

# Anton chekhov's portrayal of 18th century russian culture in the play the cherry ...

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Anton Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* was written in 1903. It concerns an aristocratic Russian landowner who returns to her family estate, which includes a large and well-known cherry orchard. Just before it is auctioned to pay the mortgage. Unresponsive to offers to save the estate, she allows its sale to the son of a former serf; the family leaves to the sound of the cherry orchard being cut down. The story presents themes of cultural futility - both the futile attempts of the aristocracy to maintain its status and of the bourgeoisie to find meaning in its newfound materialism. The socio economic Russian forces at the start of the 20th century, which also include the ascent of the middle class after the eradication of serfdom in the mid-19th century and the down turn of the aristocratic power.

The play projects the cultural conflict of the beginning of the 20th century in Russia. With a allusion directly connected to the history. Chekhov displays the changing Russia with " slice of life" in the play. The play is an understatement of constant changes in traditional values and not only a display of Russian life. In the play, every character has their own nature, which symbolizes their social level in the society of Russia. But these characters distinguish themselves into two sides, which are conservators and investors; therefore, they conflict each other in opinion. The following developments will begin with an outlook of *The Cherry Orchard* to acknowledge the basic concept of the play. The second part is culture in change that explains historical background of modern Russia. Third by a contrasting method, the main idea of this part is an illustration of conflict. And, in the fourth section, explaining symbolic meaning of *The Cherry Orchard* is an approach to highlight the conflict. Finally, the prospective

development of different groups of characters is another contrast that echoes their attitudes in the beginning.

The development of drama in the cherry orchard is parallel with the evolution of history in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. Chekhov decides to divide the people in the orchard in various ways so that the selling of the cherry orchard has a symbolic meaning for each class. primarily, there are three classes of characters in The Cherry Orchard. Group one are the aristocrats that control with money and power; Lopakhin and Ranevsky belong to this category. The cherry orchard, to them, is merely an investment tool. Group two are the kind of people to understand the change in situation but have no power to avert the selling of the orchard, These people have their sense of duty like Trofimov. And the third group, don't have either power or knowledge but they sense what is happening and feel defeated about it, a perfect example of this is "Firs"

The framework is chronologically developing in "The Cherry Orchard", and historical evolution. The framework reveals the changing traditional culture of Russia. The action of the play is measured by the outside pressure on the estate. In Act One, the cherry orchard is in danger of being sold, in Act Two it is on the verge of being sold, in Act Three it is sold, and in Act Four it has been sold. Each act symbolizes every stage of change. In Russian history, the emancipation of the serfs and the development of industrial capitalism exerted considerable influence on the various spheres of Russian cultural life during the reigns of Alexander II and Alexander III. In 1712, St. Petersburg became the new capital of Russia. With geographic advance of seaport

position and the promotion of empire rulers, the western civilization was easily imported from abroad. Some elements of the importation modernized Russia and made the country became a strong one. But some changed people's thought and reconstructed cultural pattern. New ideas, such as liberty and capitalism kept spreading and influencing Russia. As a result, on 19 February 1861 the emancipation of the serfs was decreed. Serfs were liberated. With the increasing of their wealth, they gradually promoted their social positions and had powerful influence.

In the end of the nineteenth century, the capitalism was in conflict with the traditional value. There was a conflict between new and old, ideal and reality, as well as hope and predicament, which had troubled Russians for a long time. Thus, in the play, Ranevsky and Lopakhin, have very practical reasons to deal with the real estate. Ranevsky is highly esteemed in her social position; whereas, her luxurious life leads her family to suffering. In order to survive, she must sacrifice the ancient heritage, the cherry orchard. And Lopakhin is the one who purchases the orchard. Ironically, he used to be a servant of the family. Their merchandise suggests that the new idea, which is capitalism, is destroying the old system of Russia. The new culture endangers their co-existing environment.

The play is about the purchase of a great imperial estate by former peasant who at one time worked on it, but Chekhov makes nothing political of this; rather, it is emphasized that the man who buys it had no intention of doing so, and Chekhov takes immense to subvert any easy alignment of the spectator either with the old or the new owner.

As a counterpart of capitalism, Trofimov is a sublime character. His speech is educated and refined, and it is filled with imagery and metaphors. He is a learned man who has the awareness of the dangerous situation of the orchard. As a young man, he is much more ambitious; he could strive for orchard's existence, but he failed because he has no power with him.

Trofimov is a hero who stands for old value, ideal, and hope. In the end of the play, when the cherry orchard has been sold, Trofimov, Firs, and other persons, could do nothing but sigh. But the contrast is sharpened by Trofimov's poetic speech and Lopakhin's vicious behavior. In other words, their conduct highlights the conflict between elitist culture and secular culture. It not only ridicules but also showcases the irony in the characters.

Whether Madam Ranevsky, Lopakhin or Trofimov, they have their respective definition about the cherry orchard. They represent different types of cultures; therefore, they always conflict with each other in ideology. To them, the orchard has its symbolic meaning. The orchard is the Promised Land, Utopia or Eden. As a landowner, the orchard should be an extremely important place to Madam Ranevsky because it is where she grew up.

However, being bounded by debts, she has to sell the beautiful land so that she could pay for her debts and go on searching another promised land.

Consequently, the orchard is no longer her land. After that, Lopakhin takes the land; it is his new promised land. He is finally able to sell the land, to invest in the land, and to snatch higher benefit from it. But it is his greedy abyss that makes the result becomes the suffering of change.

So the orchard becomes a victim of Lopakhin's utopian ideas. In comparison to him, Gayev is a true realist. His assumptions and presumptions are realized at the end: the aunt sends the exact amount of money which Gayev predicts; the cherry orchard sold for the debts, as Gayev foresaw in the beginning. Finally, after selling the estate both Gayev and Ranevsky seem to feel relieved.

To sum up, by the superiority of capitalism, the "nouveau riche" finally outshines the traditional group who they co-exist with. There is nothing wrong with pursuing fortune, yet it is absolutely reasonable to protect the cherry orchard. The real problem is that the nouveau riche seriously ignore the principle of co-exist. They cause an imbalance between spirit and material. Moreover, The Cherry Orchard is thus, in part, a "generation" play, making the conflict between the old and the young, the substance of a thousand dramatic themes. The beginning itself is the end, whereas, the end itself is a new beginning. The structure of the play is not complex, yet it states the historical background of modern Russia. The western culture swamps from one to another and it finally arrived in Russia. It speared out on the vast landscape. It changed Russians' life and shacked old value. The immense Russian territory ends up being the battlefield of two types of cultures.