

THE RELEVANCE OF ANTON CHEKHOV'S THE CHERRY ORCHARD IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN ANALYSIS USING SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

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Perhaps the most interesting ideas that occur across our time on earth come from the imagination and the greatest struggles of our existence. These ideas come to place in a time of enlightenment and provide new revolutionary ideas that shape our continuing knowledge. Out of chaos comes order and through our trials and tribulations we learn something about ourselves. The plays written in the twentieth century from writers such as Chekhov through to Genet challenge our perceptions of reality. When these plays are performed they enable the audience to learn in a space where they are learning about life itself. As David Edgar states in his book *How Plays Work*, 'Drama can bridge the two great sources of our experience: our direct, lived first-person biography and the much wider range of experience and knowledge that is reported to us second or third hand'. [1] We learn through the trials and tribulations of others. This realization as it were moves us because we can relate to it.

The modern novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* is about the process of change in the uncertain world of the Second World War. "We lead our lives like water flowing down a hill, going more or less in one direction until we splash into something that forces us to find a new course.[2]" Like

Just a sampling of some cool scenic designs for *Cherry Orchard*

- Devlin



literature, theatre has the capacity to illustrate the way change is forced upon the world and how different lives adapt to it. Chekov's plays are composed through a use of characters through whom a narrative evolves, especially in *The Cherry Orchard*. In *The Cherry Orchard* the characters' lives are moving ever forward and cannot stop the tide of change, they are being forced to find a new course of life, in the destruction of the estate. They communicate their issues and the existentialist nature of reality. The characters in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* are experiencing their own sense of loss and coping with the prospect of change which at least initially is in contrast to the unchanging nature of the orchard, emphasis is brought to focus in Act 1 look at the orchard and remember their childhood Mme Ranevsky; states "And out there at least, nothing has changed. My orchard gleams as white, as pure as ever, untouched by autumn's storms and winter's dead hand.[3]"

Playwrights cannot truly represent reality so we have to become like detectives in order to make sense of the play and ask questions about our society. To question life we must have discussions and find meaning in reality. To illustrate this we will use Socratic dialogue stemming from the theories of Socratic Method, The Socratic Method is drawn from the work of ancient Greek philosophy. We know about this term Socratic Method from Socrates through from his tutelage of Plato, nothing is written directly on what kind of person Socrates was, other than the dialogues which he had with Plato, another Greek philosopher. These discussions were to find truth, persuade others of truth[4] and to question the society or to refute the evidence of current knowledge around the time of Socrates. We may use these methods to analyze theatre which is one way of questioning reality. Cain's theory is based on a psychological approach to Socratic Method that Plato wrote a play called *Clouds*[5] based around how the Socratic method works which is constructed around dialectics. The dialogues that Cain analyses Socrates discusses his character through Plato's dialogue and elaborates on the uses of dialectics. As an example of dialectical theatre we need to consider Eric Bentley's phrase A impersonates B while C looks on[6], if we apply Socratic Dialogue, A discusses with B for C's insight into reality. C learns

something about reality. “C” in reference to Cain’s book the audience is understood in this dissertation to represent the interlocutor, the audience, the people that have the questions about reality. This brings us to the very truth and nature of theatre itself.

The Cherry Orchard, a play written by Anton Chekov, is an example of a dialectical play and could be seen as metaphor for Russia and offers a perspective on life and of the whole of the Russian nation. We, through reading the play, can get a psychological and analytical view point of early 20th Century Russia. Chekov was a scholar of the human condition, and his profession as a doctor allowed him to uncover signs from his patients. Asking patients questions about their well being, interpreting their responses and reading vital signs of the body is an example of how knowledge is uncovered through dialogue. **So it is through the theatre of Chekhov and through his dialogue, that we uncover meaning, we find understanding, catharsis and a truth.** According to Daphna Ben-Shaul representations within the void that is theatre can illustrate the void of society and therefore generate discourse of the present.[7] This provides a reason for the very truth, nature and basis of theatre. This dissertation through textual analysis will try to discover meaning and the logic behind the play and also aims to discover a perspective or a comparison between Russia as it was developing in the early nineteen hundreds and the fall of England’s industry. If all literature is social commentary is there a learning function that in a simultaneous and subliminal fashion we are taking from *The Cherry Orchard* through the conversation and dialectics in the form of Socratic Dialogue?

The Cherry Orchard was Chekhov’s last play written in 1903. It was written at a specific time in Russian history before the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. It was written at the time of the ideas of the socialist revolutionary party who were concerned for the well being of workers and wanted a fairer system. The price of essential food supplies rose in 1904 as money was being used for the Russo-Japanese War[8], which was to expand Russia’s borders into Constantinople, Manchuria and Korea. Other changes included freeing of servants and serfs[9] which is illustrated in *The Cherry Orchard* with reference to Firs. The freedom of servants happened in 1861 when Tsar Nicholas the second ended the system of serfdom.

But today, why do we still need *the Cherry Orchard*? Is it for entertainment; is it for a method of escapism? **In order for us to face the light we must face the dark of the void. How often in our daily lives do we take time to understand our lives, how often do we get to share a common feeling and discuss our reality?** Reality is something we can approach through questions. Reality is in itself a construct[10] which we have provided a language for in order to describe. Language is used to create laws, systems and signs and so defines our society. In this day and age, our lives are being flooded with information that some do not have the capacity to cope with. This information can sometimes overwhelm and overpower us. To alleviate this we must distinguish between superficial information and deeper layers of knowledge. Information is something we have on a day to day basis. Information is data that has been given significance. Knowledge is a specific collection of information. Without information, you cannot have knowledge, which has great use to society. Specifically *The Cherry Orchard*, under its deeper meaning of knowledge, can give us a perspective on reality.

“The Essence of the mimetic act ... is not in the action of a single individual but the orchestration of several actors. Such representations are coordinated social efforts, dependent upon the actors, and the audiences, sharing a global cognitive model of the society. This is generally true of ritual. [11]”

To find truth we must have knowledge, but not necessarily information. We can let our imaginations take us anywhere. If we imagine ourselves living in conditions that the characters do, it can lead us on a journey of self discovery. Knowledge is where we find truth, we also find it through dialogue and imagination. *The Cherry Orchard* has never been more important in order for us to take stock of what is more important to us, family stability or material wealth.

Gayev: “Absolutely. Everything’s as it should be now. How depressed we all were before the orchard went... What we all endured. But now it’s all done with.. irreversible.. everyone’s calm and cheerful once again. I hold an office in a bank now, a financier you might say.. Red into the middle.. tla.. and you look so much better too, Liuba, all in all. No doubt about it.[12]”

There is confusion about the works of Anton Chekhov, in that the interpretation of Constantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky turned *The Cherry Orchard* into a tragedy. In most opinions it is a tale about loss and acceptance and coming to terms with what is more important to people. As Anya discusses with Mme, Ranevsky in Act III:

...come with me we’ll go away from here grow new things better finer than these and then you’ll see how right all this has been and fulfilment will smile on your skin like evening sunlight and you’ll breathe again...[13]

We go to the theatre to discover ourselves; it challenges us, without being taught in a traditional, formal way. Our minds are focused in the moment on the aesthetic and the dialogue and we are engaged. What makes *The Cherry Orchard* important to a 21st century audience is that it draws a picture of a way of life, a life that is simpler, calmer and one composed and framed in rural Russia. *The Cherry Orchard* was first performed 17th January in 1904[14]. Considered Chekhov’s last great masterpiece, it was performed just before Chekhov passed away in July of that year. The play draws our attention to the changing state of the nation, notably in the landscape, which has an effect on its characters. *The Cherry Orchard* is a testament of the changing states of nations. We can now draw a parallel from this and reflect on the current state of the decline in the economy and the fall of industry in the UK, and perhaps ourselves, in the mirror that is the dialogue in the text. In the 21st century in which we are now living, we are facing a way of life that is turning our country into a state with little industry where we are working for a service economy which is a reversal of factors. Nevertheless, although *The Cherry Orchard* is set in pre-industrial Russia and a pre-cursor towards the Russian Revolution, it may well be that similarly our country needs a new direction just as Russia did in the early 20th century. After a decade of this century we are seeing the decline and fall of our rich industrial heritage that was built on a stable and secure economic system. In a reversal of fortunes, Russia

and the United Kingdom are on binary opposites in that Russia was about to see the birth of the industrial age whilst the UK has seen it coming to end. We are similarly living in an era of social upheaval and change. We have seen the decline of the Welsh coal industry, we have witnessed the fall of car manufacturing companies and mergers of others.

In rural Russia, through the lens of *The Cherry Orchard*, we view a family living in agricultural, arable farm land, composed of cherry trees. In itself the cherry orchard is a silent character which is omnipresent and is under threat from being sold off at auction. The play explores a society comprised of classes, including serfdom and the land owning aristocrats. This in itself is a system undergoing change - but at what cost? The serfs of Russia were freed. Serfs were a form of manual labour working for the aristocratic “bourgeoisie” at that time. We face a similar problem, where we are living in a supposed classless society, but it is argued that the rich are getting richer while the poor get poorer and the financial crisis is looming over our heads.

The Cherry Orchard as a pre cursor towards the Russian Revolution and the rise of Communism, we can see clues within the text, for example Trofimov says:

Mankind is advancing, perfecting its powers. All the things that are beyond its reach now will be one day be brought close and made plain. All we have to do is work. To bend all our strength to help those who are seeking the truth. Here in Russia very few as yet are working. Most members of the intelligentsia, so far as I know it, are seeking nothing, neither the truth nor anything else. They're doing nothing - they're still incapable of hard work.[15]

Trofimov realizes that in other regions there is a rise of communism and a call for equality. The people who have had education are not putting their minds to better use and are not helping the cause. Along with inequality there are also comments about the land not being used efficiently from some people's points of view, as Lopakhin says, “...but the only remarkable thing about your cherry orchard is its dimensions. It's very large”[16]. Madame Ranevsky's love of the cherry orchard is a love not shared by others. Deeper meaning is also uncovered through conversation. “Perhaps man has a hundred senses, and when he dies the five senses that we know perish with him, and the other ninety-five remain alive . . . Everything that is unattainable for us now will one day be near and clear” “But we must work.[17]” This suggests that using all your senses will allow you to become aware of the opportunities available; thus change is required, an opinion brought to light by the character Trofimov. Production and manufacturing were not as prevalent in Russia as to make the land profitable and is argued that modernization[18] was one of the causes for the revolution. These factories and modern farming methods were not available as the industrial revolution had not occurred to Russia at that time of 1904. The era in question in *The Cherry Orchard* is before the Russian Revolution, when the country was still run by the monarchy, Alexander, the Tsar of Russia. Russia is a large country and all the governance of the country was run by one man, which explains why the dire circumstances occurred, as one man could not control all of this land. Trofimov, who is the eternal student now and for all time in the play, has dialogue that reflects this state of the nation as do other characters.

“Firs: It’s all the years I’ve been alive, they were trying to marry me off before your father was born. And by the time we got our freedom, I was already principal valet. So I refused to take it, and stayed with the master and the mistress. I remember the celebrations when the freedom came. Everyone so happy and no one knowing what there was to be glad about.

Lopakhin: Ah, those good old days when you could depend on things ...getting flogged for example.

Firs: Precisely. The serfs belonged to their masters and the masters owned the serfs, now it is all so messy and you can’t make sense of any of it.” [19]

It is only through the dialogue that we as an audience are able to understand ourselves through Chekhov’s characters. The old order and the traditional hierarchy are reflected in the play’s characters.

“Ranyevskaya: Firs, if the estate is sold, where will you go?

Firs: Wherever you tell me to go.” [20]

The family still relies upon servants but seem unaware of what is happening around them. Perhaps the play for a modern audience can reach important matters and ask questions about their own lives. It may encourage us to be aware of everything around us and not to be blinkered by the material possessions and to care more about the people around us.

When a character asks a question of another character it shows an inner character trait or an opinion, or the state of the current climate. For example, when Anya is discussing the cherry orchard with Trofimov in Act 2 [21]. Questions determine a man’s existence, man in a sense as being part of the human race. For example, in Act 3 Lopakhin, who represents the new money of Russia, has just bought the cherry orchard. Whilst the previous owner is sunk down in a chair, Lopakhin says,

“Why, why, why didn’t you listen to me? My poor dear love, you won’t bring it back now. (In tears) Oh, if only it were all over. If only we could somehow change this miserable, muddled life of ours ... What’s all this? Let’s hear the band play! Let’s have everything the way I want it! (Ironically.) Here comes the new landlord, the owner of the cherry orchard!... I can pay for it all!”

Here Chekhov uses language to illustrate the fall of the aristocracy and the socio-economic climate in which the new industrialist Lopakhin can only try and gain respect by being brash and pompous.

“We” cannot be determined simply through action and so, with Socratic Dialogue, we learn something about ourselves which may include the struggle of the human condition. Dialectical Theatre turns life into a mode of discussion where previously we have not discussed our lives in such ways. *The Cherry Orchard* provides this opportunity. We do not discuss them because we

may be afraid that we might be judged. We do not discuss issues about our lives. *The Cherry Orchard* is one of the plays that allows there to be an identification through familiarity. One of the main themes emphasized in the play is change. Change is nature, change is the only constant. In *The Cherry Orchard* we see the beginning of industry, a change, and now we see the fall of industry: rise and fall.

Chekov's characters have complexities which are shown in the texts from Gayev's sweets, helping him to relax and almost revert to childhood, and return to a safe place as the characters return to their family home, to the new boots of Yepikhodov, as they squeak uncontrollably making his feet hurt. A certain amount of materialism in the possessions of the characters is shown to us which brings external forces that determine our world. We worry something might happen to it and all the items therein, so Gayev resorts to his childhood naivety of sweets and billiards, memories of a rich life, whilst Ranevskya has memories of her childhood of the room of the nursery. Chekhov asked if these things make our lives worthwhile? External forces affect the characters, such as Yepikhodov having to buy new boots because the temperature has fallen to minus 3 degrees, in a reflection of what is happening in our reality. What *The Cherry Orchard* does is hold a mirror up to reality and subverts it. We are a parallel world in the reflection of reality, determining our own existence through the lens of theatre. This type of theatre is a mirror, an act of mimesis[22] "A moral theatre can but be negative, critical, pessimistic, caricatural[23]" everything balances across the mirror's edge and theatre helps us challenge reality. If we hold *The Cherry Orchard* in opposition to our reality we begin to understand ourselves in a new light. We see our flaws reflected in the play, we see our past and our errors. In a perfect world if we could change aspects of our lives, we would change them for the better. With any play you can do this, but with Chekov the message you hear is what you see is what you get, a mirror or a slice of reality. It is through Chekov's eyes but you are seeing reality. "Everything is how it should be. Familiar...Truthful... nothing new...[24]"

One reason for going to the theatre might be to take a retrospective look at the reality, from the past, to face the future with fresh eyes. Sometimes a new perspective is all that is needed. *The Cherry Orchard* is a play that has been performed in a variety of ways and it is classed as a play that uses symbolism. It is presented in the play as a conflict between naturalism and symbolism. It has been performed using other genres of production but the play remains the same in its textual context. Each time the play has been performed a new aspect of the play's meaning is emphasized and as we perceive life from a character we can identify and imagine ourselves through their perception. Chekhov's occupation as a doctor allows his text to be deeply involved in its characters flaws. Chekhov's goal was to present things as they are and he does not prescribe an alternate reality where there is a happy ending. You may imagine this for yourself in your own viewing as people will take away different interpretations. Each individual will take away their own version of reality from the play and learn something about themselves. This could work in opposition to the directors, cast and crew in the way that they in turn present it and what they in turn learn from it. The theatre provides us with a space for discussion, debate and enlightenment; a place where we feel most unchallenged can be the most challenging of all. Sometimes people go simply expecting to see theatre and will not be expecting to consider

important life questions. However some plays do ask rhetorical questions - such as Gayev's response to Trofimov:

"Trofimov: It's time we stopped praising our species and got down to work. There's nothing else"
Gayev: Does it matter what we do? We all die in the end."^[25]

The audience can make the decision whether to answer this, it maybe that it isn't a rhetorical question, but it is more indirect that the audience is challenged in such a way. This could be seen as Socratic Dialogue.

Change is the way things are, change is nature which opens the discussion.

Chapter Two

Many plays are written to understand a particular issue, theatre can open our eyes to the world in ways we at first found unimaginable. To truly understand our reality, our method of reasoning must be presented in a particular way to make us understand this information. Socratic Dialogue offers such a way in that it critically examines beliefs by attempting to define concepts^[26]. As mentioned previously, Chekhov presents his subtext through dialogue, through which we find meaning. For example in Act III there is a dialogue between Trofimov and Madame Ranevsky,

Trofimov: For perhaps the first time in your life, you're allowed to stare truth frankly in the face.
Mme Ranevsky: Truth? What's that? Perhaps you can see it, your eyes are young. I look and I see nothing^[27].

The Cherry Orchard takes the form of a discussion through the logical progression of argument, seen through differing perspectives of the characters. Modes of reasoning and thought follow this linear pattern in that it lets the audience follow along with the play. *The Cherry Orchard*, as with other Chekhov plays, is seen as dialectic, in that it takes you and shows you what is going on in the dialogue. **There is no hidden agenda but to find meaning with the information that is being presented to you from the dialogue.** In Act I Firs describes the processes of drying the cherries - which no longer happens^[28]. This is clearly talking about a business that no longer functions but can also be referring to Firs himself who is aging, deaf and his role is becoming more redundant. On a wider scale this is also referring to the loss and change to the old order occurring across Russia. A different method of presenting information in a space, in this case theatre, is a system of reasoning called didactic or didacticism, both words originated in ancient Greece. For comparison with *The Cherry Orchard* and Chekhov, this work will consider the well-known German playwright Bertolt Brecht who favored using didactics in his plays. Brecht created the 'Lehrstücke' epic theatre^[29] with which he wanted the audience to distance themselves from the action on stage. Chekhov works in a similar way but his distancing effect was based around comedy. The characters in *The Cherry Orchard* each have their own little foibles, and show "divergence from the norms"^[30], Gayev with his sweets for example which he turns to when he feels uneasy.^[31] However, as you are able to identify with the characters, the audience needs to decide whether they are laughing with or laughing at the characters. Both systems of reasoning

hold some kind of judgement and the audience have to decide for themselves. The two methods of didactics and dialectics are different to each other but work in a similar way in that they are trying to show and teach the audience about the social and economic climate of the present. Didactics works in a way that openly shows meaning in a given context, for example in Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* or *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, a perspective is offered to the audience through the means of signs of gesture or gestus[32] as the actors make meaning clear through physical movements. Movement would be over exaggerated and comedic; this works through a distancing effect, blocking the audience from being attached to the production or as Brecht would say an "Alienation Effect/ Verfremdungseffekt." [33] Scenes would open up with a narration of what is going to happen in the scene. Chekov's comedy occurs through characterization and dialogue hence the audience learns through dialectical methods. Dialectics is more subliminal as we do not realize we are actually taking something in. Didactics though work in a direct way and we are shown as a clear example and are expected to form an opinion on it. For example, in vaudeville fashion in Act I of *The Threepenny Opera*, the play opens with an introduction to the character Peachum. A sign is shown on stage from the style of silent film, as an interlude to the proceedings of the scene coming.

"To combat the increasing callousness of mankind J. Peachum, a man of business, has opened a shop where the poorest of the poor can acquire an exterior that will touch the hardest of hearts." [34]

Brecht's plays show their message in obvious form or in the aesthetic action seen on stage. An example from *The Threepenny Opera* from the stage directions in Act III, scene seven. shows us how to feel about a girl:

"Mrs. Peachum goes out with the beggars. The beggars, except for the girl with a sign 'a victim of military tyranny', hide with their things upstage right behind the clothes rack, Enter Brown and constables.

Brown: Here we are and now, Mr Beggar's friend drastic action will be taken. Put the derbies on him, Smith. Ah, here are some of those delightful signs. To the girl: 'A victim of military tyranny' - is that you? [35]"

This also helps Brecht keep his audience distanced so they can question the details of what they are seeing.

But what is Chekov trying to show us? It is life in the early 20th century Russia, for example in Act II Anya says, "*Why do I care less about the cherry orchard than I used to?*" [36] She then goes on to be joined by Trofimov in a dialogue about the land of the cherry orchard. It also has elements of Socratic Dialogue in that Anya is questioning her own upbringing. The play also shows us the aftermath of the 19th century and the fore coming events of pre industrialization and a hint of the Russian Revolution. Since we know that the Russian Revolution occurred, the modern audience as we know it turns into a role of a clairvoyant.

Through the play tensions are raised, and the sound of a breaking string[37] is heard in the background, symbolizing a high tension in the atmosphere that has finally snapped.[38] This can symbolize any number of things but is highly symbolic as it signifies a change in tone of the play. Chekov unlike Brecht has no political standpoint[39] and it is difficult to pin down what his philosophy on life is[40]. The poignancy of *The Cherry Orchard* is in the dialogue, there isn't a clear side on which to place yourself as the characterization means the audience feels sympathy for the characters on either side of the coin. You feel sorry for the aristocracy and you feel for the underprivileged surfs and the peasantry, whereas Brecht, on the other hand, leaves your mind open and lets you become detached but see things as they are. This allows the audience to see the questions that politicize circumstances so that they may become aware of the climate. Chekhov wants you to become attached to the characters; this detachment and attachment makes an interesting contrast.

Even if the cultural and political dichotomies are different between early 20th century Russia and 21st century UK, the feelings that *The Cherry Orchard* generates in the audience are the same. For example Trofimov talks to Pischik in Act III, “*You know, if all the energy we directed towards ‘find the money’ and ‘paying for it’ had been put to some other end, we could have... re-made the universe by now.*”[41] The ideology of Brecht is Marxist which tackles an issue head on and puts it on the table for discussion. Chekhov in contrast uses indirect action and Chekov tackles an issue not from head on but from the side, “Chekov’s characters exist in the gap between merge with the object and separation of the subject, and thus also between past and future.”[42] There is a gap not being directly discussed, the gap being the subtext the play discusses and this can be a number of things depending in the viewing experience of each member of the audience. Daphna Ben-Shaul’s analysis of two productions in Israel notes the performance aspects. She refers to object relations theory and suggests there is a difference between what objects are being used for and the characters’ relationship to them. The concept that is being discussed is the representation of the void of reality[43].

The traditional, pre-industrial world of *The Cherry Orchard* can be regarded as an idyllic way of life, as opposed to what we live in now. We could see the current system as something imperfect. If we need another perspective then this play allows us to perhaps challenge the notions of the thinking of a past generation, and to juxtapose the rise and fall of Russia with our own civilization. When Trofimov talks of the problems in Russian society and that the intelligentsia, “*distract ourselves and everyone else in society from the real issues*”[44], this sentiment could easily still be relevant to the current UK. We too are easily distracted from the significant problems in our society. As our methods of learning through the process of viewing performances and textual analysis will tell us, Russia’s industrialization was formed in somewhat unstable foundations, just as we are now witnessing the disabling of most of our industries in the United Kingdom. The change in the selling of the house in *The Cherry Orchard* could come to represent the overwriting of old ways by the destruction of the past. This creates a shared catharsis, a common feeling, and in turn creates a void which is represented by the vision of a crumbling society with all the notions of materialization of an aristocracy that has everything to

lose. Whether we view our own society as crumbling remains to be seen and is open to debate. This void of reality symbolizes something but when we break it down we begin to lose something as we can never absolutely faithfully reproduce the author's intentions. But we also find a new perspective and one that is geared towards future of performance rather than the past of the text, "an act of voiding is a meeting point between acts of erasure or destruction of the past – acts which are also, at the same time, oriented towards a future action or a potential performance"[45]. Theatre works in its aesthetic beauty. It awakens the senses and the audience is embraced by the space, which encourages a response because the action is happening before you and your senses are at their peak in the moment.

The two methods of learning presented through dialectics and didactics, the difference between direct and indirect teaching, and the method used will affect the final result on the audience. The didactics used by Brecht point the audience towards a particular way of thinking about the society and how it is wrong. He was living in Germany before and during the rise of fascism and has a clear message he wants to convey which is questioning the political climate at the time. His plays use various techniques and devices to illustrate the problems of a corrupt society: there are signs at the start of scenes, songs commenting on the action and exaggerated gestures and ridiculous comedic characters. The characters motives are made explicit. Through this method Brecht presents his problem situation and with it makes it clear which answer he is presenting for the audience to agree with.

Chekhov in *The Cherry Orchard* presents a typical situation of the time. He uses comedy through characterizations but the characters are still real, believable and often sympathetic characters. For example, the characters have vices that have resulted in their loss of fortune. He presents different viewpoints with each of his different characters so the play includes Ranevsky who represents the old ideals along with the Marxist Trofimov. With this dialectic approach Chekhov presents the whole situation so that the audience can make their own judgements. In the same way that Veilleux states in relation to George Bernard Shaw, 'This approach allows for a complete hearing for the benefit of the theatre audience of all sides of a problem'[46] The effects are the same, we as an audience learn the same kind of information about existence. But as an audience member our positions are very different. Through didactics we are asked to believe a line of thought, with dialectics we are asked to follow a line of question, a line of logic, a line of learning and of reasoning.

Chapter Three

The previous chapter has illustrated how we learn about the socio-economic climate of the society through the course of dialectics. If we return to Cain's psychological model[47] The function of dialectics at its basic level is the function of conversation. But what else is represented via the play, what is the play trying to show us, what does it try to say about the society we live in? It is through the dialogue of Chekov that we learn about Russian society, which is the dialectics of the dramaturgy presented to us. It is the dialogue in Chekov's works that we must pay attention to because the world is constructed by the dialogue and the interaction between two or more characters. Semiotics points us towards the signified and the signifier. **The**

theatre audience witnesses the interaction between characters on stage. They are positioned between people as an observer in that the audience has to interpret the outcome of that conversation. The space in conversational gap between two voices is where the meaning is located. What is represented is the discourse to be considered. There is a class structure represented in *The Cherry Orchard* and this is reflected in our culture in the working class to the middle and upper class. When we think about productions of *The Cherry Orchard* and realism, some may think that realism is outdated, but the issues involved in the text remain and are issues that are still pertinent. Valency comments, “Chekov’s drama, like Ibsen’s, represents a world in transition [48]” thus representing a different facet to the audience and providing a new perspective through which to perceive Chekov’s meaning.

Recent productions of *The Cherry Orchard* have tried to represent on stage the many facets of the play: removing the walls of the house, the placement of objects, and altering the artistic action have increased the symbolist nature of the play itself, whilst other productions have moulded the play to specific country’s own sensibilities. Each country has its own cultural identity and the play can be directed and constructed to suit cultural tastes as the theme of change and loss are almost the same. Perhaps *The Cherry Orchard* challenges our notions of our cultural constructs because of the materiality of our culture. We can also identify ourselves with the characters and we too can be blinkered to what is going around us. The socio-political nature of the play can be reflected in any country it is performed in. For example when the play was performed in Barcelona with Anna Lizaran as Madame Ranevsky, ‘she seemed magically to localize and even domesticate the geographic and spatial parameters of Chekhov’s play, to fuse in a sweeping allegorical gesture a series of concepts at once very distant and very close to home’.[49]. Its resonance can be felt because the fall of an aristocratic family can be represented in any country. Having said that when put into a frame of reference of being performed in the United Kingdom for example, the theme seems to be timeless, because we have a monarchy, and we have a class structure and have seen a similar recent economic decline. Seeing this as loss may be misconstrued as a changing of the times but we need to come to terms with what our cultural identity is in order to make sense of reality. In a 2000 Spanish production by Lluís Pasqual, the play was received as an “elliptical inscription of identity (which) can be taken as a reflection of the ontological and aesthetic implications of our existence within a contemporary technological culture of disintegrating borders and transitional crossings and migrations.[50]”

The dictionary defines discourse as “verbal expression in speech or writing. A verbal exchange; or conversation. A formal, lengthy discussion of a subject, either written or spoken, The process or power of reasoning.”

Discourse can be observed in forms of communication including the use of spoken, written and signed language in contexts spanning from oral history to instant message, conversations to textbooks. This brings us to the purpose of theatre itself: if a play is challenging the existential nature of life itself and if a play like this resonates with the audience then it has achieved its purpose.

Nowadays stage realism seems out-dated. From its history of being performed in a socialist realist manner and since the “Radical Revisions[51]” of the 70’s, *The Cherry Orchard* has changed its on-stage persona, to comment on modern day issues. Peter Brook’s ideas were brought to light for *The Cherry Orchard* in 1981 and he experimented with the ideas of Brecht, Artaud and Grotowsky to play with the themes from his understanding of the play from his interpretation. As Loehlin states, “something loved has to be relinquished; disappointment has to be accepted[52]”. Brook removed the cultural and historical environment, using the space he had to illustrate the surroundings of our own environment, or in Brook’s production a dilapidated theatre. Brook’s production toured to Moscow, where the “political, geographic and cultural barriers are not what they seem to be at all.[53]” The changing in paradigmatic shifts may perhaps cover a change in generation to suit audiences. Brook’s new ideas on *The Cherry Orchard* has brought the play out of its Russian heritage and modeled it for a new modern audience. The way the play has been produced has changed its aesthetic values in order to change with the current climate, however productions have tried to remove the cultural and current issues of the day. Brook’s changed the discourse from Diachronic elaboration to a Diachronic Antithesis, from something we’ve seen before to a slight change of Chekov’s original values for the play itself. This may occur when there is a new idea or new technology or new light has been thought of by the director from something that we haven’t seen before in the play. In any given text it is possible to find new insight into the mind of Chekov. We may never truly know what Chekov meant for his play, but from some translations, a comedy in four acts is what is stated. Past productions have shown the Marxist aspect of *The Cherry Orchard*, and reading Trofimov’s character it could be suggested that the future of his character would go into the politics of the Russian Revolution. The aristocratic family have returned from Paris and don’t see the implications of what is happening around them, they have tried to escape their reality. Trofimov tries to bring them back to reality, for example he says in Act II,

And think of something else Anya: your father’s father, and his father, and his, were owners of serfs. They owned human lives, Anya. From every tree in your orchard there are people hanging, they peer at you through the branches...Owning other human beings is what has destroyed your line. [54]

The cherry orchard can also be seen as a symbol and even a character within the play. The red of the cherry orchard may be the redness of the former soviet flag; this could be the blood of the people of the land, working for the land.

Directors have chosen to downplay or increase the meaning of the characters making them more or less important. The work comes to life through the action of discourse and we only know about the environment through the process of discussion. We come to learn about the change in environment and what the characters perceive as problems with the environment and the characters dreams for the landscape. The ideas held in esteem by the characters are memories of the past, in a similar way to other realist plays such as Tennessee Williams’ *Glass Menagerie* and August Strindberg’s *Dream Play*, which are also based on dreams, wishes and hopes. *The Cherry Orchard*’s characters have dreams, wishes and hopes. This makes Chekov’s style different than

others. Chekov may be trying to allude to the Marxist thought that is brewing from the Marxian ideas of Trofimov, as the eternal student, analyzing life. Chekov here puts life under the microscope to analyze the fundamental ideals of Communism. *“Because. Our Orchard is all of Russia. Mmm? This vast, amazing continent, think of all the fine places there are in it.”*[55]

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote the communist manifesto[56]. They observed other cultures and saw two types of people in the modern society as they knew it, put simply, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Anya and her family are the bourgeoisie because they are aristocratic, whilst everyone around them, such as Lopakhin and Trofimov, are considered to be the proletariat. When Trofimov talks of the appalling conditions of the poor and the ineffectiveness of the intelligentsia[57], it would seem that Chekhov is advocating ideas of equality.



Chekov deconstructs the notions of Marxism. In order to see this, we must become reflexive and place ourselves in the audience to perceive our own lives and resonances with the narrative[58]. Chekov's plays write about the human condition and we must take into account this aspect of looking at it through the anthropological theatrical lens. We must consider that we are looking at the culture of class system with an aristocratic family coming to terms with its surroundings. Madame Ranevsky almost seems oblivious to the sufferings of the poor people around until the shock interruption of a peasant which unnerves the rest apart from Trofimov. Trofimov is asked his opinion of Lopakhin, who is the Nouveau Riche of Russia. This is an example of the change in Russia.

Trofimov: Well I think of you this way, Alex: (Lopakhin – Short for Alexandra – name of the Russian Tsar) you're rich already and nothing will stop you getting richer; in the larger perspective, based upon the scientific laws of nature, I'd say you were a 'necessary' in exactly the way that a wild animal that must devour its prey is necessary.[59]

This analysis of Lopakhin sets the tone for the discourse of the play, the discourse of present and future. It could be argued that Chekov is an absurdist by the play being about nothing but it is actually about something based on memory, hopes and dreams. The memory of the aristocracy does not recall the conditions of the serfs and peasants whilst the memory of Lopakhin is remembered as a life of struggle and a life of transition. All their lives are lives of transition and based upon this; the discourse can be summed up as change. The symbolic theme of the play is the cherry orchard and change is nature. When the season changes, the blossom turns a different color, in the spring the orchard is blossoming, around that time the fruit starts to appear, cherries in their connotations are the red blood, red blood of life. Red is also the color of anger and love,

the future socialist movement brewing at the time, turning eventually into communism, could symbolize the red socialist party eventually turning into the former Soviet Union. In the winter the trees drop their leaves and the cycle continues providing the theme of change in the play.

Chapter Four

There have been many productions over the last century or so performed in a variety of ways, starting with the tragic representation by director Konstantin Stanislavsky. Chekhov wrote letters to Stanislavsky and his wife to say that he had ruined the meaning of the play. Other choices have allowed the text to be presented with the symbolic elements more pronounced. James N. Loehlin examines the productions of Chekhov over a period of a century, whereas Daphna Ben-Shaul analyses two contemporary productions. Throughout all of these productions, the oddest and perhaps the most symbolic stage direction is the sound of a breaking string resonating in the characters and the audience. *The Cherry Orchard* works in its combination of aesthetics and dialectics. Chekhov wanted the play to be “A comedy in four acts” but Stanislavsky’s hermeneutic perspective turned it into a tragedy. We have to remember that Chekhov is Russian to understand his comedy of the characterization and gesture, such as Gayev naïvely talking to a bookcase[60], or the future of Ranevsky, her heart may be free of all that tied her down. The irony of the people who have the very solution to Ranevsky losing the house is presented to them in the ignored suggestions of Lopharkin, and even Firs the manservant who still treats Gayev as a child. Chekhov seems to suggest that he disapproves of the aristocracy, as in the play Firs is deaf, maybe to juxtapose that the aristocracy cannot hear the suggestions which would enable them to save the estate. Caricatures, stereotypes and irony may be what Chekhov’s comedy was. Gayev has a change of fortune in that he has white clay[61], perhaps a note of comedy in the ironic nature of fortunes changing

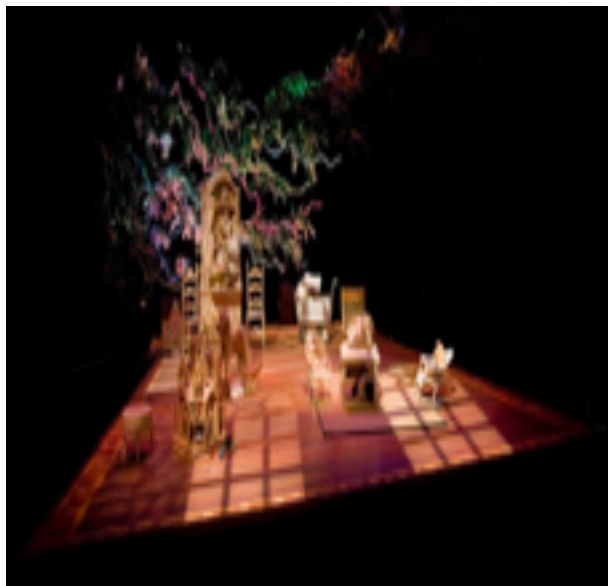


Some of those aspects of the play have been taken into account when it has been directed over the course of more than a century of the play’s existence. To look at how the play has evolved, James N. Loehlin’s study of plays in production, and journals and reviews will be considered. These works can help to further understand how the play has been scrutinized and illustrate the relationship with the text between actor and director and beyond to Chekhov himself. Has his intended meaning been achieved from the original text? Or has there been a new resurgence of meaning to be found within the text.

The play encompasses elements of realism and symbolism which is what makes the play so intriguing and a challenge to direct. The play has been performed in nearly every country on

earth starting with its debut in 1904, performed by the Moscow Art Theatre with Stanislavsky at the helm. Chekov sent letters to his wife Olga Knipper stating, “Stanislavsky has ruined my play” as Chekov was classed as an impressionist artist by Stanislavsky. “This is not a comedy, nor is it a farce as you have written, this is a tragedy, whatever escape toward a better life you open up in the last act... I wept like a woman. I wanted to control myself but I couldn’t. I hear what you say: “Look, you must realize this a farce”... no, for simple men this is a tragedy. I feel a special tenderness and love for this play.[62]” Other Russian performances have played with a variety of styles of presentation, including a communist production during the reign of Stalin. It stayed in this style in Russia with the communist undertones that was the hermeneutic response of the time. The productions at first in Russia and then in England were not received well in their debut. The play seems to have been constructed to fit the sensitivities of the audience itself, until the 1950’s when it was performed in Paris but still tailored towards a Parisian sensitivity. The play moved back to London in 1961 with a French director Micheal Saint-Denis using the productions of the past to give a rounded performance taking in elements of other productions and techniques.

Placing Chekov in the same stature as the Royal Shakespeare Company, as each evolvement progresses the understanding of the play seems to improve. Between the years of 1955 and 1974 the play was performed in Italy, whereupon studying the plays performed in France, England and from the Moscow Art Theatre, Giorgio Strehler was most innovative with the lessons learned from these productions and produced a definitive working of *The Cherry Orchard* for the 20th century. He places it within three layers of boxes, almost like a Russian doll, and we can almost also look at the play in three concentric circles of understanding. We can slightly alter the diagrammatic text from Strehler’s “Chinese Boxes[63]” approach and think of *The Cherry Orchard* as a tower. In the diagram, the first circle is the theme of change. Change is the environment the characters are placed in; the 2nd layer represents the social and cultural layer but arguably the social and cultural identity of the play where it is performed therein, socio political status may also be a factor but arguably as the play has evolved this ingredient features less. The top layer represents the purpose of the play, which is questionable as we can ask “Does this play offer us a perspective on our reality?” Strehler’s principle places reality on the third tier, the second tier for Strehler’s production emphasizes the history. The third tier is life.



Strehler wanted there to be a reduction in the Marxist undertones of the play’s predecessors. His focus was on the historical element of the change happening to a dying culture of aristocracy. He later went on to direct it again removing all cultural references by presenting the play with a surrealist flavor and in a Brechtian style of detachment “Because if one abandons oneself once can be sure that nothing of what one wants to express will be conveyed to the public.” Strehler picked upon the

multifaceted nature of the play. Strehler also adopted a minimalist approach to presenting the stage and how the characters behaved in that space, turning the play into an absurdist, modernist style production.

Moving into the late 20th century, whilst Peter Brook was experimenting with performing *The Cherry Orchard* on a carpet in a dilapidated theatre, Peter Stein tried to return to Stanislavsky's naturalistic style. Based on Stanislavsky's production notes, Stein created a spectacle and what he believed to be Chekov's aesthetic quality to the production. Stein created an absurd piece making the Orchard into a character itself, making the play a canvas of symbolism.

The Cherry Orchard over the years has become a play that has been brought to bare the stage because it is concerned with the process of change and it has been used to highlight "confronting tensions"[64] according to the analysis of James N. Loehlin. There have been many productions that have accentuated the surrealist side of Chekov, the absurdist side and the comedic side of *The Cherry Orchard*. The British productions have tried to have a conservative approach to the play and dress the actors in period costume. Most of the productions according to Loehlin try to emulate and juxtapose the production to the country it is performed in. Other productions have tried to withdraw its cultural heritage by adapting it to their needs, and also to reflect the political traumas of a society struggling to cope with an ever changing environment with all its unfairness, poverty and trials and tribulations. The play has been performed in Japan and each country adapts it to their own needs with influences of their own culture plus the influences of past productions.

Chapter Five



Through the discourse of *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekov's analysis of life through his characters can be used to discuss the issues about the present climate. It can raise questions about our own lives and our present reality. We use theatre as a way of seeking to understand our own existence and it can offer a new perspective on the way we live and help us see what is more important to our lives. If we place ourselves within the theatre setting we are confronted with what we expect it to be: a stage, some actors and maybe a few props, but the message that is in *The Cherry*

Orchard is how people cope with changes in society. The characters in the play are questioning their lives and their role in it. Chekov's psychoanalytical discourse through the mode of dialectical reasoning uses direct question and answer conversation like Socrates but focuses in on

an aspect of life which affects us personally. The character that Chekov uses in this regard is Trofimov because he is questioning the aristocracy over their place in society.

“We talked about many things and agreed on none of them. All right. You people talk about the proud man as though the concept were in some way mystical. It’s possible you’re right, for yourselves anyway. Yet if we choose to look at it in basic terms and avoid sophisticated complications, we have to ask: What has man to be proud about?” [65]

From this question it is possible to analyze theatre with a Socratic Analysis. The relationship between the audience and the performance on stage is where meaning to reality is found. The people who are viewing the performance can make an answer to this, as with other questions about what is truth? [66] a line delivered by Ranevsky. Whenever a new performance is produced by a director, whilst they cannot completely re-create what Chekov intended, new meaning is found within the text.

The way that Socratic Dialogue for Anton Chekov works is that “*Chekhov’s characters exist in the gap between mergence with the object and separation of the subject*” [67]. For Socratic Dialogue, the gap meant in this dissertation relies upon the audience’s answer to the questions posed in *The Cherry Orchard*. In the space of theatre we know that there are actors pretending to be other people, but there is a relationship between the audience and what Chekov puts there, and that relationship is the gap. Aristotle’s poetics state that Socratic conversations draw a pre-cursory parallel between discussing life and theatre [68]. In modern society theatre can be our place of discovery into questioning reality. The dialogues between Plato and Socrates are a mode of enquiry into the form of a philosophical question. The theory this dissertation is based around is Rebecca Bensen Cain’s dramatic analysis of Socratic Method, through which Plato created a drama that allows discussion about important life questions. “The silent presence of the audiences of listeners and bystanders from within the dramatic context puts a literary frame around the dialogue.” [69] *The Cherry Orchard* is similar and challenges reality and the audience into questioning this reality and therefore we are able to find depth in Chekov’s work. With this in mind, modern theatre is our method of inquiry which makes *The Cherry Orchard* one of many plays to be relevant to a 21st century audience. It still manages to achieve the effect of Socratic dialectical methods of reasoning, in an environment that is built for everyone and in a place that has a purpose. It brings us closer to the truth and nature of what is theatre.



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