducken* as a travesty of *The Seagull*, examining six iconic scenes from *The Seagull*, in order to explore the satirical effect of the altered scenes. In December of 2008, Bedlam Theatre of Minneapolis presented *The Turducken*, "a holiday dinner theater spectacular inspired by Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*." Playwright Josef Evans takes Chekhov's 1895 work and turns the classic piece into a musical and farcical satire. The plot of *The Turducken* follows the plot of *The Seagull*, and some scenes in *The Turducken* are recognizable as scenes from Chekhov's play, albeit in a significantly altered form. The framing of *The Seagull* within *The Turducken* serves as meta-commentary on the misreception and misinterpretation of Chekhov in the United States and establishes a predominant line of satire within the piece. However, the greater part of the satire and humor in *The Turducken* stems from the liberal rewriting and reinterpretation of *The Seagull*.

Brian R. JOHNSON

Evans's *The Turducken* and Chekhov's *The Seagull*

In a letter written to his brother Alexander in October 1887, Anton Chekhov says of his play *Ivanov* "I end each act as I do in my stories: I conduct all the acts peacefully and quietly, and at the end I give it to the audience in the kisser" (*Polnoe* XIII 372; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). From start to finish, giving it to the audience in the kisser is exactly what Josef Evans does in *The Turducken*, his farcical and parodic adaptation of Chekhov's play *The Seagull*. Written and directed by Evans, *The Turducken* was performed in December 2008 at Bedlam Theater, a small, independent company in Minneapolis. Bedlam Theatre specializes in producing original works born from improvisation and which land far afield of the mainstream. Produced specifically as Bedlam Theatre's Holiday Season offering of 2008, *The Turducken* had a short run of two weeks in mid-December of that year. It has not been produced since that time. In this article, I present the production of this original and insightful adaptation in the context of its production and of Chekhov's influential original.

The Turducken is not a simple or straightforward adaptation of *The Seagull*: in addition to being a parody of Chekhov's classic, it is a parody of dinner theaters and holiday musical revues in the United States. Indeed, food and music are large parts of *The Turducken*. For the two-week run of the production, Bedlam turned itself into a dinner theater, utilizing the kitchen in the restaurant attached to their theater (a part of their fund-raising apparatus) to prepare the meals served to the audience at intermission. Silly, sarcastic songs abounding in food imagery with lyrics venturing into the realm of the carnivalesque and grotesque poke fun at musical revues and dinner theaters. The beast of the title itself, *turducken*, refers to a roast of nested birds: a chicken or hen stuffed in a duck stuffed in a turkey. Historically associated with Christmas, the turducken is similar to the Yorkshire Christmas Pie, making the choice of *turducken* as a title for a holiday satire an appropriate one. This roast of three nested birds also parallels the structure of the play *The Turducken*. *The Turducken* takes place at the fictional "American Supertime Dinner Theater," which has chosen to perform Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, a "hilarious and heartwarming holiday classic" (unpublished ms., n.p.; also in subsequent quotations) for its holiday show. This is the "hen" of the turducken, the inner layer: the play *The Seagull* proper, albeit with significant alterations. The "duck" of *The Turducken*, the middle layer, is the holiday musical revue attached to *The Seagull*. This part of the play is performed by the "American Supertime Dinner Theater" players, including Grandpa Christmas and a chorus of elves. Their songs and narrative interludes set the stage for and comment upon the action of *The Seagull*. But not all is right at the Supertime Dinner Theater as Grandpa Christmas is drunk and cannot perform competently. Stage manager Steve must come to the rescue to save the show. The scenes with stage manager Steve and Grandpa Christmas constitute the "turkey" of the turducken, the outer layer of the show: the workings of the beleaguered dinner theater itself.

The Seagull within *The Turducken* has been rewritten by Josef Evans to such a degree that those audience members not intimately familiar with Chekhov's original will recognize only the most iconic of scenes from *The Seagull*. All the same, it retains the general plot line and crucial features of the original. Despite the alterations, Evans has respected Chekhov's vision in a way that many straightforward productions of Chekhov's works do not. Evans avoids "that peculiar brand of preciousness that some Chekhov admirers impose on the text," one which leads them to "adore the plays as if they are quaint, fragile scenes in a snow-globe" (Beckerman 253). Instead, Evans mocks this "preciousness" by framing the production of *The Seagull* within the milieu of the holiday review and the dinner theater, venues which could conceivably make the inappropriate and absurd choice of Chekhov for production based solely on these perceived "precious" and "quaint" qualities. Indeed, "the epithet "Chekhovian" has become so diffuse in American culture that it signals *worth* independent of any actual relationship to Chekhov" (de Sherbinin 103). Through the fictional misappropriation of *The Seagull* by a dinner theater, Evans comments upon both the questionable aesthetic choices of that venue and the general tendency of the theater world in the United States to misinterpret Chekhov's work.

Evans is not the first to exchange kid gloves for boxing gloves in his treatment of Chekhov. Joel Gersmann accomplished something similar in 1986 with his production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the

Broom Street Theater in Madison, Wisconsin: "in combining rock music, drug use, and sexual promiscuity with a highly emotional style of acting, the American director at the same time so modernized and vulgarized Chekhov that he rendered him virtually unrecognizable" (LeBlanc 60). Like Gersmann, Evans brings music and overt sexual innuendo to his production, as well as self-conscious melodrama, bawdy humor, and slapstick comedy. Both productions can be classified as parodies, but Evans's version belongs specifically to the genre of burlesque travesty, a type of parody which "modifies the style without modifying the subject" (Genette 22). As I argue in this article, despite the significant alterations to the text of *The Seagull*, the basic Chekhovian themes remain intact.

The genre of travesty also applies to Evans's work in its original semantic sense, that is: to be disguised, transvested, to be dressed in the garb of the opposite gender. In *The Turducken*, characters from *The Seagull* are disguised under different names and some are indeed transvested or transgendered. A few of the name changes are simply whimsical alterations: Trigorin becomes Trey Goering, Nina becomes Nini, and Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev becomes Constantius Gavrilovich. Other alterations are more extensive. Dorn and Shamreyev are combined into one figure as Shamdorn, perhaps indicating a "sham" version of the doctor Dorn. Masha and Medvedenko switch genders in *The Turducken*: Masha becomes Bobby Mash and Medvedenko becomes Medina. This sets up a same-sex love interest on the part of Bobby Mash, who is in love with Constantius. Sorin becomes Mucklejohn Magglepot, although his real name is "Dave" and his character eventually undergoes sexual reassignment surgery in the play. Arkadina becomes Wakadinga Gavrilovich (note the incorrect use of the masculine patronymic as her surname). Although not specified in the script, in the 2008 production Wakadinga was played by a man in drag, replete with high heels and suggestive outfits and a thick Russian accent, the only character in *The Turducken* played with an accent. The multi-layered gender play in *The Turducken* solidly places the work in the genre of travesty.

By turning *The Seagull* into a travesty, Evans has bridged the cultural and chronological gap between Chekhov and our present day. Evans seems to understand instinctively that "the problem of reception [is] one of both linguistic *and* cultural translation" (de Sherbinin 110). Evans does not speak Russian and relied primarily on the 1974 translation by Jean-Claude Van Itallie for his adaptation. Accordingly, he busied himself with a "cultural" interpretation of Chekhov, not a linguistic one. Eschewing the "quaint" and "precious" interpretations typical for the U.S. theater world, he instead captures the comic elements in *The Seagull*, translating them across time and culture, creating a whole new bird in the process (Beckermann 253). In redressing Chekhov in modern, garish garb, Evans and Bedlam jettison the time-bound elements of the piece, laying bare the conflicts within *The Seagull* and exposing the humor, absurdity, and banality within them. In *The Seagull*, Nina eventually becomes an actress, as does Nini, her counterpart in *The Turducken*. Nini performs in "a serious tragedy" entitled "Emotional Problems of the Well-to-Do," and this aptly-named show exposes the central target of Evans's satirical wit. If the structure of *The Seagull* is "grounded ... on the continual ironic parodying of the characters' self-conscious poses which undercut the authenticity of their words and action" (Strongin 367), then Evans has hit his mark with precision. *The Turducken* drips with irony and none of the characters can be taken seriously. Their "self-conscious poses" and their dreams and hopes for the future are undercut both by their own words and by the vicious, mocking treatment they receive from one another. Yet, despite the driven, ceaseless humor of the piece, *The Turducken* captures that Chekhovian essence of ambiguity, laconic detachment and distance, and life in all its utter banality. It mocks this essence, to be sure, but nevertheless, this Chekhovian essence remains. Bedlam Theatre and Evans produce an incisive interpretation of Chekhov in their version of *The Seagull*, one which understands, respects and exploits the humor of the piece, and one which bridges the cultural and chronological gap between pre-revolutionary Russia and the present-day Midwestern U.S.

To understand how Evans makes a travesty and an incisive interpretation of Chekhov simultaneously, I explore five iconic scenes from *The Seagull* retained in *The Turducken*: the opening scene between Medvekenko and Masha; the scene involving the set-up and performance of Konstantin Treplev's play; the scene where Konstantin presents Nina with a dead seagull; the scene where Arkadina, Konstantin's mother, changes his bandaging; and the farewell scene between Nina and Konstantin. Although there are a few other scenes from *The Seagull* which are more or less intact in

The Turducken, the five outlined above are most relevant for my study because of their iconic status and their central role in furthering the plot of the play.

The Seagull opens with love-sick Medvedenko courting Masha, commenting on her tendency to wear black, complaining about his paltry income, all the while completely oblivious to the fact that Masha is not interested in him and is in love with Konstantin. *The Seagull* within *The Turducken* opens the same way, but with the gender roles reversed:

MEDINA. Oh, Bobby Mash. I don't understand why you always wear black.
BOBBY. It's because I'm so depressed.
MEDINA. You don't have to be. We could get married.
BOBBY. I don't know. I don't usually marry people who repulse me.
MEDINA. Look, I may be ugly, and poor, and boring . . .
BOBBY. Don't forget stupid.
MEDINA. And stupid. But I am available.
BOBBY. Thank you, Medina. I will remember that.

The iconic opening scene from *The Seagull* is reduced to just eight lines in *The Turducken*. On its own, the humor in this scene stems from the blunt, brutal honesty of Bobby Mash in his direct rejection of Medina. But the humor is amplified for those audience members familiar with *The Seagull*. First there is of course the absurd gender reversal, setting up a same-sex love interest in the play, as Bobby Mash (Masha) is in love with Constantius (Konstantin). The gender reversal also reflects the essence of Chekhov's characters: of Masha and Medvedenko, Masha is certainly the more aggressive and independent character, the more stereotypically masculine of the pair. In *The Seagull* she takes snuff and drinks vodka, qualities Trigorin notes in his notebook, and in Act IV, after they are married, it is clear that Masha wears the pants in their family. By reversing the genders of Masha and Medvedenko, Evans exposes the latent gender roles of the characters. This scene in *The Turducken* also exposes the subtext of the scene in *The Seagull*; clearly Masha feels the same way about Medvedenko as Bobby Mash does about Medina. This is an example of *The Turducken*'s commentary on the misrepresentation of Chekhov on stage. The niceties of the conversation between Masha and Medvedenko are generally staged as "quaint," "cute," and "heartwarming." But Evans is right: this rejection is not "heartwarming," it is brutally honest. The problem lies not in Chekhov's language - clearly the rejection is there in Chekhov, and when played properly, Masha's rejection of Medvedenko is just as biting and brutal as Bobby's of Medina - but time, language and context all interfere with this understanding. By exposing the underlying conflict and stripping the scene of its conversational niceties, Evans updates Chekhov for his audience: by contacting its essence, Evans bridges the chronological gap.

The plot then proceeds as in *The Seagull*, although not without changes. Sir Mucklejohn Magglepot (Sorin) is helping to set the stage for Constantius's (Konstantin's) play, although in his deluded mind he believes he is opening his own Renaissance festival to rival the one in which his sister, Wakadinga, works. As Mucklejohn readies the set, Constantius wonders whether his "mother will like the pageant," setting the stage for the play's central mother-son conflict. Nini (Nina) is already present, and her short conversation with Constantius parallels the conversation between them before Konstantin's play begins in *The Seagull*. As in the scene between Masha and Medvedenko, the dialogue is distilled to its bare elements. Constantius explains his theory of art, with some phrases lifted directly from *The Seagull*. Nini's attitudes parallel Nina's: nervousness, her admiration for Konstantin's mother, her fear her parents may discover she's on the stage. The cultural distance between the disrepute of the acting profession in Chekhov's time and today is bridged by the mocking hyperbole in Nina's concern that her parents may discover her by getting lost and driving forty-two miles out of their way. And again, the central theme of generations in conflict is raised, both in the personalities and in their opinions about art. Note that Trigorin is not yet present in *The Turducken*: he enters later in the play.

Continuing to follow the plot line of *The Seagull* closely, *The Turducken* now introduces Bobby Mash's love interest in Constantius in a blunt and humorous manner. When Constantius leans in to kiss Nini, she simply turns her head, allowing the kiss but not reciprocating. Bobby has been watching them. Stage directions indicate he "stops what he is doing to notice them kiss. He drops the hammer he is holding on his foot, it makes a loud noise." The comic relief here reflects the dismissive and satirical treatment of Bobby's love for Constantius throughout the play. This makes Bobby Mash's

eventual marriage to Medina all the more comic, again offering homage to the original and the absolute incompatibility of Masha and Medvedenko as a married couple.

The next scene that closely resembles the original is the staging of Constantius's play: here Wakadinga and Shamdorn enter the play for the first time. The enmity between the characters is exposed in both versions, but more comically in *The Turducken*. In *The Seagull*, Arkadina simply responds to Konstantin's invitation to the play; in *The Turducken*, Constantius has to trick his mother into coming by claiming there is an emergency. Wakadinga is just as intrusive and flippant as Arakadina, simply more blunt. After some dialogue between Wakadinga and Mucklejohn about his plans to open a Renaissance Festival, Constantius's play begins with dialogue taken directly from Chekhov which gradually becomes travesty as Nini proceeds. Just as in *The Seagull*, Wakadinga ruins Constantius's show with her cutting remarks. The very same elements of the scene in *The Seagull* are carried over here: the "modernness" of the piece, Nina's long dialogue, the interjections from Arkadina and the audience, the eyes of the devil and smell of sulfur. Evans takes these elements and overlays them with modern jokes and innuendo. He reinterprets this pivotal scene and finds farce within its basic structure, the conflict between an uncaring parent and her sensitive son. It also evokes the theme of dreams; Constantius is attempting to fulfill his, and his mother simply squashes them with no attempt to be sympathetic. But perhaps her sincerity should be praised? In *The Seagull*, at least Nina's monologue is interesting of its own sake, whether or not the director of a production decides that it should be "pulled off" or not; in *The Turducken* there is no question of Nini's monologue succeeding on its own merits without Wakadinga's caustic remarks. It is simply too farcical to be taken seriously.

The next major scene in common between the two plays is the scene where Konstantin lays a dead seagull at Nina's feet. This scene exposes the underlying conflict between the two characters: Konstantin senses Nina is becoming more distant, and correctly suspects that she has fallen for Trigorin. In *The Turducken* the scene between Constantius and Nini is a distilled version of Chekhov's original.

CONSTANTIUS. Nini.

NINI. Who's that?

CONSTANTIUS. It's me. Are you alone?

NINI. Yes, I'm alone. (CONSTANTIUS jumps out brandishing an uncooked turducken.) Aaa! It's you. (he lays it at her feet) What the hell is that?

CONSTANTIUS. I was low enough today to kill this innocent young turducken. I lay it at your feet.

NINI. What? What is the matter with you?

CONSTANTIUS. I killed it the same way I'm going to kill myself.

NINI. I don't know what you're talking about. I don't recognize you.

CONSTANTIUS. I didn't recognize you first. You've changed. You hate me now. Your eyes are cold, like icy cool and refreshing Pabst Blue Ribbon beer.

NINI. It's your own fault. You're so cranky and you talk in symbols, I don't even know what you're saying half the time. I suppose THIS TURDUCKEN IS SUPPOSED TO BE SOME KIND OF SYMBOL, TOO (*holds up the turducken*). Well, I don't understand it. I'm too simple to understand you.

CONSTANTIUS. It's all because of my play. That stupid failure of a play. I've burnt it all, every scrap of it. And now where am I? Not even a writer. An impersonator of writers. A worthless hack, with only a mustache and a shiny shiny wig to call his own. You say you don't understand me. Perhaps there is nothing of me to understand. (TREY enters) Oh, but here comes the true genius. I am not worthy of his presence. I leave you to your love and enlightened conversation. (*he exits*)

Several elements in this scene are retained from *The Seagull*: the extravagance of Konstantin's gesture of laying a dead bird at Nina's feet; his threat of suicide; his jealousy of Trigorin's talent and Nina's attraction to him; Nina's apparent refusal to understand the symbolism of Konstantin's actions. Bedlam's version plays up the absurdity of the scene by changing the dead seagull to a "dead" turducken. There is also humor in Nina's reaction to the seagull: in the original, Nina simply asks "What is that supposed to mean?" (*The Seagull* 24) after Konstantin lays the seagull at her feet. Here, Nini first jumps in fright at the sight of Constantius and reacts strongly to the sight of the dead bird: "What the hell is that?" Indeed, perhaps in Chekhov's time laying dead birds at the feet of one's beloved did not engender much of a reaction in the beloved, but today, it would rightfully evoke distress. Again, Evans exposes the underlying absurdity in Chekhov's play, heightens it, and in doing so, bridges the chronological gap. The heavy-handed use of the seagull as a symbol is brought to the fore in *The Turducken*. In *The Seagull* the dead bird can be read as a symbol of the dead love between

Nina and Konstantin and a symbol presaging Konstantin's suicide, but a symbol Nina refuses to recognize. Perhaps "Nina's rejection of symbols and metaphors proves liberating and helps her to persevere" (Evdokimova 216), for even in *The Turducken*, Nini in the end is the most alive and liberated of the characters. Nevertheless, the use of the seagull as a symbol both by Chekhov and Evans is unmistakable. In *The Seagull*, it is "ironic that Nina fails to understand Treplev's [Konstantin's] meaning here, since he tells her outright that he will soon kill himself 'in the same way' as he has killed the seagull" (Strongin 370). In *The Turducken*, the obviousness of the dead bird as a symbol, as well as Nina's refusal to recognize it, is parodied with the line "This Turducken is supposed to be some kind of symbol too" written in all capital letters in the text. Here Evans mocks simultaneously the overt and heavy-handed symbolism of the seagull and renders it meaningless by absurdly replacing it with a turducken. Whereas in Chekhov the "seagull as a non-verbal sign is ultimately not the symbol of something else ... but merely a dead bird" (Evdokima 216), in *The Turducken* the turducken is not one dead bird, but three, nested within one another and roasted. At the same time the turducken, like the dead seagull, stands as a symbol "not only of destroyed lives or of Nina's or Treplev's fate, but of the overriding theme of the play, the stripping away of the many layers of artificiality" (Chances 29), which in essence is Evans's chief objective in *The Turducken* (incidentally, the reference to Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, a Midwestern beer currently popular among the hipster crowd, is a recurring Bedlam joke about product placement).

Just as in *The Seagull*, the scene in *The Turducken* continues after Constantius exits and Trey Goering enters. In the original, Nina displays heady youthful idol worship and puppy love toward the famous Trigorin, while Trigorin displays his ambiguous intentions toward Nina. The dialogue in *The Seagull* concerns the lives of actors and writers: Nina wishes to know what it is like to be famous, she is envious of Trigorin's life, and intrigued, and she says "For the glory of being a writer or an actress, I'd endure anything — the disapproval of my family and friends, poverty and disappointment" (*The Seagull* 25). Trigorin for his part remains self-involved, speaking of the process of writing, his anxieties about his fame, and the process of creation and inspiration. Although they expose their inner desires and dreams to one another, neither character really listens to the other. Trigorin's avoidance of directly confronting Nina's affection for him is what makes his intentions toward her in the scene and the play so ambiguous: Is he lecherous or sincere? Is he just a flattered middle-aged man or does he have real feelings for Nina? All these elements are retained in *The Turducken*, and like the other scenes, it is greatly distilled. Trey Goering enters to speak with Nini; he has just returned from ice fishing.

NINI. Hello, darling!

TREY. Hello, you.

NINI. Did you catch anything?

TREY. Only the willowy wisp of literary inspiration. Ah, writing. Like a frozen lake, full of fish who don't want to eat any worms. Damn those cursed fish! Who was that you were talking with?

NINI. Oh, nobody. Just a crazy person.

TREY. What are you holding there?

NINI. This? Oh, it's just a symbol of death in my honor, or something to that effect.

TREY. You don't say. That gives me an idea for a story. A girl has lived all her life near a poultry farm. She loves that farm, like an animal loves a farm. She is free, like a duck, loud, like a turkey, and tasty, like a chicken. But then a man comes along by mere chance and out of nothing better to do, destroys her, like this, ah, whatever you call it here.

NINI. That sounds amazing.

TREY. I know. I just thought of it. Incredible.

Evans reduces the scene to its barest motivations: Nina openly betrays Konstantin by characterizing him as "crazy" and she openly acknowledges that she does indeed understand the symbolism of the dead seagull/turducken. And the scene ends on the same note that it does in *The Seagull*: Trigorin speaks of inspiration for a story, when in truth he is simply exposing his true, lecherous intentions, that he will casually destroy this young girl. What is ironic here is that amidst all the openness, the characters nevertheless head toward their destinies. In *The Seagull*, the truth of symbols and intentions are layered, cloaked, and characters refuse to acknowledge them, as obvious as they may be. Here in *The Turducken* the banality of this refusal to acknowledge the truth is exposed by making the truth of the situation even more self-evident. Nini's response "That sounds

amazing" to Trey Goering's explicit admission of his intentions toward her heightens the parody by making it clear how she is simply ignoring the truth of the matter; this in turn underscores Nina's naive refusal to see the reality of her situation in *The Seagull*, one which she herself pursues.

The next iconic scene retained in *The Turducken* is the scene where Arkadina changes the bandages of Konstantin's self-inflicted head wound in his attempted suicide. In *The Seagull*, the scene starts out tenderly, reenacting the mother-son relationship when Konstantin was a child, with an expected reconciliation at the end; it quickly turns into a feud over Trigorin's talent and they begin to call each other names until Konstantin begins to cry and Arkadina begs him to forgive her. In *The Turducken* the scene follows the same outline:

CONSTANTIUS. Mother.
WAKADINGA. Son. Let me see that bandage of yours.
CONSTANTIUS. It needs changing.
WAKADINGA. The doctor's getting a drink. I'll change it for you. Here, sit down.
CONSTANTIUS. Do you know how to do it?
WAKADINGA. Oh, sure. I played a nurse once on an instructional video. "Watch out for Knives." The American Cutlery Council. They paid me very well. Ah, look at this. Almost entirely healed. (*she kisses him on the head, pauses a moment*) Constantius. I'm worried, and I have to ask you. You won't try to ... you know...
CONSTANTIUS. What?
WAKADINGA. (*pantomiming shooting herself*) Click click. Boom! Aaaaaa. Thud. Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle...
CONSTANTIUS. Shoot myself?
WAKADINGA. Don't say it!
CONSTANTIUS. I won't. It was just a moment. I was out of my head with despair, I lost control ... it won't happen again.
WAKADINGA. (*stroking his hair*) That's my boy.
CONSTANTIUS. It was all because of that ... idiot. Trey Goering.
WAKADINGA. Idiot! The man is a certified American genius.
CONSTANTIUS. The man is a half-brained piece of horseshit. That's what he is.
WAKADINGA. Oh, there you go again. Disagreeing with your mother.
CONSTANTIUS. I'll disagree when you're wrong. Which is pretty often.
WAKADINGA. I respect that man greatly. You have no right to speak ill of him.
CONSTANTIUS. No right? His plays are gigantic piles of donkey vomit. Everything he writes makes me sick.
WAKADINGA. You're just jealous. People who have no talent have nothing better to do than criticize those with real talent.
CONSTANTIUS. Like you?
WAKADINGA. Yes! And Trey.
CONSTANTIUS. Ha! I'm more talented than both of you put together.
WAKADINGA. According to whom, Constantius? The hordes of audience members who come to see your ridiculous little plays? The birds? The crickets? The hundreds of empty seats every time a sentence of yours is uttered upon the stage?
CONSTANTIUS. Audiences are stupid. They pay money to see you; that should say it all.
WAKADINGA. You're a horrible writer and you have squandered the genetic gifts I gave you. You're not fit to write a toilet bowl commercial, you ungrateful little ... sponge!
CONSTANTIUS. Cheapskate!
WAKADINGA. Fatface!
CONSTANTIUS. Dingdong!
WAKADINGA. Fairyfart!
CONSTANTIUS. Dogbreath!
WAKADINGA. Dinosaur!
CONSTANTIUS. Astronaut!
WAKADINGA. Mongrel!
CONSTANTIUS. Wretch.
WAKADINGA. Ingrate.
CONSTANTIUS. Miserable old whore.
She slaps him. He turns away, sits and begins to cry softly.
WAKADINGA. (*muttering now, breaking down as she continues*) Beggar. Nonentity. Fool. Stupid fool. (*goes to him*) Don't cry. Stop crying. Forgive me. Forgive me, your foolish, terrible mother. Forgive me, I'm so unhappy. Please.
CONSTANTIUS. If you only knew. I've lost everything. She doesn't love me anymore, and now I can't write. All my hopes are gone.
WAKADINGA. It will pass. She'll come back to you. Believe me. She will love you again.
CONSTANTIUS. But she won't even look at me. She fawns on him like some stupid animal.
WAKADINGA. He won't be with her for long. Not if I have anything to say about it.

Apart from again being significantly shorter than the original, *The Turducken* heightens the conflict between mother and son by using language which turns the tender scene into a farce. Trigorin is not the real issue here. The conflict is about the characters' egos: Konstantin's envy of his mother's

success and her resentment of his failure to live up to her ideals and standards, her refusal to acknowledge that she prefers her writer/lover to her writer/son, Konstantin's resentment of that fact, and his envy of Trigorin's fame and talent.

Arkadina's vulgarity comes out through Evans's re-writing of the scene. In *The Seagull*, maternal instinct is enough knowledge to allow her to change Konstantin's bandage; in *The Turducken*, this maternal instinct is erased, replaced by her experience playing a nurse on an instructional video entitled "Watch out for Knives." The disdain Arkadina feels toward her son is exemplified in *The Turducken* when she asks Konstantin whether he will attempt suicide again: in *The Seagull* Arkadina can barely bring herself to mention the act; in *The Turducken*, she farcically demonstrates the act of shooting oneself. The name-calling exchange in *The Seagull* is the climax of the scene with a moment of reconciliation coming at the very end when Arkadina begs for forgiveness; the same pattern is followed in *The Turducken*, but the name-calling is heightened and made absurd by profanity and non-sensical epithets. This exposes the conflict for what it is — an infantile fit of jealousy on both sides — but it also serves to emphasize the severity and intractability of the conflict. The "nonsense" epithets in *The Turducken* also point to the difficulty in translating terms such as "non-entity" and "Kievan shopkeeper" into our modern culture. Here, Evans and Bedlam do not attempt to translate these items in any cultural way; instead they play upon the absurdity of the difficulty of culturally translating these terms and use them to expose the vulgar farce underlying this scene. In *The Seagull*, Konstantin simply begins to cry; in *The Turducken*, his tears are evoked by Arkadina slapping him, provoked by his calling her a "miserable old whore," which is exactly what she is in *The Turducken*. Again, a theme underpinning the scene is exposed, the theme of the inability to face the truth, and using that truth to hurt another person.

The final scene I discuss is the scene in Act IV where Konstantin sees Nina for the last time. Two years have passed since Act III. Konstantin professes his undying love for Nina, claiming he is bound to her heart and soul for all eternity. Nina is unreceptive; she has come to say good-bye, to mourn the youth she has lost now that she is an actress playing on the provincial stage, now that she has lost her reputation and her family. The version of this scene in *The Turducken* is shortened significantly — Konstantin's ruminations on his writing are cut, as are Nina's concerns of being overheard — yet overall the scene follows the same arc.

NINI. Constantius.

CONSTANTIUS. Nini. Darling. I had a feeling— Oh, my darling Nini. You're here.

NINI. I am. (*they embrace*) Oh, Constantius. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

CONSTANTIUS. Let's not cry. Let's not. Here, let me look at you.

NINI. Am I much different?

CONSTANTIUS. You're thinner. Your eyes are bigger. It's so strange to see you. After all this time. Why didn't you call me? Why wouldn't you see me?

NINI. I was afraid. I thought you would hate me. Oh, this place! Do you remember, Constantius?

CONSTANTIUS. Too often. Every day. I live here now, alone among these memories.

NINI. I haven't cried in two years, but I came here, last night, to see if it was still here. And it is. Our stage! I cried, a deep cleansing soul-puking kind of cry. But I'm not crying now, see? Look at us now, Constantius. You an author, me an actress ... our dreams come true. And tomorrow I leave for rural Nebraska, to do a community theater production of "Annie Get your Gun."

CONSTANTIUS. You can't leave. Not now. What are you talking about? Come inside with me. I still love you.

NINI. But I don't love you. Don't you see, Constantius? I am the turducken. I'm a rotten piece of flightless meat, impaled on a skewer I can no longer feel. I'm an *actress*.

CONSTANTIUS. Don't leave me again. I'm alone, and lost, and it's so cold, everywhere it's cold. Take me with you at least. I love Nebraska in January.

NINI. (*going up on the stage*) I figured it out. You see? I understand. Our work — acting, writing — it's not about fame, or glory, or any of the things I used to dream about on this tiny strip of country dirt. It's about how to endure. How to bear my burden and have faith. You see? I have faith and it doesn't hurt me so much anymore. When I think of my calling, I'm not afraid of life.

CONSTANTIUS. But I haven't figured it out. I live in chaos. I don't know what my calling is. I'm nothing without you.

NINI. Shhh ... I'm going. Good bye.

CONSTANTIUS. Stay. Please.

NINI. (*singing to herself*) Men and lions, deer and quail, rabbits, monkey, dinosaur ... Santa Claus. (*trailing off, then speaking*) The future! What does it hold? Cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. I am alone. I open my mouth to speak. No one hears my wretched cry. Only I remain the same. Only I see the empty table before me ... I am eternal. I am the turducken. Oh, Constantius, you were right. You were right... (*she embraces him impulsively and rushes off*)

CONSTANTIUS. Wait. Please. Come back!

Instead of full-on farce, the humor of this scene is more subtle and only works when the actors play it straight, a significant departure from the tenor of the play to this point. It significantly parallels the original in *The Seagull* in tone and content, albeit in a highly redacted form. But the scene in *The Turducken* approaches tender moments only to turn them comical through the use of a well-placed word or phrase. The first of these occurs when Nini talks about her grieving process. She has returned to Konstantin's stage and has had a good cry. Bedlam approaches pathos here, until Nini utters the line "I cried, a deep cleansing soul-puking kind of cry" whereby the scene devolves into bathos. Nina is a provincial actress in *The Seagull*, as is Nini in *The Turducken*. To bridge this cultural and chronological gap, Bedlam and Evans place Nini in "rural Nebraska, to do a community theater production of 'Annie Get your Gun'." This comic line gives a good cultural and contemporary approximation of the type of provincial theater Nina was engaged in. The scene then returns to its undulation, creating a moment of pathos when Nini explains that she does not love Constantius, only to delve into bathos again when Nina's infamous line "I am the seagull" is transformed into "I am the turducken." The joke does not end by simply replacing the stuffed seagull with a stuffed turkey; the "brutality" of preparing a turducken is emphasized and compared to Nina's profession: "I'm a rotten piece of flightless meat, impaled on a skewer I can no longer feel. I'm an *actress*" (emphasis in the original). This line gets to the heart of Nini's (and by extension Nina's) position in life: her naive preoccupation with the stage has left her pinned, immobile, and numb, yet she has achieved her goal of becoming an actress. The scene again returns to building pathos, and some of the truth of the reality of the conflicts in *The Seagull* are enunciated by Nini in *The Turducken*: "Our work — acting, writing — it's not about fame, or glory, or any of the things I used to dream about on this tiny strip of country dirt. It's about how to endure. How to bear my burden and have faith. You see? I have faith and it doesn't hurt me so much anymore. When I think of my calling, I'm not afraid of life." Unlike the other characters, Nini is no longer afraid of life, because she has lived so much more than her superficial fellow characters. She has experienced "The painful relinquishment of golden childhood and the dream of innocence before the bitter necessity of knowing reality" (Jackson 111). Her dreams have been shattered, and because of that, she sees the world more clearly. Yet Bedlam and Evans will not allow the pathos to stand; bathos returns when Nini declares as she is leaving Constantius for the last time once again: "I am the turducken."

In conclusion, pathos cannot stand in *The Turducken*: it is, after all, an absurd uproarious farce. Yet even through the laughter, the play addresses serious Chekhovian themes: pursuing one's dreams only to find they cannot be fulfilled; settling for what is safe and available rather than what one truly wants; the ability of petty jealousy to ruin relationships; issues of creativity and "new forms" in art. But unlike "quaint" and "precious" productions of Chekhov, *The Turducken* does not take these themes seriously. In this, Evans is closer to the original spirit of *The Seagull*, which "constantly puncture[s] illusions, constantly remove[s] the veneered cover of falsity to expose the deflated reality" (Chances 33). As a "new version" of *The Seagull*, *The Turducken* succeeds in creating a contemporary and relevant travesty while simultaneously paying respect to and opening up a timeless classic.

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