

# Sartre's Existentialism through the Lens of Chekov's *The Seagull*

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## 1. Introduction

The life of human beings become ironic when their hopes and dreams are in strong conflict with their fate. Existentialism does not harshly follow the rules of a certain tradition; it is specifically the anti-tradition of all philosophers. One of the key existentialist figures is Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who has prolifically written about the position of man in his society and environment. He examined the difference between the questions of being what it means to be human, the question of living, and how humans should interact with their society. Remarkably, these aspects of existentialism that Sartre acknowledges are elucidated in great pieces of literature (novels, dramas, short stories and poems) everywhere in the realm of creation. How a person can remain human in a universe filled with complications, the choices that a person makes under the search for the meaning of Existence are the underpinnings of these literary works. The objective of this paper is to analyse the struggle of the characters that search for the meaning of their life in the drama, *The Seagull* by Anton Chekov, through the perspective of Sartre's Existentialism. Through the performances of the characters, this drama indirectly portrays the existentialist pattern of thinking which provides the complications of life as a work of art. This paper focuses on the credibility of the choices they make in the play, which is mostly related to the daily struggle of the lives while showing the intellectual assessment with its response to Existentialism.

## 2. Literature Review

In *The Seagull* by Chekov, the characters like Trepliov, Nina and Masha are struggling to find the meaning of life through living their own lives. As a writer, Trepliov believes that he will find the meaning of his life through his work. Consequently, at the end of the play, he commits suicide because he depends on the others to give the purpose of his life without finding it in himself. Nina is also searching for the meaning and purpose of her life; and she puts it in the hands of the others. However, there is a doubt whether she has found her meaning of life or whether she is struggling to find it. It is crystal clear that she is blind towards Trigorin and she puts the meaning of her life in Trigorin's hands. Another character which depicts this issue is Masha. She is different from the other two characters as she

moves her purpose of mourning from death to life. She exposes her frustration about the meaninglessness of life. However, Chekov does not directly manifest the existentialist theme in his play. So, it is clearly evident that there is a lack of studies done to show the relation between Existentialism and Chekov's play *The Seagull*.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Anton Chekov's *The Seagull* will be used as the main literary source, in its relation to the life crisis which demonstrates how human identity can be better understood and how it either becomes comprehensible or dissolve. Furthermore, the essay by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism* will be used to assert the existentialist viewpoints which depict that human destiny is shaped by human beings themselves. The information gathered will be critically and comparatively analysed to examine how the theory of Existentialism plays a key role in Chekov's play, *The Seagull*.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

As a human being, we always question, 'what is our function and what are we for?' The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle has raised the question on human functioning as to how we differ from animals. It is because we act according to rational plans in which we may call it as rational activities. The traditional view of the human functioning is that human beings strive for happiness. Our excellence consists in fulfilling our function well. However, Sartre exemplified that men have no essence or intrinsic function. We are free to define ourselves as we chose and humans are radically free. He examines the difference between the question of being and what it means to be human, and also how human beings should interact with their society. His consideration with the human condition places him in the centre of the existentialist movement. For him, it is not merely a philosophy, but also a way of life. Theatre acts as a powerful medium to generate the above idea. In Chekov's play *The Seagull*, Existentialism can be seen as a prominent theme though Chekov does not manifest it directly. The search for answers in an answerless world is a good concept that both Sartre and Chekov pay their attention to.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, it is clearly evident that these characters are struggling to find the meaning of life. Thus, they question their own existence. So when hopes and expectations of people are in a strong confrontation with their fate, their lives become ironic. Furthermore, Jean-Paul Sartre has written both in the field of philosophy and literature. Thus, he can be known as a literary metaphysician. To comprehend Sartre's contribution to literature, it must have a proper idea to grasp what he has mentioned in his philosophical texts. However, Sartre attempts to provide a descriptive analysis regarding a practical bearing on how to live. According to Sartre, he claims that

human beings can alone make decisions and free choices among all things in the world. Therefore, Sartre's ideas on Existentialism can be taken into consideration when looking at the issues depicted in *The Seagull* by Anton Chekov. Although Chekov does not convey the existentialist theme directly, he tries to show the theme through different characters.

## **6. References**

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