

The Cherry Orchard – Questions

Rajesh Swaminathan
21-Feb-2005

1. There is undoubtedly an emotional attachment that works at the psychological level between the family members and the cherry orchard. Mrs. Ranevsky in particular cannot come to terms with her reality and refuses to accept her son's death. Referring the orchard to as a 'nursery' serves to maintain this morbid sentimentality in Mrs. Ranevsky's mind.
2. In any play, and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* is no exception, costume is a powerful symbol for a character's personality. Lopakhin's costume proves his business-like mentality; in addition, he still walks around with his work boots, which tells us that Lopakhin hasn't forgotten his past.
3. Lyubov Andreevna possesses the typical traits of a land-owner since she doesn't seem to want to concern herself about matters that don't relate to her. She may appear domineering in the beginning, but quickly proves herself to be polite, innocent and understanding to both her brother's and two daughters' opinions. She is sometimes impractical, but this trait is often shadowed by the rapid events that run past her in so short a time.
4. To an extent, the character of Firs, Gaev and Tofimov can be called comic since they help add a sense of light-hearted humour to the play. As a result, Lyubov's comicalness is diminished as she is the only character, besides Lopakhin, who really shows genuine concern about the cherry orchard.
5. *The Cherry Orchard* contains a concise characterization of *social realism*. We already know that Chekhov looked forward to a new and happier society: Russia, like much of the rest of Europe, was ceasing to be an agrarian society and moving towards a more industrialized one. The theme of the play is to convey that change is difficult and painful, but nevertheless inevitable.
6. Gaev, at least at the end of Act 1, poses as one of the realistic characters who suggests a pragmatic proposition to solve the problem of the orchard. As the play progresses however, his opinions, bizarre as they are, are diluted, and are of no real consequence. One would consequently be advised to think twice before acting upon suggestions from a person like Gaev. We simply cannot take his speeches quite at face value. Gaev frequently takes refuge in his thoughts about billiards, and his habit of eating candy at an age like his does not enhance his stature. His very emphatic speech to the book-shelf forces us to question his mental sanity and his ambition at the end to take up a job at a bank only helps procure feelings of pity and sympathy for poor Gaev.

7. Firs, in a funny way, is a rather major minor character. His most important responsibility in the play is to supply the audience with the all-important background information. Firs has lived at the house adjoining the cherry orchard for almost ever, and he acts as the glue between Mrs. Ranevsky and the orchard. It seems that no one really pays a great deal of attention to what Firs has to say, much like the fool in *King Lear*, but if we were to carefully listen to what Firs has to say, we learn more about Mrs. Ranevsky, her brother Gaev and her daughter Anya. He also helps add some humour to the play which helps extenuate the family's problems a bit.
8. The sound of the breaking string, although insignificant at first, helps symbolize the separation between Mrs. Ranevsky's family and the cherry orchard. The gap between these two elements in the drama has widened and the connections cut-off. The ownership of the orchard has switched hands, and like a broken string, stands without the slightest relation to either the family or the members who reside in it.
9. There is no one type of comedy. *The Cherry Orchard*, without hesitation, is certainly not a Shakespearean type of comedy. On the same note, the play is not a tragedy either since it does not contain certain of its important characteristics, namely death. But we do not necessarily require death to call the play a tragedy. Marriage might have compelled us to call the play a comedy, but this too does not happen, although there are floating proposals around the place. At the end of the play, we feel a sense of leisure. On the other hand, some characters beg us to empathize with them, which is an indication of tragedy. Some scenes may be called a farce due to the apparent humour involved in them, but the episode where Tofimov falls downstairs is certainly not farcical, if not serious. In the end, we are justified in calling *The Cherry Orchard* a magnificent tragicomic as it contains prominent elements of both.

█