The Cherry Orchard Study Guide

The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov

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Introduction

Anton Chekhov wrote *The Cherry Orchard* during the last year of his life. Though Chekhov intended the play to be a comedy, when it was first produced by the Moscow Art Theater on January 17, 1904, producer Konstantin Stanislavsky insisted it should be played as a tragedy. Chekhov fought against this portrayal, but to this day, most productions emphasize the tragic elements of the piece.

The Cherry Orchard is a play about the passing of an era. Some critics have said that it is a play about nothing more than a wealthy family that loses its beloved cherry orchard and estate to a man of the rising middle class. The action is quiet in this tragicomedy. Chekhov's family had lost its home to repossession in 1876, and this may have been an inspiration for the story. He also had inspiration for some of the characters while staying at the estate owned by Stanislavsky's mother in 1902.

The Cherry Orchard portrays the social climate of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, when the aristocrats and land-owning gentry were losing their wealth and revealed themselves to be incapable of coping with their change in status. Many Socialist Soviet critics in Russia after the Revolution of 1917 tried to interpret this as an indictment of Russian society at the turn of the century; however, it is unlikely that Chekhov meant this play as an attack on the society of which he was so much a part. Though intended as a comedy, the tragedy of the situation in which Mrs. Ranevsky and her family find themselves is derived primarily from their inability to adapt to their new social and personal responsibilities. No longer able to live on the labor provided by the serfs (slaves) who worked the land, many wealthy landowners, like Mrs. Ranevsky in *The Cherry Orchard*, lost their fortunes and their estates.

Author Biography

Anton Chekhov was born in Taganrog, Russia, on January 16, 1860. His grandfather had been a serf who had been able to earn enough to buy his freedom and purchase a small home. In 1876, however, Chekhov's father, a grocer, was forced to move the family to Moscow because of their many debts and the repossession of their home. Chekhov remained behind to finish his studies. His years in school at Taganrog were plagued by poverty, and he often agreed to complete other students' school work for payment in order to support himself.

In 1880 Chekhov moved to Moscow and entered medical school at the University of Moscow, He graduated with an M.D. in 1884. Chekhov had written hundreds of short stories by the time of his graduation, but he did not consider writing as a career until he moved to St. Petersburg in 1885 and became friends with A. S. Suvorin, editor of the journal *Novoe Vremja*. By 1888 Chekhov was practicing medicine only during epidemics, focusing instead on his writing.

Though his one-act plays *The Boor* and *The Marriage Proposal* were successful, his first full-length plays *Ivanov* and *The Wood Demon* were great disappointments. He did not write another full-length play until *The Seagull* in 1896. Though *The Seagull* failed in its first production due to its intense psychological realism (very unlike the fashion of the time), the Moscow Art Theater's production in 1898, which was staged under the supervision of noted producer and actor Konslantin Stanislavsky, was a great success.

This success was followed by *Uncle Vanya* in 1899, *The Three Sisters* in 1901, and ultimately *The Cherry Orchard* in 1904. Chekhov and Stanislavsky argued whether *The Cherry Orchard* was a comedy, as Chekhov maintained, or a tragedy, as Stanislavsky claimed. The play was finally produced as interpreted by Stanislavsky, and Chekhov was at first absent from the premiere on January 17, 1904, even though his wife Olga Knipper (whom he married in 1901) was an actress in the Moscow Art Theater and a part of the production. He was finally persuaded to attend the premiere just after the second act.

Suffering from tuberculosis during the last years of his life, Chekhov spent much time abroad in European health resorts and was often separated from his wife and family. A few months after attending the premiere of his final play, he died in a Black Forest spa in July, 1904.

Plot Summary

Act One

The Cherry Orchard opens in the nursery of Lyuba Andreyevna Ranevsky's estate. Although it is only about 2:00 A.M., it is close to daybreak, for it is May, when northern Russian days are long and the sun rises very early. Lopakhin, a businessman, and Dunyasha, a maid, anticipate the arrival of Mrs. Ranevsky, who is returning home from a self-imposed, five-year exile with her daughter, Anya, and her governess, Charlotta Ivanovna. Lopakhin speaks of his peasant background and his admiration for Mrs. Ranevsky; then the pair is briefly joined by the bumbling clerk, Yepikhodov, nicknamed "Twenty-two Calamities."

After arriving, the travelers enter, preceded by Firs, a manservant. They are soon joined by Varya, Lyuba's adopted daughter, Leonid Gayev, Lyuba's brother, Simeonov-Pishchik, a neighboring landowner, and Lopakhin and Dunyasha.

The reunion is very tearful. Mrs. Ranevsky sweeps about the room, overcome with joy. The family members all display great emotion, weeping uncontrollably, not just over each other, but over die cherry orchard and house, even the nursery and its furniture.

Lyuba is a generous but impractical sentimentalist. She tears up two telegrams from France without reading them, because, as she says, "I've finished with Paris." Yet she daydreams of her happy youth, and imagines, at one point, that she sees her mother wandering through the cherry orchard. Gayev, as sentimental as his sister, has a screw or two loose; he carries on a perpetual game of mental billiards and weeps fondly over the nursery's bookcase. Pishchik, also eccentric, seems less senile than mad. When Mrs. Ranevsky starts to take some medicine, he grabs her pills and swallows the lot on impulse. Firs, the old family retainer is simply feeble. He constantly trails off his mental path into inarticulate muttering.

As the dialogue's comic shuffle continues, unpleasant truths intrude. Mrs. Ranevsky is broke, and in her absence, Varya has not made interest payments on the mortgage. The estate is to go on the auction block in August. Lopakhin proposes a practical solution. He advises Lyuba to divide the estate into lots and lease them out for vacation cottages, even though that will mean sacrificing the house and orchard. Gayev, who considers Lopakhin an upstart peasant, is incensed and dismissive, calling the businessman's proposal "utter nonsense." He, Lyuba, and Firs simply extol the virtues of the orchard, as impractical as it has become.

Pishchik, too, is facing the loss of his estate through his failure to pay mortgage interest. He tries to get a loan from Mrs. Ranevsky. Rebuffed, he consoles himself with the idea that "something's bound to turn up." The arrival of the "eternal student" Peter Trofimov, who has been expelled from a university for his radical politics, prompts a new round of

weeping. The forgetful Pishchik repeats his request. Mrs. Ranevsky tells Gayev to lend him the money, but Gayev refuses.

After Mrs. Ranevsky goes off, Gayev, Varya, and Anya discuss possible solutions to her financial woes. Gayev doubts that their great-aunt, the Countess, will help because Lyuba had offended her relative by marrying beneath herself, but he buoys his nieces' hopes by promising to borrow money on his own while encouraging Lyuba to ask Lopakhin for help. Then, completely exhausted, all the characters save Peter Trofimov leave the room and go to bed.

Act Two

The scene shifts to outside a chapel near the orchard. Sunset approaches. Charlotta, Yasha (who is Firs's ambitious grandson), and Dunyasha sit on a bench. Nearby, Yepikhodov plays a guitar. After Charlotta ponders her heritage, Yepikhodov stops playing to remark on fate and his uncertainty about shooting himself. When Charlotta and the clerk leave, Dunyasha confesses her love for Yasha, but she is overcome by the smoke of his cigar and also leaves the scene.

Mrs. Ranevsky, Gayev, and Lopakhin enter. Lyuba, distraught by her admitted extravagant lifestyle, drops her purse, scattering gold coins on the ground. Yasha picks them up while she voices regrets about wasting money on lunch. Lopakhin again presses her to agree to his plan, but she finds his proposal "vulgar," making him momentarily furious. She speaks of the death of her son and her affair with the scoundrel who left her destitute, then tries to convince Lopakhin to marry Varya.

Firs enters with Gayev's overcoat. He is followed by Trofimov, Anya, and Varya. Talking with Lopakhin, Peter voices his disgust for the Russian intelligentsia, while Lopakhin, the selfmade man, speaks of his great success at making money.

As the sun sets and the air grow still, they hear the melancholic sound of a breaking string. For a moment, they try to identify its source, but they are interrupted by a drifter asking for a handout. Lyuba, foolishly generous, gives him one of her gold coins.

After the rest leave for dinner, Anya and Peter talk. He identifies the orchard with the old, decadent Russia, and tells Anya that she must abandon it to find true happiness. Then, as they are called by Varya, the pair exits towards the river to be alone.

Act Three

It is night, the day of the auction, during a party at Mrs. Ranevsky's estate. Couples enter the drawing room from the ballroom, where a band plays and guests dance. They await the return of Gayev, who, with money borrowed from the Countess, had gone to town to try to save the estate.

A forced gaiety keeps the mood superficially buoyant. Pishchik's complaints about his debts are blunted by Charlotta's clever ventriloquism and magic tricks, but Mrs. Ranevsky's apprehension surfaces in her confession that she intends to return to the wretch of a man who had fleeced and deserted her. Later, Mrs. Ranevsky and Peter get into an argument over the heart versus the head. Trofimov claims that he is beyond love for Anya. Lyuba ridicules him for being a pseudo-intellectual. Angry, Peter storms from the room, promptly falling down a flight of stairs.

A spreading rumor of the estate's sale momentarily upsets Mrs. Ranevsky, but she is soon dancing with Pishchik, who once more presses her for a loan. Thereafter, Yepikhodov, scorned by Dunyasha, gets into an argument with Varya, who attempts to beat him with a billiard cue but accidentally hits the arriving Lopakhin instead. However, the blow does nothing to dampen his spirits, for it is he who has bought the estate. Lopakhin gives a long, self-congratulatory and triumphant speech, leaving Mrs. Ranevsky in tears with only Anya to console her.

Act Four

It is now October, and the setting is again the nursery. The room is bare except for some odd furniture. In the distance, an axe is heard; a woodsman has begun felling the cherry trees in the orchard.

The family members, getting ready to depart, have deposited their luggage near the front door. Lopakhin encourages everybody to share some champagne, but his enthusiasm only earns him bitter remarks from Trofimov. Anya enters, questioning whether the ailing Firs has been taken to the hospital. No one seems quite sure. Dunyasha then professes her love for the disdainful Yasha, who plans to return to Paris with Mrs, Ranevsky. Dunyasha will ultimately marry Yepikhodov instead.

Mrs. Ranevsky enters with Gayev, Anya, and Charlotta. She gives a tearful goodbye to the house, sadly reconciled to her fate. Gayev is more optimistic. He has secured a job in a bank. Pishchik, too, has had some luck; he has managed to escape rum through leasing some clay-rich property. Concerned about Varya, Mrs. Ranevsky pushes Lopakhin to propose to her step-daughter. The businessman seems willing enough, but when left alone with Varya, neither is able to broach the subject.

Near the end, after the others depart for the train station, Lyuba and Gayev embrace in a tearful farewell. They, too, leave, and for a moment the stage is bare; then Firs enters, forgotten and left behind. Dejected over his fate, he plops down on a sofa and lies motionless. The doleful sound of the breaking string is heard again, then, at the final curtain, only silence save the echoing axe.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

Charlotta, Yasha and Dunyasha are talking in a field and it's nearing sundown. Yepikhodov is nearby playing a guitar. Charlotta is bemoaning the fact that she has had a miserable childhood, and Yasha wants to leave and go abroad. Yepikhodov is brooding that he doesn't know whether to live or die so he carries a revolver with him at all times. Yepikhodov (who has already proposed to Dunyasha and is singing of his unrequited love for her) asks to speak with Dunyasha alone. She suggests he go inside to get her cape, and when he does so, she is left alone with Yasha. Yasha kisses her and she declares her love for him. The masters arrive and Yasha sends her away, as he doesn't want the others to know he has taken up dating her.

Lopakhin, Lyubov and Gayev enter. Lyubov is lamenting her financial situation even though they have just returned from a restaurant. Lopakhin implores her one more time to consider the cottage option to save the estate. It must be done now or the land will be auctioned. If she would only say yes, she would have all the money she would like. He's frustrated and starts to leave, but she asks him not to; when he is around is the only time when she doesn't feel a terrible weight over her head. She has squandered her fortune on deadbeat, alcoholic husbands and she has lost everything to pay their debts.

Trofimov, Anya and Varya enter. Lopakhin goads Trofimov as being almost fifty but still a student - a student of women, it would seem. He comes back at him and calls Lopakhin a predator. Varya interrupts the fight and asks that they change the subject. Trofimov launches into a monologue of the disparity between the intelligentsia and the working class. Lopakhin takes offense, as he works long hours every day and doesn't see much nobility in it.

A stranger approaches asking directions and if they might have any money. Lyubov gives him a gold coin and Varya is outraged. They have nothing left to eat, yet her stepmother is giving away gold. Lopakhin again reminds them all of the impending auction. They all leave except Anya and Tofimov, and she is concerned with losing their orchard and their garden, but he tells her that all of Russia is their garden. The country is vast and contains many things. Every leaf on every tree represents someone who has worked the land and when the leaves blow it is human beings speaking, saying that they toiled in order to create the idyll her family now enjoys. In order to live in the world, they must atone by suffering, by work...continual hard labor. She understands what he is saying and tells her to throw the keys to her house down the well and walk away. He passionately tells her that he has seen much, endured much, but he also feels the throb of happiness coming. A happier time is coming, and they may not live to see it, but others will.

Act 2 Analysis

The disparity between the wealthy and the working class in early 1900's Russia is evident. The estate workers have bleak pasts and futures that are not much brighter. The wealthy can't adjust their lifestyles even though the world is crashing around them. There are people literally waiting with axes to destroy the cherry orchard, the vestiges of their life. Yet there is some hope to bridge the gap as Lyubov gives her last gold coin to the stranger. She has such a good and generous spirit, and that will take her a long way no matter what her path will be now. Anya is coming around to Trofimov's way of thinking, that that there must be revolution and suffering in order to atone for the sins of the past and to create a more just Russia. His being a student and part of the thinking class has helped open her mind. Also, he lives most of the time in Moscow and sees firsthand the inequalities between the classes and can share those perspectives with her. It gives her more compassion for the plight of those people, and in turn, she will probably be the one who will be in the best position to help her mother adjust to difficult circumstances as they transition.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

This act takes place in the ballroom of the estate. Pishchik and Trofimov are discussing politics and Charlotta is trying to entertain others with card tricks. They are all waiting to hear the fate of the cherry orchard, for the auction was held that day. Lyubov is beside herself with anxiety. Tofimov tries to console her and tells her to be calm, look truth in the eye and be at peace.

What truth and what peace, she wants to know. He is too young to understand. He can look forward and nothing frightens him, and that's because life is still hidden from his young eyes. She begs him to understand her view, that she was born in that house. Her mother and father were happy here, and her grandfather. Her son drowned here. If they take this house, they will take her life.

She tells him that she has received another telegram from Paris that day from her current husband, who is sick and needs her. She feels she must go back to him, and while she knows that people don't understand her devotion to him, she loves him. He is a stone around her neck, maybe, but she cannot live without him. He tries to remind her that the man is a thief and a liar, but she tells him that when he is a bit older he will understand about love.

Finally, Lopakhin and Gayev return from the auction and it is revealed that Lopakhin was the highest bidder. He is now the owner of the estate. If only his father and grandfather could see him now. The boy they thought was so stupid now owns the cherry orchard - the very place where they could not even come into the kitchen. He drinks to the felling of the trees so he can build cottages and the grandchildren can have a new life. This is a happy day, why is there weeping?

Lyuobov is crying alone and Anya comes to her. It is true that the cherry orchard is sold, but she still has her good, pure spirit. They will go away from this place and plant a new orchard, a better orchard than this one. And joy will settle on her spirit like the sun at evening.

Act 3 Analysis

The lives of the wealthy in Russia are crumbling as symbolized by Lyubov's loss of her beloved cherry orchard. What can the world be coming to if a man with peasant blood can buy her home and her heritage? There is a new Russia coming, one with more equality for the working people, and that is what Lopakhin symbolizes. Lyubov is also pulled by the love she still feels for her no-account husband back in Paris. She is a romantic caught in a desperate time in history, and perhaps it's best that she'll be back in Paris for awhile. Her sensibilities have not prepared her for what must surely happen now in her home country, but her daughter, who has had the benefit of conversations

with Trofimov, a student, can help her mother see that they can build a new life. The daughter is wiser than the mother in this way. However, she, like Trofimov, is still young and has the enthusiasm afforded to young people. Lyubov has been hurt and deceived, suffered many losses and is still so very weary, but she has the courage born of a good heart to sustain her. True, she'll need to pull up her roots now just as her cherry trees are being destroyed, but she will plant again and will be happy once more.

Act 4

Act 4 Summary

It is moving day, and everyone is saying their goodbyes. Lopakhin is offering toasts to the former owners, but they don't partake of any. Trofimov will return to the university in Moscow. Lopakhin offers him some money, but he won't accept it as he doesn't need that to be happy. They think that their old servant Firs has been taken to the hospital, but no one seems to know for sure.

There is the sound of chopping, and Anya asks Lopakhin to silence the workers until her mother has left. Lyubov will return to Paris to take care of her husband, but Anya asks her to return soon to build a new life with her. Anya tells her that a new life is beginning and she is happy.

Gayev adds that they had all been ill with anxiety, but once the decision to sell and leave was made things seemed to have improved. Everything grew calm. Even Lyubov looks better, because she is now able to sleep at night again.

But now it is time to leave. Lyubov and Gayev are the last to exit. She studies the walls one last time and says goodbye to the beautiful orchard - her life, her youth, her happiness.

After they have all gone, Firs appears and realizes that he is alone, that they have forgotten him. Oh, well, life has passed once more. He doesn't have much strength left so he decides to lie down for just a little while.

Act 4 Analysis

The sale is complete and the transition is under way. Work has begun on destroying the orchard and Lopakhin is now the master of it all. Tromifov refuses his money because he considers himself to be above such needs. He is a purist in thought and philosophy and like many of the young idealists and scholars of the time, caught between the opportunities afforded the wealthy and the empathy for those who toil.

The revolution is about to begin in Russia as symbolized in this microcosm of aristocracy. Lyubov studies the house and remembers her parents there, remembers her childhood, and knows that after one more winter and spring it will exist no more. Two more seasons, and it will be as if they had never existed.

What does she owe them? Is it her fault that this happened? After all, she was never equipped to know about survival. Maybe all she can do is hold them in the rooms of her heart and continue living with as much dignity as possible. The old life is destroyed, the peasants are taking control, and the wealthy are dazed with the prospect of creating

new lives. The past is old and tired and forgotten just like the old servant, Firs, who realizes this and lies down to sleep.

Characters

Anya

See Anya Ranevsky

Charlotta

See Charlotta Ivanovna

Dunyasha (doon-YA-sha)

Dunyasha is the maid in the Ranevsky household who dreams of being an aristocratic lady. She parodies the ladies of the household, and compares herself to them. She must give up her dreams of marrying Yasha (Mrs. Ranevsky's manservant) when he returns to Paris with Mrs. Ranevsky, She agrees to marry Yepikhodov instead.

Firs (feers)

Firs is the Ranevsky family's faithful servant who, because of his loyalty to the family, chose to stay after the serfs were freed. Sickly and somewhat senile, he marks the play's most poignant moment when he is locked inside the estate and forgotten. He laments: "Life has slipped away as iflhaven'tlived "

Gayev

See Leonid (lay-oh-NEED) Gayev

Leonid (lay-oh-NEED) Gayev (GUY-ev)

Gayev is Mrs. Ranevsky's brother. He is an irresponsible, unkempt man who prefers to play or pretend to play billiards than to find a solution to his family's problems. He is addicted to fruit candies, and talks a great deal faults pointed out by his family several times in the play. Dreaming up several schemes to save the orchard, Guyev acts on none of them; instead he calls out billiard shots and believes someone will come forward to rescue the family. Like his sister, he imagines the cherry orchard as it was in his childhood, unable to accept that it will soon be sold.

Hiker

The Hiker is a sickly homeless man who begs Mrs. Ranevsky for money. That she is in financial ruin herself and gives the hiker a gold piece emphasizes Mrs. Ranevsky's generosity and her disregard for her own predicament.

Charlotta Ivanovna (ee-VAN-ov-na)

The governess to both Anya and Varya, Charlotta is a very thin woman whose magic tricks and uncertain parentage add comic elements to the play.

little cucumber

See Dunyasha

Lopakhin

See Yermolay (yer-mo-LYE) Lopakhin

Peter Trofimov (trow-FEE-mov)

Trofimov is a shabbily dressed "eternal student." He was a tutor for Mrs. Ranevsky's son, and the sight of him when she first returns to the cherry orchard brings back terrible memories of her son's death. She remarks that Trofimov has aged badly, which is a veiled reference to his time spent as an inmate in a labor camp for those found guilty of participating in subversive political activities. Trofimov's actions sometimes do not match his words. Remarking that he and Anya are "above love," he is criticized by Mrs. Ranevsky for his outspoken behavior. She ridicules his declaration, and as he storms out he falls down a flight of stairs. Chekhov tries to keep Trofimov from being too serious by injecting humor into both the dialogue and his actions. Though he can be outspoken and critical, he is tender and supportive of Anya. He is constantly emphasizing the value of work as the salvation of Russia, and convinces Anya that the whole of Russia is her orchard. Soviet critics after the Russian Revolution of 1917 latched onto the character of Trofimov as a literary hero who exemplifies the ideals of Socialism, often citing his speech describing the trees in the orchard as souls.

Pishchik

See Boris Simeonov-Pishchik

Post Office Clerk

The post office clerk appears as a guest at the ball.

Anya Ranevsky

Mrs. Ranevsky's daughter, Anya, dresses all in white to signify her purity and innocence. Although she loves her home and the orchard that surrounds it, she realizes that all of Russia is her orchard. She looks the future as an adventure. At seventeen, she is eager to go on with her life and to share it with Peter Trofimov, the eternal student. Anya is the opposite of her sister Varya, and is a youthful, sweet, energetic, young woman looking forward to the future. She attempts to get her aunt, the Countess, to help her family pay off the debt on the orchard, but is ready to face the future without wealth.

Lyuba Andreyevna Ranevsky

See Mrs. Ranevsky

Mrs. Ranevsky (ra-NEV-sky)

Mrs. Ranevsky is an aristocratic woman incapable of adapting to the changing social climate in Russia. When faced with the loss of her beloved orchard and estate, she is incapable of acting to save it. She is a kind and generous woman who is irresponsible when it comes to money and adult life. Though she knows that the orchard is up for auction in August, she continues to go out to lunch, throws a lavish party, and gives a gold piece to a homeless man. Her neighbor, Boris Simeonov-Pishchik, continues to borrow money from her, despite her desperate financial situation.

Having fled to Paris from Russia five years before to try to forget the deaths of her little boy and her husband, Mrs. Ranevsky has only succeeded in trading her problems at home for a new set of difficulties. She takes a villain for her lover, and is swindled out of most of her money and then is left by him for another woman. Once back in Russia, she receives telegrams from him begging her to return because he is ill. When the orchard and estate are lost to Lopakhin, she returns to her lover in Paris because she feels the need to take care of him.

Rather than living in the present, Mrs. Ranevsky pictures the orchard as it was in her childhood, with her mother walking through its aisles. She is crushed by the sale, but then freed from the worries associated with running such a large estate. Mrs. Ranevsky puts a face on the many wealthy landowners who lost their wealth and power in turn of the century Russia.

Varya Ranevsky

Varya Ranevsky is the adopted daughter of Mrs. Ranevsky. At twenty-four years of age, this daughter of a serf is allied with neither the aristocracy or the servants, but is in a world somewhere in between the two. She wears only black and is very dedicated to her work and to religion. She runs the cherry orchard to the best of her ability while her mother is gone, but is seen as a miser by the servants.

Varya is in love with Yermolay Lopakhin, a wealthy merchant who is more concerned with business than with her. She is heartbroken by his passivity, and by her family's inability to save their home. She openly criticizes her mother's generosity and irresponsibility when it comes to money, yet she has no solution to the problem.

Dreaming of entering a convent, by the end of the play Varya has taken a job as a housekeeper at a nearby estate. She is a severe woman who feels ill-at-ease without a task to attend to. She is unable to fight for what she wants Lopakhin and instead passively accepts her fate.

Boris Simeonov-Pishchik (seem-YOH-nov-PEE-shik)

Simeonov-Pishchik is a landowner who is constantly in debt and asking to borrow money. He expects fate to solve his financial problems, and eventually allows the English to mine his estate in order to pay off his debts. Though he pays Mrs. Ranevsky the money he owes her in the end, it is too late to save the orchard. He does not consider her financial situation when he borrows the money from her, and she is too generous to deny his request.

Stationmaster

The Stationmaster is a fun-loving guest at the ball who dances with the ladies.

Trofimov

See Peter Trofimov

Twenty-two Calamities

See Simon Yepikhodov

Varya

See Varya Ranevsky

Yasha

Yasha is Firs's grandson, but is eager to become more than a manservant. Referred to as a scoundrel by Varya, he plays with Dunyasha's emotions, and schemes to go back to Paris with Mrs. Ranevsky. He also ignores his mother every time she comes to see him, and leaves her waiting outside. He is a self-centered man who cares nothing for anyone but himself.

Yepikhodov

See Simon Yepikhodov

Simon Yepikhodov (yep-i-KHO-dov)

Yepikhodov is a financial clerk whose ineffectual management leads to the auction of the estate. Nicknamed Twenty-two Calamities, he is constantly plagued by problems (including squeaking boots) and crises. He is in love with the maid Dunyasha, who is in love with Mrs. Ranevsky's manservant Yasha. This love triangle provides some of the comic moments in The Cherry Orchard.

Yermolay (yer-mo-LYE) Lopakhin (lo-PA-chin)

Lopakhin is a wealthy businessman whose grandfather was once a serf on the Ranevsky estate. Though sometimes seen as a calculating opportunist, he loves the Ranevsky family and tries to persuade Mrs. Ranevsky (who helped him as a child) to cut down the orchard to clear land for building country vacation cottages for the rising middle class. He grows increasingly impatient with her as she refuses to see the solution he suggests and does nothing to save the estate. Lopakhin eventually buys the estate at the auction, and in a vulgar display during the ball, he rejoices in owning the estate his family was once forced to serve. Much is made of the fact that Varya loves Lopakhin and that the two should marry, but he is too consumed with making money to propose to her. Lopakhin represents the triumph of vulgarity and ignorance of the middle class over the traditions of nobility and elegance of Czarist Russia.

Themes

Apathy and Passivity

For Mrs. Ranevsky, her daughters, and her brother Leonid Gayev, apathy and passivity have become a way of life, as Mrs. Ranevsky's line "if only this heavy load could be lifted from my heart; if only I could forget my past!" reveals. Mrs. Ranevsky has given up trying to change her circumstances and is resigned to taking her life as it comes. She goes out to expensive lunches, buys a gift for Anya, lends her neighbor Pishchik money, and gives a gold piece to the homeless hiker in Act Two. Mrs. Ranevsky refuses to accept that she can change her circumstances by changing her behavior. She becomes passive and allows the auction to take place. Gayev, Anya, and Varya also become passive in the situation, and continue to believe that everything will work out. This apathy-combined with a fear of living below the standards to which they' ve become accustomed is what keeps the family from saving its orchard.

The family ignores Lopakhm's suggestion of breaking up the orchard into smaller plots for country cottages. Mrs. Ranevsky considers the suggestion vulgar, declaring that the orchard is famous for being the largest and most beautiful in Russia. She and her brother do almost nothing to avert the auction and remaining passive and hoping for a solution or a savior, such as their relative the Countess, seals their fate.

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Varya also remains passive, though she tries to save money where she can by feeding the servants only dried peas. It upsets her to stand by as her mother and uncle do nothing, but she is powerless to act without their support. Varya wishes to enter a convent but does not; she is even incapable of acting on her own behalf in this instance. Similarly, Varya's passivity when it comes to her love for Yermolay Lopakhin (and his passivity toward it as well) leads to their inability to commit to one another in marriage. Both repeatedly say they have no objections to marriage, but neither proposes it, because Varya is held by social constraints and Lopakhin by his obsession with business. Mrs. Ranevsky tells Lopakhin to propose to Varya, but he fails to comply, even while he tells Mrs. Ranevsky: "I";m ready even now… Let's settle it at once and get it over. I don't feel I'll ever propose to her without you here." When brought together, Varya and Lopakhin remain inactive, exchanging only small talk. Lopakhin is called away and the moment is lost. Their inability to act destroys any hope of marriage.

Appearances and Reality

Mrs, Ranevsky and her family appear to be a wealthy family living on their estate. They continue to live just as they have for generations, keeping servants, throwing parties, and lending money to neighbors even though they are nearly destitute. Their need to keep up appearances threatens their very existence. Gayev speaks of getting a job in a bank only when it becomes obvious that his financial situation is dire this would have been unheard of in earlier tunes. He speaks badly of his sister, because she has been an "immoral woman" while living in Paris and asserts that her impropriety is what led their aunt, the Countess, to refuse to help them. This emphasis on appearance is important to the aristocracy, but in the changing social climate in which the play takes place, these things become less and less important. Gayev maintains the appearance to his family that he has the auction of the orchard under control, but in reality he has almost no control over the situation.

Choices and Consequences

For all characters in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard,* choices have their consequences. Free will is a powerful thing, and the Ranevsky family chooses to remain passive and allow the auction to happen with little interference. It is only Lopakhin, who chooses to buy the orchard when his advice goes unheeded, who eventually benefits from the sale. Similarly, Pishchik takes the opportunity to allow mining on his estate and benefits from this choice by making enough money to pay off his debtors. Chekhov places much of the blame for the sale of the orchard on those characters who are unable to make choices and act to save themselves.

Class Conflict

The class conflicts in this play are illustrated best through the servants. Yasha is Firs's grandson, yet their wants and needs are far different. Yasha wishes to move up in the world, and this means taking the opportunity to return to Pans with Mrs. Ranevsky. Firs, on the other hand, wishes to return to the days before the liberation of the serfs. This difference is underscored by generational differences as well. Firs is more comfortable with the old social order, while Yasha yearns for a new one.

Dunyasha, Mrs. Ranevsky's maid, wishes to be a lady and to marry a wealthy man. She is free to dream, unlike her predecessors, who were locked in servitude. There is a new hope among the servant class that they could make money like Lopakhin, or save enough to buy a small home. Peter Trofimov comments on the sociological changes in Russia when he says to Anya "all your ancestors owned serfs. They owned living beings. Can't you see human beings looking at you from every cherry tree in your orchard, from every leaf and every tree trunk? To own living souls that's what has changed you all so much… That's why your mother, you yourself, and your uncle no longer realize that you are living on borrowed capital, at other people's expense, at the expense of those whom you don't admit farther than your entrance hall." This passage

underscores and explains much of the class conflicts in die play. The aristocracy refuse to treat men like Lopakhin or Trofimov as social equals, despite their (the aristocracy's) fall from power.

Lopakhin and Varya are in the middle of this class conflict. Lopakhin was born the child of serfs on the Ranevsky estate, and Varya's father was a serf. Lopakhin is a wealthy man who is in a better financial situation than the Ranevskys, yet they will never accept him as a social equal. They consider him a vulgar man who has no appreciation for tradition or beauty (he suggested building "vulgar" cottages on the pristine orchard). Varya was adopted by Mrs. Ranevsky, so she too is caught in the middle of the struggle by virtue of not being entirely a part of the aristocracy nor of the servant class.

Style

Comedy vs. Tragedy

Anton Chekhov wrote his last play, *The Cherry Orchard,* as a comedy about a wealthy family that loses its beloved home and orchard to a man who was born a serf on their estate. A comedy is one of the two kinds of drama (the other is tragedy), one that is meant to amuse and typically ends happily. Chekhov referred to *The Cherry Orchard* as a farce, which is a type of comedy characterized by broad humor, outlandish incidents, and often vulgar subject matter. When Konstantin Stanislavsky decided to produce the play at the Moscow Art Theater in 1904, however, he stated in a letter to Chekhov, as quoted in *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater:* "It is not a comedy, not a farce as, you wrote it is a tragedy no matter if you do indicate a way out into a better world in the last act... when I read it for the second time... I wept like a woman, I tried to control myself, but I could not. I can hear you say. 'But please, this is a farce...' No, for the ordinary person this is a tragedy." This difference of opinion between Chekhov and Stanislavsky would lead to a great rift between the two friends. Like that first production, most contemporary productions of *The Cherry Orchard* still emphasize the play's tragic elements, rather than choosing to present Chekhov's vision of the play as a farce.

A tragedy, strictly defined, is a drama in prose or poetry about a noble, courageous hero of excellent character whorbecause of a tragic flaw brings disaster upon himself. Tragedy treats its subjects in a dignified and serious manner, using poetic language to help evoke pity and fear and bring about catharsis, a spiritual awakening or renewal. *The Cherry Orchard* does not fit into the conventional definition of tragedy, but the inability of the main characters to act to save themselves or solve their own problems serves to evoke empathy in the reader/viewer. The play provokes a feeling that the circumstances depicted are tragic, despite the humorous passages.

Comic Moments

There are many comic situations in the play. Leonid Gayev's constant calling out of imaginary billiard shots, and his chatter create some wonderful comic moments: his salute to the one-hundred-year-old bookcase ("Dear highly esteemed bookcase, I salute you"), and his addiction to hard candy are a few examples. Simon Yepikhodov, also known as Twenty-two Calamities, is a character included purely for comic effect. His boots squeak, and, as he states: "Everyday, sir, I'm overtaken by some calamity. Not that I mind. I'm used to it. I just smile." Yepikhodov's love triangle with Dunyasha and Yasha lends comic value as well.

The elderly servant Firs's doddering ways and muttering-and the misunderstandings that result from his frailties are also resented with comic intent. However, language is used to make Peter Trofimov comic in a much different way; his passion often gives way to comical rants. After he is chastised by Mrs. Ranevsky for his declaration that he is

"above love" with Anya, he storms out and falls down a flight of stairs. This is played for comic effect in Chekhov's stage directions, but could easily be portrayecTIh aenousTrranner-, Yasha's exchange with Dunyasha in the orchard is another comic moment. Calling Dunyasha his "little cucumber", Yasha flirts with her and makes her love him, while fully intending to leave her. Again, the complexity of the haracters that Chekhov has created leave room for interpretation by actors and directors.

Boris Simeonov-Pishchik is both tragic and comic at the same time. He is constantly seeking a loan from Mrs. Ranevsky to pay off his debts, though her financial situation is no better than his. Most of his pleas are comic, yet the entire situation is a dreadful one. Chekhov's idea of finding the humor in tragic circumstances is an important part of his individuality as a playwright. Pishchik's comments about his family pedigree lead to his admission that he has fallen on hard times: "My father, may he rest in peace, liked his little joke, and speaking about our family pedigree, he used to say that the ancient Simeonov-Pishchiks came from the horse that Caligula had made a senator. But you see, the trouble is that I have no money. A hungry dog believes only in meat. I'm just the same. All I can think of is money." Although one can certainly find humor in Pishchik's statement, anyone who has ever worried about his or her finances can sympathize with his preoccupation with money. In numerous situations, Chekhov manages to walk a fine line between comedy and pathos, one that could fall to either side depending upon interpretation. This is a contradiction present in the play, and it illustrates why some consider it a farce and others regard it as a tragedy.

Point of View and Empathy

The point of view in this play is third-person, allowing the audience to see the events in the story from outside any particular character but without any insights into their inner thoughts or motivations. The audience often experiences empathy for these characters. Empathy is a shared sense of experience, including emotional and physical feelings, with someone or something other than oneself. When, at the end of the play, the axes begin the job of chopping the orchard down; the reader/viewer feels Mrs. Ranevsky's pain. Upon learning of her young son's death, which is followed shortly by her husband's (events that take place prior to the play's first act), the audience understands her need to run away to Paris. Similarly, when Lopakhin fails to propose to Varya, the audience can appreciate the heartbreak she experiences.

Historical Context

Politics

In 1904, the year *The Cherry Orchard* was first produced, Russia was in a state of upheaval. The Japanese declared war on Russia on February 10, 1904, following Russia's failure to withdraw from Manchuria and its continuing penetration of Korea. The Japanese defeated Russia at the Yalu River on May 1, 1904; by October of that year the Japanese had forced Russia to pull back its forces. This war was the beginning of tensions in Asia and the establishment of Japan as a military force.

On the home front, Russia's minister of the interior, Vyacheslav Plehve, exercised complete control over the public. He forbid any political assemblies, required written police permission for small social gatherings, and forbid students to walk together in the streets of St. Petersburg, Russia's capital. On Easter Sunday of 1904, 45 Jews were killed, 600 houses were destroyed in Kishenev in Bessarabia on orders from Plehve, and the police were instructed to ignore rioting in the streets. These events culminated with Plehve's assassination on July 28, 1904. This kind of civil unrest marked the beginning of a time of great conflict and transformation in Russia that ended with the Communist Revolution in 1917.

These tensions both in and outside Russia made life difficult for Russian citizens. The middle class began to assume an elevated position in society as many nobles lost their wealth and large, lavish estates. As theRanevsky family discovers, Russia is changing and the climate is no longer hospitable to those who do not act in their own interests. Trofimov's character alludes to the strict control of the public when he speaks of the "things he's seen" that have caused him to age prematurely. When the serfs were freed, the landowners were forced to pay for labor, and as conditions in Russia worsened due to war and the totalitarian regime, revolution becomes imminent.

Transportation and Industry

The Trans-Siberian Railroad's link from Moscow to Vladivostok opened in 1904. This is the longest line of track in the world, spanning 3,200 miles between the two cities. In the United States, the first New York City subway line of importance opened on October 27, with the Interborough Rapid Transit, known as the IRT, running from the Brooklyn Bridge to 145th Street with stops in between. This system would grow to become the world's largest rapid transit system, covering more than 842 miles. These transportation systems are important because, as society became more urbanized around the world, it changed. Large plots of land, such as the cherry orchard in Chekhov's play, were broken up into smaller plots for building and industry. The railroads allowed people of all economic backgrounds to travel and allowed goods to be shipped long distances using much less manpower.

Science and Technology

Marie Curie discovered radium and polonium in uranium ore in 1904; these two new radioactive elements helped to fuel the nuclear age in the decades to come. Also in 1904, German physicists Julius Elster and Hans Friedrich Geitel invented the first practical photoelectric cell, which led to the invention of radio.The first wireless radio distress signal was sent the same year. Clearly, the time in which Chekhov wrote *The Cherry Orchard* during 1903 and 1904 was a time of much change and scientific advancement. The simple way of life on the orchard was being phased out of existence; a different mindset was required for the dawning age of science and industry. The Ranevsky family is unable to adapt to this new, quickly evolving world in which discoveries are made almost weekly and change is imminent.

Literature and Drama

1904 saw the first publication of such works as Lincoln Steffens's expose of urban squalor *The Shame of the Cities, The Late Mattia Pascal,* by Italian novelist Luigi Pirandello, Henry James's *The Golden Bowl,* and *Reginald,* by English writer Saki, also known as H. H. Munro. Plays which, like *The Cherry Orchard,* were first produced in 1904 include: *Riders to the Sea* by John Millington Synge, Frank Wedekind's *Pandora's Box,* George Bernard Shaw's *Candida* and *How He Lied to Her Husband,* and *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up,* by James M. Barrie. Chekhov's style was substantially different from his contemporaries'; his self-proclaimed "farce," *The Cherry Orchard,* portrays psychology and human behavior far more realistically than many of his fellow playwrights. Unlike the other plays of its time, *The Cherry Orchard* focuses upon an historical era and examines the whole of society rather than just characters.

Critical Overview

Anton Chekhov intended *The Cherry Orchard* as a farce, yet when Konstantin Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater decided to produce the play, it was presented as a tragedy, according to Stanislavsky's view of the play. Chekhov was so frustrated by the failure of Stanislavsky and other commentators to share his vision of the play as a farce that he burned all copies of the manuscript except for one that remained in Moscow. Chekhov was suffering in the last stages of tuberculosis, yet still managed to make the trip to Moscow to attend rehearsals almost daily. Despite his conflicts with Stanislavsky about how the play should be interpreted, he kept a close watch on the production by attending the rehearsals.

In his The Breaking String: *The Plays of Anton Chekhov,* Maurice Valency asserted:

It is strangely ironical that Chekhov never saw his play produced as & comedy, as he intended, nor has anyone, apparently, ever ventured to produce it in this manner. *The Cherry Orchard* has many comic passages, some of them so broad as to approximate farce but, generally speaking, directors have been unable to fathom the author's comedic intention. The reason is not far to seek. The play, on the whole, is not funny. The characters have their comic side, but the situation is sad. No rationalization has ever succeeded in giving it a comic bias.

Chekhov combined elements of both kinds of drama comedy and tragedy in *The Cherry Orchard,* but he used those elements to underscore each other. Some critics have maintained that it is precisely because *The Cherry Orchard* cannot be viewed as a comedy or even as a tragedy in the strictest sense that it is such a successful drama; the combination of both comic and tragic components, these critics maintain, generates the realism in and the emotional impact of *The Cherry Orchard.* The heartbreak that is felt as the characters lose what they want most is diminished by the sense that these characters have not lost their sense of humor; in addition, presenting both negative and positive emotions makes the characters, and their situations, much more accessible to the audience. Francis Fergusson, m an essay included in *Chekhov: A Collection of Critical Essays,* argued: "If Chekhov drastically reduced the dramatic art, he did so in full consciousness, and in obedience both to artistic scruples and to a stricter sense of reality. He reduced the dramatic art to its ancient root, from which new growths are possible"; Chekhov was very deliberate in the crafting of the play. Though most modern productions focus on the tragic in the play, there is no escaping the humor present in it. Chekhov honed this ability to capture the "real lives" of people and "real situations" noting that in life there is always a mixture of the tragic and comic and recreated it for the stage. In *The Cherry Orchard,* his last play, he combined the farcical elements of his earlier works like *The Marriage Proposal* with the anguish and misery found in his tragedy, *The Seagull,* and created a new type of drama.

When the play premiered on January 17, 1904, Chekhov sought to avoid it. It was only after a messenger was dispatched to report the audience had erupted in thunderous applause after the second act that he was persuaded to attend. To his horror, the play

was stopped between the third and fourth acts as those present saluted the author on his twenty-five years as a writer. Weak from tuberculosis, Chekhov suffered through the evening watching what he viewed as his farce presented as what he called "a piece of sniveling sentimentality," as quoted in *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater.* Stanislavsky would eventually modify his view of the play in the thirty years after the initial production, but he would never see the play in the manner Chekhov had intended.

The Cherry Orchard is still performed and taught today because the characters remain very real to audiences; they personify aspects of comedy and tragedy that are present in the everyday lives of viewers. The complexities of the situations that occur in the play mirror the complexities in life. Real life may not be as balanced as is life in the play, but Chekhov manages to make the play feel like reality. The actions, or failures to act, have consequences, and not all stories have a happy ending. Hope still exists, but it is the hope that the characters can create for themselves a future that is better than the present, rather than the hope that fate will bring that better future to the characters.

Soviet critics after the 1917 Communist Revolution seized upon the character of Peter Trofimov as a hero. He is a young political radical, whose ideas and political beliefs have caused his expulsion from school. He looks forward to a more equal society, and the views he espouses in the play especially his speech to Anya in which he likens the trees in the orchard to human souls made him a favorite of Communist critics and scholars. Many Western scholars, however, do not view Trofirnov as a hero, largely because although he makes speeches he rarely acts, and even though he presents himself as being concerned with the fate of all humanity he cannot understand those around him. Furthermore, these critics argue, Trofimov refuses Anya's love and affection and opts instead to "fall in love' * with his theories about humanity. Despite such criticisms, scholars do agree that Trofimov is ardent in his beliefs and fully intends to work for better things in the future, and these personal characteristics are those which Chekhov intended to celebrate in *The Cherry Orchard.* Following the collapse of the Soviet Union (and Communist governments), Russian critics tend to emphasize the psychological significance of Trofimov rather than his political convictions.

Most scholars do agree that Chekhov's last play is his triumph, and that its strengths He in its combination of both tragic and comic elements. By creating this balance between the two genres he creates a world where every little action and decision (or lack thereof) has its consequences, and the action in the play is very real. These characters seem to live on after the final curtain. Despite the fact that this psychological realism caused the failure of the first production of *The Seagull,* the audience was ready by 1904 to embrace the reality of the characters and to both empathize with and understand their actions. *The Cherry Orchard* is an excellent example of how one literary work can generate a variety of interpretations. Though the play was intended as a farce by Chekhov, it generally is produced more in accordance with Stanislavsky's view that it is a tragedy. It is important to note that this play is still produced and studied all over the world, because although Chekhov did not want the play to be translated due to his belief that people outside of Russia would not understand the issues it raises, *The Cherry Orchard* has proven successful largely because its themes are universal in scope.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Fiero is an accomplished actor as well as a noted collegiate educator. In this essay he discusses Chekhov's skill as a writer of comedy and *The Cherry Orchard's* status as a misperceived comedy masterpiece.

Henri Bergson, the French philosopher, theorized in the essay collection *Comedy,* that laughter springs from our perception of "something mechanical encrusted upon the living." The comic figure, Bergson maintained, is rigid or inflexible in circumstances that demand a resiliency of the mind or body. Moreover, laughter increases through a character's repeated failures to alter a rigid behavior, for it is repetition that transforms mere rigidity into the semblance of something mechanical, like a jack-in-a-box.

If Bergson's ideas have any validity, there is no writer who possessed a greater sense of the comic than Anton Chekhov. Nor is that sense more fully revealed than in his last play, *The Cherry Orchard,* generally considered his greatest work.

From the outset, Chekhov designed the play as comedy. In a letter to his wife, Olga, quoted in *Chekhov in Performance: A Commentary on the Major Plays,* he said that it was to "be funny, very funny, at least in conception." Furthermore, as his later correspondence indicates, he was convinced he had done what he intended. Writing to Lilina, wife to the Moscow Art Theater's great director, Konstantin Stanislavsky, he claimed that, "in places," *The Cherry Orchard was* "even a farce."

Stanislavsky and his co-director, Nemirovich-Danchenko, as they had with other Chekhov plays, chose to interpret the play as much more serious stuff than farce. On stage, they weighed it down as a serious drama, advertising it as such, much to Chekhov's annoyance. The playwright had never felt that either man had fully understood his plays, and he often bristled at their interpretations yet he could hardly argue with the acclaim their theater won him.

Chekhov's adherence to realism, his objectivity, made it difficult for his contemporaries to see his characters in the kaleidoscopic light in which he cast them. In *The Cherry Orchard,* as in all his comedies, he created characters who confront serious, often insoluble problems. From one perspective, they do elicit sympathy, even pity, no matter how passive or inept they may also seem. If their suffering is the main element the audience perceives, the comic impulse is suppressed, for, as Bergson noted, laughter is really only possible when there is an "absence of feeling."

Farce, most particularly, depends on a hardening of the heart, an emotional distance that allows uninhibited laughter, often at the expense of a character's misfortune or suffering. Some great comic writers, including William Shakespeare, have used various methods to prevent an audience from feeling too much empathy comic asides.For example, or mistaken identities arising from the use of disguise. Chekhov, ever true to the limits of realism, uses no such devices. As a result, as J. L. Styan suggested in *Chekhov in Performance,* he risked misinterpretation: "Farce, which prohibits

compassion for human weakness, and tragedy, which demands it, are close kin. The truth is that *The Cherry Orchard* is a play that treads the tightrope between them, and results in the ultimate form of the special dramatic balance we know as Chekhovian comedy."

The Cherry Orchard, depicting the passing world of twilight Russia (before the country's casualty-ridden involvement in both World Wars and its Communist Revolution), certainly has a tragic backdrop. Sometimes, when it cannot be repressed, an anxious awareness of that passing wells up in the characters, but it does not change them. Only Lopakhin really adapts, because to find his place in the new world, he must help destroy the old. He is not mercenary or callous, however, just practical. Although he has only a commercial interest in Mrs. Ranevsky's property, he is genuinely respectful towards her, partly from habitual reverence that typified the Russian peasant class from which he springs. Initially, he even tries to help her, but her inability to take action finally forces him to buy her land himself. In doing so, he severs the last invisible strings of class deference, ties that bind another character, the old manservant, Firs, until death. The play confirms Lopakhm's resourcefulness, his adaptability. He is, primarily, a flexible character, and is not, therefore, comical, except, perhaps, in his stillborn efforts at wooing Varya.

The central symbol of the old Russia is the cherry orchard. In his way, Peter Trofimov, the perennial student, perceives it as such, but he sees nothing of worth in the ways of the past. The orchard only reminds him of human misery. He speaks of the ghosts of the serfs to Anya:

Can't you see human beings looking at you from every cherry tree m your orchard, from every leaf and every tree trunk1' Don't you hear their voices'

His solution is not to cut the orchard down, but rather to run from it, into "ineffable visions of the future " He is a Utopian dreamer, as impractical and inflexible as Mrs. Ranevsky and her brother, and, therefore, unlike Lopakhin, he is more than slightly ridiculous.

The cherry orchard is not simply an emblem of a Russia that has passed. As Styan suggested, "it represents an inextricable tangle of sentiments, which together comprise a way of life and an attitude to life." Its white cherry blossoms remind Mrs. Ranevsky and her brother, Gayev, of their youthful purity and innocence. To them, the orchard is a thing of great and enduring beauty, and they find Lopakhin's proposal to replace it with vacation cottages "vulgar." For Firs, the orchard is "an inviolable aesthetic symbol of the traditional order, " Anya, on the other hand, drawn by her heart to Trofimov, accepts the student's dream of a future happiness, despite Trofimov's inconvenient belief that they must transcend love and practice celibacy to prepare for it.

On a more mundane level, the orchard is simply a white elephant. No one harvests its fruit, and, in fact, no one even enters it, except the anonymous, unseen woodsman who starts felling its trees in the last act. And while the orchard may be glimpsed through the

windows of the house, it is the house itself that is the play's true setting, "the centre and heart of the play," as J. B. Priestley claimed in his text *Anton Chekhov.*

Three of *The Cherry Orchard's* four acts take place inside the house, and two of them, the first and the last, occur in the same room the nursery. It is the setting for both the arrival and departure of Mrs. Ranevsky and her entourage. The room at first vibrates with life, brimming with the excitement of the reunited family members, who animate the room with their memories and maudlin but joyous greetings to the furniture. In contrast, at the end, it is stripped of all its furnishings, all signs of life, except some odds and ends; the flotsam of the past, now abandoned, like Firs, who seems indistinguishable from the discarded sofa on which he lies immobilized at the final curtain. Staged, the room has a more immediate impact than the orchard, for it is actually present, unlike the cherry orchard, which remains indirectly experienced through words alone. The orchard's presence is most keenly felt in the last act, in the sound of the axe that has begun its destruction.

The most poignant and haunting presence in the play is not even identified with a locale. It comes in the sound of the breaking string, heard first in the second act, and then at the end of the play Maurice Valency argued in *The Breaking String: The Plays of Anton Chekhov,* that the broken string is "the golden string that connected man with his father on earth and his father in heaven, the age-old bond that tied the present to the past." In general terms, it represents the passing of a way of life, but it relates, too, to the play's specific actions, especially Lopakhin's purchase of Mrs. Ranevsky's estate. The act gives him an overwhelming sense of emancipation, expressed in his triumphant monologue at the close of Act Three:

"I've bought the estate where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren't even allowed in the kitchen I must be dreaming. I must be imagining it all It can't be true"

Most of the other characters suffer some anxious and painful moments in their ritual passage into the changing but uncertain world that the play foreshadows. Some, like Yepikhodov and Charlotta, experience an identity crisis, while others, like Gayev and Firs, seem sadly disoriented and confused. Yet, as Francis Fergusson claimed in *The Idea of a Theater: A Study of Ten Plays,* while *The Cherry Orchard* is "a theater poem of the suffering of change," it is free "from the mechanical order of the thesis or intrigue" play. The tragic implications of the change drift through the comedy like the ghost of Mrs. Ranevsky's mother in the orchard, but they are not shaped into a single catastrophe and momentous reversal of fortune. The tragic elements are simply too diffuse and, like the breaking string, too distant to be distinct or fully understood.

They are also muted and even subverted by the foreground elements that provide a comic counterpoint to the tragic backdrop. Much of the play's action remains routine and mundane, even trivial.

Behind a facade of politeness, there is a quiet tension between those who fear change and those who welcome it, but when tension surfaces as anger or open aggression,

Chekhov releases the pressure through some sort of comic safety valve. For example, in the third act, Trofimov, stung by Mrs. Ranevsky 's attack on his perceptions of man/woman relationships and his childish whining, exits with theatrical indignation, only to fall down some offstage stairs to a chorus of laughter. So, too, in the second act, when the frustrated Lopakhin calls Mrs. Ranevsky "a silly old woman" because she will not agree to his plans for the estate, Gayev defuses the situation with his billiard game prattle and non-sequitur confession to a fruit candy addiction.

Most of the play's characters are idiosyncratic, and some, like Gayev and Pishchik, are wonderfully eccentric. Most, said Priestley, if "coldly considered," are also at least slightly contemptible: "Madame Ranevsky is a foolish woman only too anxious to return to a worthless young lover; Gayev is an amiable ass who talks too much; Anya is a goose and her Trofimov a solemn windbag; Lopakhin, the practical self-made man, is confused and unhappy; Epihodov a clumsy idiot; Dunyasha a foolish girl; Yasha an insufferable jumped-up lad; and Firs far gone in senility." However, Chekhov never leaves any one of them exposed to such a naked light for very long; he is too congenial for that, too, as Priestley stated, "tender and compassionate."

Each character also seems to have a comic foil or nemesis, Firs and Kasha, for example, or Charlotta and Yepikhodov. All also ride some sort of mental hobby horse that sporadically sends them off the track of conversation onto private, incongruous pathways, i.e., amusing non-sequiturs. Most, at the point of self-awareness, behave exactly like a jack-in-the-box, never able to suppress their foolish impulse. For example, in Act Two, Mrs. Ranevsky, berates herself for her careless waste of money, then immediately drops her purse on the ground and a moment later bestows one of her last gold coins on a panhandler. Meanwhile, Yepikhodov, ever mindful of his role as an unfortunate clod, stumbles into furniture as if to prove he was not miscast for the part.

It is possible to probe such characters to reveal some darker or more sinister personality traits. Beverly Hahn, for one, argued in *Chekhov: A Study of the Major Stories and Plays* that the weaknesses of Mrs. Ranevsky and Gayev, their lack of will, "amounts to a complex sense of guilt and self-degradation which is both personal and yet obscurely the product of their situation of privilege." The Moscow Art Theatre audience of 1904 came from and returned to the world depicted in Chekhov's plays, and they experienced such inner guilt first hand plus all the pain, sorrow, and pathos that Stanislavsky felt was in *The Cherry Orchard* and that scholars can still expose. But a reader or viewer of the play need not be quite so myopic. There is sufficient distance from Chekhov's world to free laughter from inhibition, restoring the comic balance that Chekhov felt was somehow missed in his own time.

Source: John Fiero, in an essay for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt from his book, Chekhov: A Spirit Set Free, Pritchett outlines the historical background of and Chekhov's sources for The Cherry Orchard, characterizing the play as "Chekhov's farewell to Russia and his genius,"
Pritchett is an English literary figure, and is considered a modem master of the short story and a preeminent literary critic. He writes in the conversational tone of the familiar essay, approaching literature from the viewpoint of a lettered but not overly scholarly reader.

Chekhov started writing *The Cherry Orchard* in Yalta in February 1903. He wrote to Olga, who was in Moscow and whom he called his "little pony," that a crowd of characters was gathering in his mind but he could only manage to write four lines a day and "even that gives me intolerable pain." His disease was possessing his whole body, moving to his intestines and his bowels. Olga came to Yalta in July, hoping the play would be finished in time for her to take afair copy back to Moscow in September when the theater season opened. It was not ready because he was continuously revising what he had written, but also because, m his anxiety about money, he had agreed to become the literary editor of a new magazine which had been started by his liberal admirer Lavrov, and he was reading dozens of manuscripts for him. At last the play was finished, "except for difficulties with the second act." Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko sent him long and enthusiastic telegrams. There was only one jarring note: Stanislavsky had called the play "a truly great tragedy." Tartly, and fearing Stanislavsky's possessiveness, Chekhov replied that it was not even a drama"It is a farce."

The central subject of *The Cherry Orchard* seems to have been taken from Chekhov's story *A, Visit to Friends,* written in 1898, which deals with the bankruptcy of the Kiselev family, with whom he had stayed many times at Babkino. Chekhov did not include the story in the complete edition of his work and it has been suggested that he did not want to offend the family: but the story may very well have been rejected because it is too labored in a novelizing way. In the story, the family have turned cynically to a shrewd and successful young lawyer, hoping against hope that he will find some way of saving them from ruin: he knows so many rich people. The wife thinks the solution lies in getting him to marry their daughter. He is sentimentally attracted to her, but self-interest is stronger than sentiment: he simply sneaks away in the night. The young man is ashamed of his behavior.

In *The Cherry Orchard,* Lopakhin, the property speculator, evades all appeals to marry Ranevskaya's ward. He seems to be a new version of the shrewd plain practical railway engineer who appears in *Lights* and more fully in the excellent *My Life,* a man with a businesslike eye for taking over the properties of the feckless landowning families. Chekhov admired this self-made man and he warned Stanislavsky that Lopakhin must not be played as a greedy vulgarian; he saw that Lopakhin's weakness was that he would be too cautious and inhibited m love. Ranevskaya must not be played as an entirely frivolous and irresponsible spendthrift: she is all heart; her sensuality is natural to her and not vicious. In her reckless life in Paris she has nursed a lover who has

deceived and robbed her, and she will return to him at the end of the play when he is ill again and appeals to her once more. She is shrewd when she mocks Trofimov, the high-minded and self-absorbed "eternal student" who has been the family tutor, because, at his age, he has never had a mistress. He is, she says, a prig. She may be a victim of what Chekhov called *morbus fraudulentus* when she gazes at her cherry orchard and sees in the white blossoms the symbol of the lost innocence of her girlhood, but the incurable lavishness of her heart is genuine. Lopakhin will not forget the moment she tenderly washed his face when his nose was bleeding when he was a little boy, and called him "little peasant." In Lopakhin, the tongue-tied moneymaker, that childhood memory is a genuine grace. What Chekhov brings out, as he makes his people tell their own story without listening to one another, is then: absurd pride in their own history and their indifference to everyone else's. Ranevskaya may long for the tongue-tied Lopakhin to propose to her ward, but the girl's real dream is for a life of pious journeys from convent to convent.

The truly desperate character is the bizarre half-German outsider, Sharlotta, who breaks the tension of the play by her mystifying tricks with cards and her ventriloquism. Chekhov had seen such a girl at a fair on one of his trips. She is the daughter of anarchy and is truly frightening. Everyone else knows who they are. She does not know who she is. "I have no proper identity papers and I don't know how old I am. I keep imagining I am young.... Where I come from and who I am I do not know." All she knows is that she has traveled, when she was a child, from fair to fair and that her gypsy parents taught her to do card tricks. A German lady rescued her and turned her into a governess. She pulls a cucumber out of her pocket and eats it. “I am so lonely, always so lonely ... and who I am, what I exist for, nobody knows." Pathos? Not at all a wild independent native homelessness. In the final scene of the play, in the general good-byes when the house is sold, she picks up a bundle, pretends it is a baby, produces the illusion of a baby crying as she sings "Hush, little baby, my heart goes out to you," and then throws the bundle on the floor and says to them all: "And please find me another job. I can't go on like this."

What about the eloquent speech of Trofimov, the eternal student, sent down twice from the university, working for the "glorious future" in Russia? He attacks the theorizing intelligentsia and proudly refuses a loan from Lopakhin at the end of the play. In Act n he cries out: "The whole of Russia is our orchard." Is he a proud prophet of revolution and reform? Hardly: he is a rootless enthusiastic bookworm.

Objection has been made to the final scene, in which Firs, the sick and rambling old servant, lover of the old days, is left behind when the family leave, locked in by mistake. The family had assumed he was in the hospital and no one had troubled to find out. Is this eerie or simply anticlimax? It "works," for he is the very conscious historian of the family in a play which is notable for its pairs of matching scenes. For we remember that in the wild ballroom scene in the third act, Chekhov has brought in the local stationmaster, who insists on reciting a notorious poem called "The Sinful Woman." It is dearly directed at Ranevskaya's adultery. He is seemingly unembarrassed by his tactlessness and may even be thinking that he is celebrating her fame in local gossip. No one listens. But it is Firs who enlarges the history of the family. He says:

We used to have generals, barons and admirals at our dances in the old days, but now we send for the post-office clerk and the stationmaster and even they are not all that keen to come.

He rambles on about the good old days of serfdom:

I feel frail. The old master, Mr. Leonid's grandfather, used to dose us all with powdered sealing wax no matter what was wrong with us. I've been taking powdered sealing wax for twenty years or more and maybe that is what's kept me alive.

The matching of time present and time past gives the play the density and intricacy of a novel; the play is the most novelized of Chekhov's plays because the people talk it into existence and because no one listens. It is a farce because the people are a disordered chorus who have lost their gods and invent themselves. They are a collective farewell, and that is what moves us. As Professor Rayfield has written, the play is also Chekhov's farewell to Russia and his genius.

Source: V. S. Pritchett, in his *Chekhov: A Spirit Set Free, Hodder & Stoughton,* 1988, pp. 220-24

Critical Essay #3

In the following review, which originally appeared in the *New York Times* on January 23, 1923, Corbin praises *The Cherry Orchard,* calling it "the masterpiece of the man who ... has touched the pinnacle of modern Russian comedy."

The Moscow players proceeded last night from the lower depths of Gorky to the high comedy of Tchekhoff, revealing new artistic resources. Stanislavsky, Olga Knipper-Tchekhova, Moskvin, Leomdoff and half a dozen others entered with consummate ease into a rich variety of new characterizations. The stage management was less signal in its effects, but no less perfect. Yet for some reason *The Cherry Orchard* failed to stir the audience, even the Russian portion of it, as did *The Lower Depths* and even *Tsar Fyodor.*

This is a play of comedy values both high and light. The milieu is that of the ancient landed aristocracy, beautifully symbolized by an orchard of cherry trees in full bloom which surrounds the crumbling manor house. Quite obviously, these amiable folk have fallen away from the pristine vigor of their race.

The middle-aged brother and sister who live together are unconscious, irreclaimable spendthrifts, both of their shrinking purses and of their waning lives. With a little effort, one is made to feel, even with a modicum of mental concentration, calamity could be averted. But that is utterly beyond their vacuous and futile amiability; so their estate is sold over their heads and the leagues of gay cherry trees are felled to make way for suburban villas.

Beneath the graceful, easy-going surface of the play one feels rather than perceives a criticism on the Russia of two decades ago. Here is a woman of truly Slavic instability, passing with a single gesture from heartbreak to the gayety of a moment, from acutely maternal grief for an only child long dead to weak doting on a Parisian lover who is faithless to her and yet has power to hold her and batten on her bounty. Here is a man whose sentiment for the home of his ancestors breaks forth in fluent declaiming, quasi-poetic and quasi-philosophic, yet who cannot lift a finger to avert financial disaster.

In the entire cast only one person has normal human sense. Lopakhin is the son of a serf who has prospered in freedom. He is loyal enough to the old masters, dogging their footsteps with good advice. But in the end it is he who buys the estate and fells the cherry trees for the villas of an industrial population. It is as if Tchekhoff saw in the new middle class the hope of a disenchanted yet sounder and more progressive Russia. The war has halted that movement, but indications are not lacking that it is already resuming.

With such a theme developed by the subtly masterful art of Tchekhoff there is scope for comedy acting of the highest quality. It is more than likely that the company seized every opportunity and improved upon it. But to any one who does not understand Russian, judgment in such a matter is quite impossible. Where effects are to be

achieved only by the subtlest intonation, the most delicate phrasing, it fares ill with those whose entire vocabulary is da, da.

As an example of the art of the most distinguished company that has visited our shores in modern memory, this production of *The Cherry Orchard* is abundantly worth seeing. The play in itself is of interest as the masterpiece of the man who, with Gorky, has touched the pinnacle of modern Russian comedy. But if some Moscovite should rise up and tell us that in any season our own stage produces casts as perfect and ensembles as finely studied in detail, it would be quite possible to believe him.

Source: John Corbm, "Russian High Comedy" (1923) in *Onstage Selected Theater Reviews from The New York Times* 1920-1970, edited by Bernard Beckerman and Howard Siegman, Arno Press, 1973, p 34.

Adaptations

The Cherry Orchard, Parti: Chekhov, Innovator of Modem Drama, an educational film includes select scenes and a discussion by Morris Hough-ton, 1968; available from Britannica Films.

The Cherry Orchard, Part II: Comedy or Tragedy? from the same series as the above; scenes with discussion by Houghton; focus on technique of dramatizing interior action and concept of subtext, 1967; available from Britannica Films.

Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre, using the Stanislavsky method, director Yuri Zavadsky stages select scenes from *The Cherry Orchard;* available from IASTA.

The Cherry Orchard, on three audio cassettes, translated by Leonid Kipnis, actors include Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn; Caedmon/Harper Audio.

Anton Chekhov: A Writer's Life, a brief biographical study of the dramatist, 1974; available from Films for the Humanities and Sciences.

Chekhov, Henry Troyat's biography of Chekhov on twelve audio cassettes, read by Wolfram Kandinsky, 1989; available from Books on Tape.

Chekhov: Humanity's Advocate, an audio cassette in the Classics of Russian Literature Series; Ernest Simmons discusses Chekhov's work and artistic principles, 1968; available from Audio-Forum.

The Seagull, another Chekhov classic adapted to film by Sidney Lumet, starring James Mason, Vanessa Redgrave, Simone Signoret, David Warner, Harry Andrews, Eileen Herlie, Denholm Elliot, 1968; available on video from Warner Brothers.

The Seagull, Russian film version with English subtitles, directed by Yuri Karasik, 1971; available from Facets Multimedia, Inc.

Three Sisters, yet another Chekhov classic adapted for film by Laurence Olivier and John Sichel, starring Olivier, Joan Plowright, Alan Bates, Jeanne Watts, Louise Purnell, Derek Jacobi, 1970; available from American Film Theater.

Three Sisters, video taped version of the Actors Studio production of the play, directed by Paul Bogart, starring Kim Stanley, Geraldine Page, Shelly Winters, Kevin McCarthy, and Sandy Dennis, 1966.

Vanya on 42nd Street, imaginative firming of a rehearsal of David Mamet's stage adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya,* directed by Louis Malle, with Andre Gregory as the director of the play in rehearsal and Wallace Shawn as Uncle Vanya, 1994; available from Columbia Tristar Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the Russian class structure that evolved after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, during the reign of Tsar Alexander n, relating it to the gallery of characters in *The Cherry Orchard.*

Research the rise of the Moscow Art Theatre, its relationship to Anton Chekhov, and the influence of its great co-director, Konstantin Stanislavsky, on the "method" school of acting that was taught by Sanford Meisner and Lee Strasberg in America and popularized by such actors as Robert De Niro, Jane Fonda, and Dennis Hopper.

Investigate the treatment of tuberculosis in Russia and Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century and relate your findings to Chekhov's life and role as physician.

Investigate the influence of Chekhov on modern American drama and such specific playwrights as David Mamet, Maria Irene Fornes, Spalding Gray, John Guare, Wendy Wasserstein, Neil Simon, and Lillian Hellman.

Research daily life on the provincial estate of late nineteenth-century Russia and relate your findings to *The Cherry Orchard* and other works by Chekhov.

Research penal conditions in Chekhov's Russia and the playwright's efforts to encourage reform in his nonfiction expose, *Sakhalin Island* (1893-94).

Compare and Contrast

1904: A Zemstvo congress meets in St. Petersburg, Russia, and demands that civil liberties are accorded to citizens and that an assembly of representatives of the people is convened.

Today: Russia still grapples with basic civil liberties and rights after the fall of the Soviet Empire. A coup is attempted by right-wing activists, but democratically-elected President Boris Yeltsin retains his power.

1904: The Trans-Siberian Railroad opens, linking Moscow to Vladivostok. The railroad's 3,200 miles of track makes it the longest line in the world.

Today: Citizens of Vladivostok take to the streets to protest the government's failure to deliver on financial reforms. The expansive distance between Moscow and Vladivostok, though linked by communications and public transportation, makes it difficult for the central government to control the city.

1904: French physicist Mane Curie discovers polonium and radium two new radioactive elements. This discovery leads to the advent of nuclear power, nuclear weapons, and space flight.

Today: Despite financial difficulties, the Russian space program continues to advance. The space station Mir, powered by nuclear means, continues to orbit the Earth manned by astronauts from both Russia and the United States.

1904: The National Tuberculosis Association in the United States is established to fight the disease, which is also known as consumption In Russia the disease claims the life of playwright Anton Chekhov.

Today: Tuberculosis is on the rise again in the United States, and around the world due to HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Thought to be virtually wiped during the 1970s, tuberculosis has gained a foothold through weakened immune systems that result from viruses like HIV. However, many treatments are now available to combat tuberculosis, and the illness does not carry with it a death sentence, as it did during Chekhov's time.

What Do I Read Next?

The Bear (1888) and *The Marriage Proposal* (1889), the best of Chekhov's early one-act farces or "curtain raisers," tap the purely comic and make an interesting contrast to his more complex and subtle comedies like *The Cherry Orchard.*

Miss Julie (1888), an early naturalistic drama by August Strindberg, investigates the tragic consequences of breaking class barriers in the sexual liaison of Miss Julie and her father's valet, Jean.

The Three Sisters, Chekhov's immediate predecessor to *The Cherry Orchard,* was first performed at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1901. Another play of minimal action, it introduces characters who, like those in the later play, suffer from an inertia of the will.

Heartbreak House (1916), George Bernard Shaw's iconoclastic comedy, shares Chekhov's thematic interest in the breakdown of social norms based on class distinctions. Hesione Hushabye's country house, the play's setting, is a place where artificial conventions and traditions are exposed to Shaw's sardonic wit.

The Autumn Garden (1951), by Lillian Hellman, reflects Chekhov's influence in its technique, structure and theme. Three generations of the Ellis family and their friends gather in the Ellis house to suffer through a shared ennui, atrophy of the will, and sense of loss.

The Good Doctor (1974) is Neil Simon's dramatic tribute to Chekhov, consisting of a collection of dramatized stories adapted from the Russian writer's fictional sketches.

Further Study

Bergson, Henri "Laughter," in *Comedy,* edited by *Wyhe Sypher,* Doubleday (Garden City, NY), 1956.

Bergson's essay is included with George Meredith's "An Essay on Comedy" and appendix essay, "The Meanings of Comedy," by editor Sypher The collection is an excellent source for ideas on the nature of the comic

Bruford, W. H. Chekhov and His Russia: *A Sociological*

Study, Archon Books (Hamden, CT), 1971

Relates Chekhov's work to Russia's social structure, with a discussion of the various groups, including the merchants, landowners, intelligentsia, and the peasants; a very useful background study for *The Cherry Orchard.*

Fergusson, Francis. *The Idea of a Theater. A Study of Ten*

Plays, Princeton University Press, 1972

A highly regarded and influential introduction to theater, this study relates the structure of *The Cherry Orchard* to classical tragedy

Hahn, Beverly. *Chekhov: A Study of the Major Stories and Plays,* Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Although a general study of both fiction and drama, work discusses *The Cherry Orchard* at length to answer critical assaults on Chekhov as "a melancholy and merely impressionistic dramatist."

Kirk, Irina *Anton Chekhov,* Twayne (Boston), 1981.

General introduction to Chekhov. Makes passing mention of Bergson as a relevant theorist for the comic in Chekhov.

Magarshack, David. *Chekhov the Dramatist,* Hill and Wang (New York), 1960.

Divides Chekhov's plays into two categories: plays of direct and plays of indirect action (plays with significant offstage action), including *The Cherry Orchard.* Stresses comic structure of plays.

Priestley, J *E.Anton Chekhov,* A S. Barnes & Co. (Cranbury, NJ), 1970.

A critical biography in the "International Profiles" series, arguing that Chekhov was a better dramatist than fictionist. A good introduction to Chekhov, with illustrations.

Rayfield, Donald. Chekhov: *The Evolution of His Art,* Harper & Row (New York), 1975.

A critical biography that analyzes the relationship between Chekhov's fiction and his plays, showing how each sheds light on the other.

Styan, J. L. *Chekhov in Performance: A Commentary on the Major Plays,* Cambridge University Press, 1971.

An act by act interpretation of Chekhov's four major plays, particularly useful for preparing the text for performance.

Valency, Maurice. *The Breaking String: The Plays of Anton Chekhov,* Oxford University Press (New York), 1966. Study focuses on Chekhov's plays in the context of the development of modern drama in Europe and the relationship of his plays to his fiction.

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Field, Bradford S,, Jr., Gilbert, Miriam, and Klaus, Carl H. *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater,* Scott, Foresman, 1981.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board membersceducational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an �at-a-glance� comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes �The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,� a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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