

## Apocalyptic Images and Allusions in Oscar Wilde's Salome and Anton Chekhov's The Sea Gull

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### □ ABSTRACT □

This article examines the apocalyptic images, characters and allusions in two selected plays of fin de siècle theater: *Salome* (1893) by Oscar Wilde and *The Sea Gull* (1896) by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. These two plays are selected to illustrate two different ways, direct and indirect, in adapting apocalyptic images, borrowed from the Book of Revelation. In *Salome*, Wilde employs apocalyptic images, sometimes literally and sometimes through allusions. The research claims that through this process, Wilde does not emphasize the dominant eschatological ideology of the end of time. On the contrary, he attempts to destroy the illusions and apocalyptic scenarios of the end of the world of his contemporary people. Doing so, Wilde uncovers the real apocalyptic reality that the people of the late nineteenth century lived.

Similarly, the article also examines Treplyov's symbolic play within a play in Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* focusing on the great influence of the Apocalypse on Treplyov's mind whose eschatological imagination leads him to his final destruction and death. Because of the inability to cope with the accelerating changes and intolerable decadent reality, Treplyov becomes the prisoner and victim of his own apocalyptic imagination. The article concludes that like Wilde, Chekhov does not strengthen the apocalyptic and nihilistic views that echo the widespread fears of the end of time by the nineteenth century people, but rather warns against the dangerous consequences of the ideology of the end of the world through the play within a play technique, and the adaptation of apocalyptic images.

**Key Words:** Fin de siècle, Apocalypse, Revelation, Eschatology, Prophecy, End of the world, End of time.

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## الصور والدلالات المتعلقة بنهاية العالم في مسرحية "سالومي" للكاتب أوسكار وايلد ومسرحية "النورس" للكاتب أنطون تشيخوف

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### □ ملخص □

تتناول هذه المقالة مفهوم نهاية العالم من حيث صورها و شخصياتها و دلالاتها في عملين مختارين من مسرح نهاية القرن: مسرحية "سالومي" للكاتب الايرلندي أوسكار وايلد عام 1893 و مسرحية "النورس" للكاتب الروسي أنطون تشيخوف عام 1896. تم اختيار هذين العملين لأنهما يقدمان تبني صور نهاية العالم بمقاربتين مختلفتين مباشرة و غير مباشرة. يعرض البحث أن توظيف أوسكار وايلد لصور نهاية العالم المستوحاة من سفر الرؤيا - أحياناً على شكل دلالات و أحياناً أخرى على شكل اقتباسات حرفية- في مسرحيته سالومي لم يهدف إلى تأكيد الإيديولوجية الأخروية السائدة و إنما هو محاولة لتحطيم ما ساد لدى معاصريه من تصورات لسنايروهات نهاية العالم، و بذلك يعري الكاتب الواقع الكارثي المأساوي الحقيقي الذي كان مخيباً على حياة الناس في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر. وبطريقة موازية يعالج البحث أيضاً المسرحية الرمزية التي تعمل عليها شخصية تريبليوف داخل مسرحية تشيخوف "النورس" مسلطاً الضوء على تأثير سفر الرؤيا على فكر و مخيلة هذه الشخصية التي ساقته إلى حتفه، و ذلك يعود لعدم قدرته على التعايش مع المتغيرات المتسارعة و الواقع الفاسد مما جعله أسيراً و ضحية لمخيلته الأخروية. و كما هو الحال مع وايلد، تنتهي هذه المقالة إلى نتيجة مؤداها أن تشيخوف لا يسعى إلى تقوية النظرة الأخروية و العدمية التي تعكس المخاوف الشائعة حول نهاية العالم في نهاية القرن التاسع عشر، و إنما يحذر من النتائج الخطيرة لإيديولوجية نهاية العالم من خلال تقنية المسرحية داخل المسرحية و تبني الصور الأخروية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نهاية القرن، سفر الرؤيا، الأخروية، نبوءة، نهاية العالم، نهاية الزمان.

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## Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed tremendous global changes encompassing politics, science, religion, society and economy, as well as increased struggles, human crises and catastrophes that reached their peak at the end of the century. In her book *Oscar Wilde and the Yellow Nineties*, Frances Winwar depicts the European scene at that critical period of time as full of accelerating events, upheavals, wars, and conflicts, which ruin the hopes of mankind of a new century as a "brighter and more wonderful harbinger of futurity." She argues that when the nineteenth century dawns, "impoverished Europe, bloodless from the disastrous war that had killed the best of her youth," goes through changes almost in all fields of life. She depicts the contradiction between what the historians start to call a "rebirth" of the nineteenth century caused by the "industrial prosperity," and the miserable lives of workers whose "flesh and blood" are "bought for the machines very cheaply." For her, the late nineteenth century people suffer "the conflict between the world and the spirit" (153).

In such a conjunction, predictions about the end of the world prevailed, especially when the century came to a close during which the apocalyptic images found their best expression, context and time to reappear among people. The Apocalypse of Saint John constituted an important source of abundant ready apocalyptic images that fed the fantasies people resorted to escaping their intolerable apocalyptic reality, manifested especially in the period between 1880 and 1901, and continued to reappear in the next century especially in the years of 1999 and 2000. Apparently, these predictions even started earlier in 1805 when the Welsh Presbyterian minister Christopher Love, influenced by the Book of Revelation, predicted that a devastating earthquake would bring the world to an end:

And I die in that thought, and really believe that my calculations are right, on the Revelation by St. John ... The stars will wander, and the moon turn as blood, in 1800. Africa, Asia, and America, will tremble, in 1803. A great earthquake over all the world, in 1805. God will be universally known by all: Then a general reformation, and peace forever, when the people shall learn war no more. Happy is the man that liveth to see this day! (Love 10-11)

Also, in 1814, the 64 year-old woman, Joanna Southcott, claimed that she would deliver the Christ child on Christmas Day, the same day of her death, on which her autopsy revealed that she was not pregnant (Browne). Apparently, she was influenced by the stories of Christ's Second Coming, especially the story of "the woman clothed with the sun" who gave birth to the Christ child in Revelation (Rev. 12.1-5). Similarly, in 1881, the famous prediction of the fifteenth century prophet Mother Shipton, "The world to an end shall come, In eighteen hundred and eighty one," gained popularity in certain Western communities which continued to believe in her predictions though her apocalyptic story turned out to be an apocryphal one (qtd. in Harrison 9). Last but not least, Jack Wilson, the religious and spiritual leader and creator of the Ghost Dance movement, predicted that the Millennium, the one thousand years of the peaceful reign of Jesus Christ on the earth according to Revelation, would occur by 1891 (Wovoka Biography). All these predictions differed in purpose and plot, but they all shared the vision of an imminent radical change supporting the assumption of the continuous power of the Apocalypse over the minds of the people, linking their fears with the expectation of a heavenly intervention and salvation like the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Doomsday, and salvation of a few people chosen by God. Following the general apocalyptic tendencies, playwrights employed the apocalyptic imagery in their scripts. Then the increasing usage of the apocalyptic imagery developed to become by itself an apocalyptic trend, bringing together too many writers,

and constituted just a part of a wider apocalyptic trend known as fin de siècle art and literature. In this context, Frank Kermode, in his book *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue*, explains this phenomenon considering that our "eschatological anxieties" are a "secular habit of mind," marking the end of centuries when "our sense of epoch is gratified" (96). He describes this situation as a "pattern of anxiety that we shall find recurring, with interesting differences ... Its recurrence is a feature of our cultural tradition, if not ultimately of our physiology" (69). He argues that, in general, "the dying men" under varying existential pressures, create fictions of "the End" which satisfy their needs as to "imagine a significance for themselves" and "make tolerable one's moment between beginning and end," to which they feel "a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related" (4-5). He observes that the "Apocalypse is a radical instance of such fictions and a source of others" (6).

At such a historic conjunction, writers like Oscar Wilde and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov find in the Book of Revelation (the last chapter of the Bible) the best scenario to comment on their apocalyptic times and introduce their vision of the future. Their contributions to the dramaturgy of the apocalypse are considered an integral part of fin de siècle art, shedding light on social and political issues like decadence, deterioration, and, of course, the end of the world. They have sensed the necessity of an end to stop the corruption that touches almost all fields of life and expressed their point of view of it in their scripts. This article focuses on the way apocalyptic images and allusions are employed in Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*, and the messages they attempt to convey.

### **Importance and objectives**

This research studies a very controversial issue, even nowadays, which is the end of the world, from a dramatic point of view in order to introduce readers to different conceptions of the end of time. Its importance lies in its attempt to examine two different fin de siècle plays written at a very critical period of time of the late nineteenth century which marks a transitional period between the aftermath of the European revolutions and the eve of the two World Wars. The objectives of this study is first to trace back and analyze the apocalyptic images used by Wilde and Chekhov in their scripts in relation to the apocalyptic imagery of the Book of Revelation by Saint John. The second objective is to make a clear distinction between the ways in which the apocalyptic images are employed, and finally, to find out whether these two dramatists borrow the apocalyptic images for purposes other than to emphasize the Biblical ideology of the end of time.

### **Methodology**

Throughout this paper, a historical materialist approach is applied based on close textual analysis of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's *The Sea Gull* in light of the Book of Revelation by Saint John. The analysis is supported by the historical material context of the late nineteenth century and Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue*, in an attempt to answer how and why the apocalyptic imagery is employed in the selected plays.

## **II**

The Apocalypse of Saint John offers a vision of the end of the world in a story-like text with a plot and characters including the narrator who is Saint John, the prophet. The characters are divided fundamentally into two contending parties of good and evil, and human beings and living creatures are between Heaven and the Abyss suffering both of Satan's evils and God's wrath. The scenario starts with Christ's Second Coming with which the wails and catastrophes of God's wrath start to pour on the earth and its people, and ends

with the Great War, the Battle of Armageddon, which is finally resolved with the victory of God's angels over Satan and his followers. Cities will be destroyed and others will be erected like the collapse of the great city of Babylon, the mother of prostitutes, and the erection of New Jerusalem, the bride of Jesus Christ. A few chosen people, who are the 144000 from all the tribes of Israel, will be sealed in their foreheads and consequently saved at the end of the world. Some other people will receive the mark of the Beast of Satan to be saved on the earth during the Beast's reign. Finally, the story ends with God's creation of His new world and kingdom, New Jerusalem, where He and Jesus Christ along with the chosen live in eternal bliss. So, substantially, the apocalyptic scenario is based on the total destruction of the current corrupt world and the creation of a better new one. The total destruction of the earth and perish of the sinful human beings seem necessary to create the Kingdom of God. The end of the apocalyptic story makes the narration of God's wrath, punishment and destruction of the earth, for which most of the apocalyptic scenario is dedicated and in which the tone of destruction overshadows the tone of creation, appear as a creative act and the only way of salvation.

Wilde and Chekhov find in the text of the Apocalypse of Saint John a source of inspiration and ready apocalyptic images and characters that can be adapted to serve their ultimate conception of their apocalyptic reality and vision of the end they expect. Although both of them use the apocalyptic images and allusions in their texts, they deal with this imagery in two distinctively different ways. While the Biblical story of the end of the world constitutes the core of Wilde's *Salome*, around which all the other events of the play are woven, it occupies just a part of Chekhov's *The Sea Gull*, after which the play focuses more on its repercussions. In other words, Wilde in his play *Salome* borrows the apocalyptic images and characters, and the story of the end of time from the Apocalypse of Saint John in a direct way depending on intertextuality as to express his dismay of the coming era that will be full of violence, and warn his readers or audience against it. Chekhov in his play *The Sea Gull* indirectly adapts the apocalyptic images to reveal the deadly consequences of having an apocalyptic imagination, and suggests a way to survive.

In his play *Salome*, Oscar Wilde creates the kingdom of Herod that is similar to his contemporary world that is full of vice, bloodshed, evil characters and destruction. He introduces to this kingdom the character of Jokanaan who dramatically functions as a Saint John figure. As Saint John's prophecy introduces a scenario of the end of the world which brings to an end the undergoing corruption of the world and creates the Kingdom of God on earth, Jokanaan's prophecy has a similar function in the play foreseeing the approach of "the day" when the kingdom of Herod will witness the Advent of Jesus Christ and the demise of evil characters. At the end, the prophecy's inability to convince and be received by the other characters of the play uncovers a lack of communication between the holy man, Jokanaan, and them, as well as the purpose of employing these apocalyptic images in the kingdom of Herod.

Jokanaan is introduced by some soldiers and guards of Herod's palace as a prophet who is imprisoned in a cistern by king Herod, fearing his apocalyptic speeches and prophecies. Later, his voice is heard by the beautiful princess Salome, the stepdaughter of Herod, who insists to see him ignoring Herod's orders to prevent anyone from meeting Jokanaan. As soon as she sees him, she falls in love with him, even though he always speaks terrible things about her and her mother, Herodias. He considers her the daughter of an incestuous marriage, because Herod, after killing his brother, the previous king and real father of Salome, and taking the throne from him, marries his brother's wife, Herodias. Salome becomes so fascinated by Jokanaan, and asks him for a kiss, but Jokanaan never

accepts such a demand. In fact, he rejects and dismisses her many times, expressing explicitly his feeling of hatred towards her because he considers her an evil character, and deems himself "the chosen" by the Lord. Consequently, her stepfather, Herod, who desires to possess her and cannot keep his eyes away from her, asks her to dance naked and promises her anything she wants in return. She accepts his offer and performs the dance of the seven veils, after which she surprises everyone with her demand that Jokanaan should be beheaded. The play ends with his head on a silver plate held by Salome who kisses him on the mouth, and is immediately killed afterwards under the shields of the soldiers, upon orders of Herod himself.

Throughout the play, the story is interrupted by the prophecy of Jokanaan whose voice represents the Biblical voice through which he loudly articulates his ideas and feelings of hatred, and prophesizes what is to come. His predictive speeches are a clear manifestation of the employment of the prevalent religious ideology of the end of the world of the Apocalypse and its images to the point that some speeches are almost literally copied from the verses of the Apocalypse. His prognostication speaks of the savior who will follow him, and the approaching of, what he calls, "the day." He also attacks the three royal characters, Herod, Herodias, and Salome by connecting them to the apocalyptic character and story of Babylon, uniting all of them in one evil entity and prophesizing Salome's severe punishment.

As in Saint John's prophecy, Jokanaan's predictive speeches are initiated with Christ's Second Coming which he calls "the day" and becomes a recurrent image in the play as Jokanaan keeps mentioning, alluding to, and depicting "the day" from the very beginning of his speeches till the end. This recurrent image can be seen in these speeches by Jokanaan, "After me shall come another mightier than I" (532), and "The Lord hath come. The son of man hath come" (534). "The Lord" and "the son of man" are used in the Apocalypse to refer to Jesus Christ (*King James Version*, Rev. 1.13). The similarity cannot be missed between Jokanaan's previous speeches and the following Saint John's verses, "Behold, he [Jesus Christ] cometh" (Rev. 1.7), or "Behold, I [Jesus Christ] come quickly" (Rev. 22.12). To assure the approach of "the day" when Christ's Second Coming will take place, Jokanaan repeats his warnings many times; "The eyes of the blind shall see the day" (532); "Lo! The time is come! ... The day of which I spoke" (541); "So the day is come, the day of the Lord" (543). After that, almost at the end of his speeches, Jokanaan depicts what is going to happen in "the day" about which he has been prophesizing since the beginning of the play. The images of what will happen are almost literally copied from the Apocalypse emphasizing the collapse of the cosmos: "In that day the sun shall become black like the sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become like blood" (545). Wilde's close borrowing is clearly evident in Jokanaan's previous depiction and this verse by Saint John, "the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood" (Rev. 6.12). Similarly, it cannot be missed in the image of the stars in Jokanaan's depiction, "and the stars of the heavens shall fall upon the earth like ripe figs that fall from the fig-tree" (545), and Saint John's depiction, "And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind" (Rev. 6.13).

Jokanaan's divination does not only depict the approach of "the day" when the destruction of the world will take place, but also the fears of humans and living creatures of that day which, effectively, makes Christ's Second Coming appear as a source of terror rather than salvation. Wilde uses evocative images of fear and hiding inspired by the Apocalypse, but with different characters and places, that include kings and mythical Greek characters. In Jokanaan's prophecy, the dread of the kings of the earth, "the kings of

the earth shall be afraid" (545) is the echo of this verse, "And the kings of the earth ... hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains" (Rev. 6.15). In addition to the kings, Jokanaan's prophecy depicts mythical creatures hiding themselves from the catastrophes that will mark the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Jokanaan says, "The son of man hath come. The centaurs have hidden themselves in the rivers and the sirens have left the rivers, and are lying beneath the leaves of the forest" (534). The use of sirens which are fabled creatures, half-women and half-birds, and centaurs which are fabled monsters, half-men and half-horses, is to exaggerate the state of panic. In general, the state of trepidation and panic that is depicted in Jokanaan's prognostication can be clearly found in the following Saint John's verses:

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (capitalization as in the original text) (Rev. 6.15-17)

Consequently, hiding whether under the mountains, rocks, or beneath the leaves and escaping from or to the rivers are the same depiction of the state of hysterical terror that is felt towards the end of the world, and which, however, echoes the widespread fears of the late nineteenth century people. These images of exaggerated chaos emphasize the idea that although the final peace is promised to be achieved for God's people, this promise does not actually cancel the process of demolishing the world. The wars that will be waged in the name of God according to the Book of Revelation including sever punishments, bloodshed, woes, tribulation, and catastrophes, that are feared by people, making "the day" that Jokanaan depicts appear as a day of annihilation rather than a day of salvation.

Adhering to the Biblical eschatological canon, the prophecy of Doomsday cannot be fulfilled without the existence of evil characters like Babylon, the mother of prostitutes. Likewise, in the kingdom of Herod, the three characters Herod, Herodias, and Salome are connected and related to the story of Babylon so that they dramatically function as one evil entity that should be challenged by the holy man, Jokanaan. Accordingly, Jokanaan attacks and portrays the three characters as sinful ones who commit abominations and will meet a horrible end similar to that of Babylon. So, the stress on the negative aspects of the apocalyptic story of the end of the world continues in Jokanaan's predictive speeches and becomes stronger when the images of "the day" are accompanied with images of vengeance, and allusions to the apocalyptic Biblical story of Babylon.

In the Apocalypse, Babylon is an apocalyptic woman who is hated and punished severely by God. She represents a famous city known for its richness and arts. This city is personified as a woman who is bad, attractive, arrogant, seductive and rich. Her richness is featured in the beauty of her visual appearance with the gold which she wears, and the golden cup which she holds in her hand (Rev. 17.4). With her beauty she seduces the kings and workers to come and commit adultery with her (Rev. 17.2). Therefore, she is considered a great prostitute, or "the mother of harlots" (Rev. 17.5). Consequently, God hates and punishes her with "so much torment and sorrow" (Rev. 18.7). God's hatred of her is asserted in the way He doubles her punishment asking her kings to make her naked, burn and eat her body, and His angel to pick up a gigantic boulder and "cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all" (Rev. 18.21). At the end, the city collapses and turns into ruins for which God's saints rejoice in Heaven and feel happy after Babylon's death and abyss.

In the predictive speeches of Jokanaan, some of the images of God's wrath against the city of Babylon are employed to express Jokanaan's hatred of Herod, Herodias and Salome, and foretell their future. For instance, Jokanaan uses the same image which is used to describe Babylon's obscenity, "having a golden cup in her hand full of abomination and filthiness of her fornication" (Rev. 17.4), to describe Herod's obscenity, evil and crimes: "Where is he whose cup of abomination is now full?" (536). Like Herod, Herodias is related to the story of Babylon. In Jokanaan's repeated callings and descriptions, Herodias appears as a harlot whose sin and lack of repentance correspond to those of Babylon. As Babylon "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication" (Rev. 17.2), Herodias is depicted as a harlot who gives herself to men and commits fornication with the captains of Assyria and young men of Egypt (536). Her sins are exaggerated in the same way in which Babylon's sins are exaggerated to stress her dangerous influence on others and her ability to sway people. Saint John condenses Babylon's accumulated sins in these two verses: "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev. 18.3), and "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities" (Rev. 18.5). Similarly, Herodias and her iniquities are depicted by Jokanaan saying, "Thy mother hath filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sins that come up to the ears of God" (537).

The same applies to Salome who, as Herod and Herodias, is connected to the story of Babylon. Without knowing her personally before, Jokanaan prejudices and connects Salome to Babylon and her mother Herodias through heredity, making evil and immorality like any physical characteristic that can be passed on genetically from one generation to another. Constantly, he describes Salome as the "daughter of Babylon" (537), "daughter of adultery" (539), "the wanton! The harlot!" (544). Obviously, he considers her to be, as her mother, a source of evil, through which he affirms his faith in or allegiance not only to the Biblical apocalyptic scenario of the end, but also to other religious and cultural beliefs considering Salome an evil character. Moreover, as in the Apocalypse, the exaggerated images of the involvement in the degenerate deeds precede and account for God's later severe punishments of Babylon, the exaggerated images of immorality of both Herodias and Salome work as preliminary causes for the later severe punishment that is meant to be given to Salome. Jokanaan says, "Let there come against her [Salome] a multitude of men" (544). This is similar to Babylon's punishment of how the multitudes and nations (represented in the waters where Babylon sits), and the seven kings (represented in the seven heads of the beast which Babylon rides) will hate, come against, and destroy her (Rev. 17.15-16). So, according to Jokanaan's prophecy, the end of Salome will be horrible, and like Babylon, her body will be abused, which at the end appears to be the only fulfilled prophecy. Salome is crushed beneath their shields like Babylon's body which is pierced and burned and her flesh is eaten by the beast and the nations on which she sits.

The prophecy of Jokanaan comes to end the abominations and corruption of the evil characters in the kingdom of Herod, prophesizing the Advent of Jesus Christ, which he calls "the day" and concentrates on the negative aspects of the Biblical end describing the fears, sins, and sever punishments without ending his divination with the utopian world that is promised by God after the total destruction of the earth in the Apocalypse. However, comparing the images that Jokanaan draws of himself, Salome and the world with their images as they appear in the eyes of the other characters, makes the readers and audience feel a gap between Jokanaan's depiction and the other characters' understanding of the world they live in and the characters they deal with. This contradiction makes the world



and its final fate that Jokanaan introduces and attacks in his apocalyptic speeches appear different, and even unrealistic, from the world which is depicted in the comments and dialogues of the other characters in the play.

In *Salome*, Jokanaan delivers his religious prophecies to characters that belong to different religions. Some soldiers are Jews and some others do not even believe in God, like The Nubian and The Cappadocian. Although Jokanaan delivers his apocalyptic vision and warns them against the coming horrible day, other characters are deaf to his cries. The irony is that while he tries to warn them, most of them consider him incomprehensible, or crazy. The problem is in his usage of one specific scenario of the end of time, the one that is suggested by Saint John in Revelation, to communicate his apocalyptic vision to both monotheistic and polytheistic people. So, the Biblical scenario of the end appears invalid and incomprehensible to them. For instance, the Second Soldier says, "he is always saying ridiculous things" (533). The First Soldier answers Salome who asks about what Jokanaan is saying, "We can never tell, sometimes he says terrible things; but it is impossible to understand what he says" (533). Jokanaan's depiction of Salome as a Biblical character of evil concentrated in women comes against her image as a victim of the unrequited love she suffers towards him. Moreover, the image of Salome in the eyes of The Young Syrian contrasts with that of Jokanaan. For The Young Syrian, "she is like a dove" or "silver flower" (534). The story itself makes her appear as a victim and victimizer sometimes which effectively makes readers or audience sympathize with her and do not consider her the only one to blame. This sympathy is strengthened because of the arrogant way Jokanaan deals with her considering himself "the chosen." He says to her, "Back! Daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the Lord" (537). This manner makes readers or audience also doubt that Jokanaan is not only a victim, but also a victimizer, especially in his constant refusal and disgust that he expresses towards her. This makes him, as Salome, a participant in their final collapse.

Consequently, the use of contradictory images in the play makes the readers and audience doubt whether Wilde borrows all the apocalyptic images and draws all these analogies for a purpose other than to emphasize Saint John's apocalyptic story of the end of the world. The way Wilde employs these apocalyptic images shows that as there are people who start to feel the Biblical scenario of the end suggested by Saint John as invalid, at the end of the nineteenth century, others continue to find it the best scenario to describe their reality as Jokanaan. These contradictions also suggest that in his play, Wilde depicts the reality of his contemporary Europe, full of contradictions, struggles, bloodshed, and, of course, corruption, against which he attempts to warn his readers and audience. His apocalyptic and decadent style helps him craft the play's pessimistic end after which he leaves his readers and audience with no suggested solutions. The play ends with the head of the prophet on a silver plate in Salome's hands, who kisses his mouth, after which she is killed while Herod receives no physical punishment, but rather collapses spiritually, "I will not stay here ... Surely some terrible thing will befall ... put out the troches. I will not look at things, I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the troches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace, Herodias. I begin to be afraid" (553). So, except of the "eschatological anxiety" and the state of hysterical horror in Herod's speeches, Jokanaan's prophecy of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not fulfilled, and "the day" and its imminence, of which he keeps warning against never comes.

To conclude, Wilde expects an era of darkness, brutality and debauchery to come. His pessimism is intensified in his concentration on the destruction and vengeance more than the promised utopian world of the Bible as echoed in Jokanaan's speeches. This

concentration overshadows the feeling of a new era of a radical beginning that foretells a peaceful world. Based on this, we may claim that Wilde does not borrow apocalyptic images, characters, and almost literally verses from the Apocalypse to emphasize the Biblical scenario of the end of time, or assure the widespread rumors of the end of the world at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, Wilde's depiction of the apocalyptic reality with its contradictions is to warn his readers and audience against the coming era that will be full of violence and bloodshed leaving the final judgment, reckoning, and solutions to their imagination.

### III

Like Wilde, Chekhov in his play *The Sea Gull* conveys his vision of the present and the coming era, and warns his readers and audience against the apocalyptic reality they live in. In *The Sea Gull*, Chekhov depicts the tragedies, fears, and horrors of his time that are typical of the spirit and mood of the people not only in Russia, but also in the world. Like Wilde's kingdom of Herod, Chekhov creates the society of the lake which suffers corruption, poverty, decadence, antiquated theatrical forms, and stagnancy, and introduces to it the character of Treplyov who functions as an apocalyptic writer who senses the decadence of the world of the lake and its society. Moreover, his depiction of Treplyov character illustrates how the apocalyptic imagery may prove destructive to those who are obsessed with it. On the whole, Chekhov's use of apocalyptic imagery reveals that destruction is not necessarily a prerequisite for the creation of a better world. However, unlike Wilde who closely borrows verses from the Apocalypse, Chekhov's style of depicting the apocalyptic reality and future is indirect. He uses the technique of the play within a play to reveal the apocalypse that is felt in a rotten society.

In *The Sea Gull*, Treplyov, a playwright, is a melancholic character who fears the stagnancy and vulgarity of his contemporary life. He suffers the lack of attention, jealousy, unrequited love, the sense of nonentity and the vulgarity of the theater of his time. Prompted by the corruption he sees around him, he imagines an end, and expresses it in his new apocalyptic play through which he tries to expose the corrupt society, express his eschatological ideas, and spread his warnings of the coming horrible future, as well as invent new forms in writing. He interprets his rejection of the reality, and the necessity for a radical change in his play after which his sense of the end is increased gradually, and at the end of the play, he ends his own life. Like Treplyov, Nina, the young actress, is another character who has been living in the prison of her miseries for a long time. Though she suffers a lot from poverty, over protection by her father and stepmother, who control her life completely, and later the death of her child, she rebels against her miseries. Both Treplyov and Nina rebel against their miseries depending on the same Apocalypse-rooted idea of change, which usually makes the urge for destruction appear as a creative one. However, the two interpret the urge of destruction in a different way; while Treplyov wants to get rid of the old forms in writing and society radically and destroys his own life to create a better future, Nina destroys her utopian imagination of the world and creates a better life for her with real work and dedication. The wrong way of conducting this principle leads Treplyov to his own death, whereas Nina's revolutionary reactions lead her to her own survival.

Treplyov's apocalyptic play within a play, which is written and directed by him, is a monologue about the end of the world, performed by one character who is Nina, and attended by his mother Arkadina, a veteran actress, and the other characters of the play. Its time is revealed in Treplyov's welcoming speech, "rock us to sleep and let us dream of what shall be in the course of two hundred thousand years" (12). The place is not specified

exactly, but rather described as desolate, "barren," or a "stagnant marsh" (13). The play is both written and directed in an apocalyptic style.

In content, though with different details, the scenario of Treplyov's monologue is like the apocalyptic scenario of the Apocalypse, and a manifestation of the employment of the most important concept that the scenario of the end of time is based on, particularly that of the Apocalypse. The monologue begins with death and destruction, "Cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Frightful, frightful, frightful" (13). Life is extinguished, and living creatures are turned to dust, then the struggle with the devil begins reaching to a climax of the final battle, which is similar to Armageddon, after which the "soul of the world," embodied in Nina, is destined to defeat the devil. Thenceforth, the "soul of the world" and the "eternal matter" unite and a new harmonious world of everlasting peace, that is called the "Kingdom of Universal Will," ensues. However, until then "there is only horror, horror" (13). Treplyov's scenario and the Apocalypse are based on two main processes of destruction and creation; after total destruction of the old world, a new and beautiful one is created. The creation here is done only after the total destruction, as well as harmony and peace also come after struggles and wars. This concept is the basic idea on which the scenario of the end of the world of the Apocalypse is based and affects Treplyov's life as the concept extends to control, not only his theoretical ideas, but also his behavior which brings his final collapse.

Not only does Treplyov depend on the apocalyptic images of the end of the world in his written script, but also in the way he directs and introduces it to his proposed audience. He uses his eschatological imagination and wit to produce the apocalyptic images and scenes in a way that makes those who will come to see his play find themselves in an abyss expecting an imminent disaster. Before Treplyov's welcoming speech that introduces the play to be "in the course of two hundred thousand years," a sound effect which is implanted in the apocalyptic memory as a harbinger of destruction is used to announce the beginning, "a small horn is heard playing" (12). The same sound of the horn is the one with which every apocalyptic disaster of the seven trumpets of the Apocalypse opens. In this way, the proposed audience find themselves facing the same feeling of an impending apocalypse from the very beginning. Then, the curtain is raised on the scene of Nina wearing a white dress, and sitting on a rock, behind which there is a pale moon. Immediately, the image of Nina brings to mind the image of the apocalyptic woman, "the woman clothed with the sun," who looks like an angel, and is left alone in the desert, where no one can hear her shrieks (Rev. 12.1-17). Then, the apocalyptic images and prophecies start to be heard by Nina. While Nina is on stage, Treplyov's mother, Arkadina, finds herself in a very difficult situation sitting with the attendees, in a lower place face to face with the young and beautiful actress, towards whom she feels jealous. The mother tolerates neither this nor the pressure of watching the apocalyptic end of the world which she loves, enjoys and controls. She expresses her rejection and denial of the play through this comment: "This is something decadent" (13). The situation gets worse when Treplyov uses the stage effects of two red spots of light, and reeked sulfur proficently. In the theater, the place where the audience sits is usually in a lower level. Treplyov intends at a certain time of the play to use the theatrical effects of lights and sulfur, which he has checked before starting the play. He wants to release the sulfur into the direction of the audience where his mother and her boyfriend, and the whole corrupt society are sitting. He wants Arkadina to feel as if she is burning and suffocating in the lake of sulfur, exactly as the devil and his beasts and armies in the Apocalypse are burned after the collapse of the old world. He considers her a sinful woman living in "the abyss of crime" (12), and the

reason behind his and the other characters' sufferings and collapse. Therefore, he is going to torture her very soul by revealing the destruction of the world she loves, and punish her afterwards in the abyss which he creates through stage effects and apocalyptic images (12). She has known that very well before the beginning of the play. Reciting from *Hamlet*, she says to him before the beginning, "My son! Thou turn'st my eye into my very soul. And there I see such black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct!" (12). Then, Arkadina succeeds finally to stop the play and apocalyptic monologue with her laugh and sarcastic comment considering what she has just seen unreal. She says, "it's a stage effect" (14). Treplyov, in return, considers his mother's intervention a serious attempt to destroy his play and, thereby, the world he wants to create. As a reaction, he tears the script of the play.

Dramatically speaking, Treplyov's play fails to achieve its objectives in warning the audience of the anticipated frightful future of such a miserable society and the degenerative life they are living, exactly like Jokanaan's speeches. The irony is that no one of the audience of the play with in a play understands his play, his ideas, or the apocalyptic scenario that is full of sufferings, horrors, shrieks of pain, and death. Obviously, his means of change, that he yearns to achieve by radically eradicating the old forms with new ones, has also failed his aim of awakening his people. His huge fault is that he thinks that the revolution can be achieved by annihilating the old forms and world through total destruction, anarchic actions which bring nothing but horrors, and sufferings. He does not realize that he is so dependent on images, symbols, and the apocalyptic imaginary world where his soul is trapped forever. His inability to endure his failure is manifested in his reaction when he tears the papers of the play, and later on in killing an innocent seagull.

When the play is stopped unexpectedly by the sarcastic comments about decadence by his mother Arkadina, Treplyov is devastated. His play fails to pass his required message. The society he aims to change remains unaffected. Moreover, His beloved Nina falls in love with the other writer, Trigory. Treplyov's miseries exacerbate and he kills an innocent seagull. Killing the seagull is another attempt of Treplyov to draw attention, and rebel against his miseries, in order to create a change out of the process of killing. Thinking that such attempt of killing and destroying will create new reactions, at least in the heart and mind of his beloved, Treplyov throws the dead seagull at Nina's feet (23). However, what worsens the situation is that, for the second time, he fails to change anything because Nina finds it very difficult to understand the reasons behind killing the seagull, considering it just another symbol of the incomprehensible language and images that Treplyov speaks of recently (24). The miseries and difficult situations go on and get harder when Nina returns to the lake after her marriage to Trigory. This is especially felt after Treplyov's last conversation with Nina through which he discovers that she becomes an independent woman and refuses and leaves him again. Consequently, he commits suicide. By killing himself, he thinks that a new situation will be created if at least some people care about his death. On the one hand, he thinks his death may bring a sort of change into the stagnant "souls" and minds of the people around him. On the other, he expresses his final hopelessness, spiritual collapse, and inability to find other solutions to handle his reality. However, as in his two previous attempts to create a better situation out of killing and destroying, he fails. Indifferently, the people learn of his death. His death changes nothing in his society. It is a real irony when people become indifferent to the death of a human being. As a result, his death shows that Treplyov is so stuck in his eschatological imagination that causes his own perish at the end, turning him from a revolutionary character into a rebellious one. The main theme in the play seems to be a

very serious question: Is it necessary to kill in order to change reality? Or is it necessary to eradicate the whole world in order to create a new peaceful one?

Nina's character is the best answer to such questions. Although, she suffers a lot, unlike Treplyov, she endures her sufferings, and revolts against her reality by real work. She destroys the utopian world in which she has been living, she kills her old mentality and accommodates to the new reality she faces. She chooses to be a "real" actress and works hard in her life. If the main concept of the Apocalypse and Trplyove's play works in life, then it is absolutely not in killing physically (not by bloodshed) and murder, like killing an innocent seagull, but rather in killing and destroying the old mentality and rotten spirit. For Chekhov, the hard reality can be overcome by real work and endurance. Changing reality by real work is the real revolution and true revolution can be achieved only by changing the decadent "spirit of the world," stopping self-corruption, and changing all invalid forms. Real work along with endurance are the only way to survive the apocalyptic reality; they are the first step towards creating a new better world.

So, Chekhov writes his play *The Sea Gull* to reflect the tragedy of man in the modern world, and the choices that can be taken to overcome all struggles and sufferings. On the surface, it depicts the stagnant society, but hides inside a hidden movement towards great changes. He uses apocalyptic images and ideas as well as nihilistic ones in order not to say that it is the end of the world, as the religious apocalyptic scenario indicates, but rather to show the intolerable reality that needs to be changed. If such sufferings like blackness, sadness, depression, unfulfilled dreams, poverty, make people think that there should be an end, then let the ending process be done by real labor and work, by endurance and constant attempts to depict and change the decadent reality into a better future.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the two playwrights, Wilde and Chekhov, find the Apocalypse of Saint John a source of inspiration to produce their own versions of the apocalypse, confirming that the apocalypse by itself becomes an ideology that one can resort to at a period of time marked with wars, catastrophes, and intolerable miseries. While Wilde borrows and employs the apocalyptic images in a direct or overt way, Chekhov borrows and employs them indirectly. Wilde's main literary device is intertextuality including too many allusions and direct references, but Chekhov's main literary device is the play within a play technique, through which both dramatists, however, unmask the apocalyptic reality and warn the readers and audience against the coming horrible future. It is obvious when the prophet, Jokanaan, is beheaded, a woman like Salome is changed into a monster and smashed under the shields of soldiers, the tyrant king, Herod, lives and controls the fate of others, the real talented writer, Treplyov, commits suicide, and the innocent seagull that represents life is killed a dark period is foreseen and predicted hundreds of years before, that one should consider today and think about for a moment. So, both of them are pessimistic concerning the coming era which they expect to be a grisly one, characterized by evil and gory practices. This suggests that some writers of fin de siècle had anticipated the coming chaos, bloodshed, brutality, and wars long before they actually started to appear in the twentieth century. As a result, although Wilde and Chekhov differ in style, they are similar in the ultimate purpose of employing the apocalyptic images. They borrow apocalyptic images of the Apocalypse not to emphasize the eschatological vision of the end of the world but rather the disasters they witness. Their versions of the apocalypse depict humanity on the threshold of an abyss when, for them, to quote Kermode's words, "the end is immanent rather than imminent" (101).

Finally, the variety in giving interpretations of, and producing fictions about the end, whether they mean the end of the world or the old order of life and human relations, show the differences in the ways people interpret their sense of the end according to their own readings of world events, time, experience and history, and how their religious ideologies

of the end of time affect their way of thinking and behavior. Their apocalyptic visions of the end reflect the kind of the apocalypse they both live in and expect.

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