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The Cherry Orchard: Critical Analysis
The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov is about a Russian family that is unable to prevent its beloved estate from being sold in an auction due to financial problems. The play has been dubbed a tragedy by many of its latter producers. However, Chekhov labeled his play a farce, or more of a comedy. Although this play has a very tragic backdrop of Russia's casualty-ridden involvement in both World Wars and the Communist Revolution, the characters and their situations suggest a light-hearted tone, even though they struggle against the upcoming loss of the orchard.

Apathy and passivity plague the characters and contribute often to the comic side of things. Sometimes, however, the passivity erupts the tragic flaws of the characters as they fail to save the estate. Another theme of The Cherry Orchard is the thin line between reality and outer appearance between which the characters cannot distinguish. Although indirect, this confusion provides the play yet again with comedy. On the contrary, the confusion is also seen as another tragic flaw of the characters contributing to the downfall of the estate and its orchard. Another theme Chekhov portrays is the effect of choice and free will.

In some circumstances this is the ultimate form of tragedy, depending on the outcome. With this, Chekhov succeeds in confusing tragedy and comedy in his final play The Cherry Orchard. Chekhov's characters in The Cherry Orchard contribute greatly to the comedy.

The action takes place on a Russian estate belonging to Mrs. Ranevsky. There is a debate over finances and a wealthy businessman named

Lopakhin, whose father was a serf on the estate, thinks of a way to solve the financial problems.

The family, however, seems to ignore the problem of losing the estate. This is the first instance of comedy in that the family chooses to ignore the problems while a wealthy businessman pleads with them to take action. The family continues to ignore the future for the estate as personalities are developed in each of the characters. A very comical character is the clerk Yepikhodov, also known as "Twenty-two Calamities." In his entrance he stumbles over a chair while babbling at whatever comes to his mind. First, a senile manservant, is the next to add comic elements as he hobbles across the stage also talking to himself. As if the characters themselves weren't funny enough, their interaction and dialogue between each other is just as comical. Gayev, Mrs.

Ranevsky's brother, continues to spit out billiard shots as the conversation continues, after which he weeps over the nursery's bookcase. Pishchik, a neighbor who is also in financial struggle, grabs Mrs. Ranevsky's pills out of her hand and swallows them all for no apparent reason.

Again in this scene First mutters to himself as he trails off of the conversation taking place. The characters, it seems, are being warmed up for some sort of comic routine. Yet through this dialogue, unpleasant truths spring forth.

The mortgage has not been paid in a while due to Mrs. Ranevsky being broke. And while Mrs. Ranevsky was in Paris, Varya has not been paying the mortgage. This is somewhat tragic because the estate is now going to be lost because of Mrs. Ranevsky and Varya not being able to pay off the estate's

debts. When Lopakhin proposes his idea the family finds it impractical and Gayev even calls the idea “ utter nonsense” (Chekhov 226-296).

Pishchik also reveals that he too is going to be losing his estate due to an unpaid mortgage. Looking for a loan from Mrs. Ranevsky, he is denied. This is the first instance of tragedy. The character’s actions, moreover, are the comical focus in the play. It seems as though Chekhov gives the characters an awareness of their faults, and their actions reinforce these faults, as though the characters had forgotten them.

For example, Mrs. Ranevsky pities herself for her carelessness with money, then immediately bestows one of her last gold coins to a beggar. Another example of a character’s inability to suppress foolishness is Yepikhodov’s role of the “ unfortunate clod” (Galens 21-39). He continues to stumble over furniture in each of his appearances.

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