

Title : Clair de lune ... sur l'eau: Maupassant and Chekhov's *Seagull*
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Two important motifs in Chekhov's work are moonlight and water, present in an example given in a letter to his brother Aleksandr of how to write. Treplev repeats this description in *The Seagull* when talking about Trigorin: У него на плотине блестит горлышко разбитой бутылки и чернеет тень от мельничного колеса - вот и лунная ночь готова.... The image, which at first seems a simple evocation of visual beauty, in fact underlines the importance of perception: the broken bottle is a piece of garbage and had doubtless contained vodka. Chekhov's images can be read in different ways.

In *The Seagull* Arkadina reads from a passage from Maupassant's *Sur l'eau*. This journal of a voyage Maupassant made on his yacht contains a section on the influence of the moon on humans, invoking a kind of madness, with quotations from various poets. Of particular interest is a quotation from Leconte de Lisle's poem *Les Hurleurs*:

*Monde muet, marqué d'un signe de colère,
Débris d'un globe mort au hasard dispersé,
Elle laissait tomber de son orbe glacé
Un reflet sépulcral sur l'océan polaire.*

Maupassant's evocation of a dead star seems a likely source for Treplev's playlet. The present rising of the *globe mort* (or *vieil astre défunt*, as Maupassant calls it), over the lake is montaged with his invocation of a future dead earth. That is to say, the moon, which we find so beautiful, is a reminder of the earth as it will be eons from now. Montaging different time perspectives is a key device in Chekhov's texts. The combination of the images of moonlight and water thus contains an important subtext – the ultimate fate of the earth. Such perceptual ambiguity – beauty/ugliness - is of the essence of Chekhov's imagery.