

Chapter 7. *The Cherry Orchard*: Complete Synthesis of Vision and Form

Today, as never before, Chekhov productions argue with one another, and each one of them provokes discussion. This is because everyone has his own Chekhov. This is true of producers [directors] and actors, and also of audiences and critics. They do not always see eye to eye ... But let us pause and ask ourselves: why are there such divergent interpretations, and are they, in general, justified? Perhaps there does exist a standard 'reading of Chekhov' for all time, a model that can be violated only at one's peril? Does this diversity of interpretation have something to do with producer's [director's] license, or is it prompted by the inherent features of Chekhov's plays with their polyphony and counterpoint, so that different people hear different voices? (Marianna Stroyeva)¹

Chekhov, to sum up, transcended the superficiality that often adheres to optimistic literature and at the same time escaped the morbidity that besets pessimistic profundity; and he kept a characteristic balance in other important respects ... [It is by] remembering especially the plain yet somehow elusive fact that there was ever sympathy in his comedy and some degree of comedy in his sympathy, that we may hope to bring his plays authentically to the stage. (John Gassner)²

A month after Chekhov had written to the actress Mariya Petrovna Lilina informing her that his new play, *The Cherry Orchard*, 'has turned out not a drama, but a comedy, in places even a farce',³ her husband Stanislavski wrote to the playwright and informed him that the play 'is not a comedy, nor a farce as you have written, this is a tragedy, whatever escape towards a better life you open up in the last act'.⁴ So began the interpretative controversy that has continued to this day. Unfortunately, the quarrel about which genre more aptly describes *The Cherry Orchard* has generated more heat than light. Generations of directors and critics have placed themselves in warring factions that mirror the original polarised positions set up by Chekhov and Stanislavski. As Gilman rightly points out:

... from the beginning of its life on stage and in the critical and popular minds the play has swung between interpretative polarities: naturalism and poetry, social lament and social prophesy, more controversially comedy and something very close to a tragic mood ... What we might call 'the comic versus the melancholic' became a debate at the start.⁵

In the West, the belief that Chekhov was a deeply pessimistic writer developed as a result of critics and directors in Europe and America slavishly following the Moscow Art Theatre interpretations made famous by Stanislavski and

Nemirovich-Danchenko. Writing in 1966, Nicholas Moravcevich argued that the West developed 'a full-fledged cult of Chekhovian gloom', which was not challenged till after World War II. As a result, 'a whole generation of theatre-goers spent their lives believing that the Chekhovian play calls for a refined sensibility, melancholy disposition, red eyes, and a handkerchief'.⁶ Like Gilman, Moravcevich saw interpretative approaches to Chekhov in terms of polarities. From the time when the Moscow Art Theatre produced *The Seagull*:

... the critical controversy over the rightful interpretation of Chekhovian plays, like a great pendulum, completed two full turns. Its initial swing towards the *larmoyante*, mournful, and somnolent gained momentum through the productions of Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko, whose popular success easily obliterated the author's occasional feeble protests that the Moscow Art Theatre directors and ensemble very frequently saw in his works dimensions and themes he had no intention of revealing.⁷

According to Kenneth Tynan, British versions of Chekhov in the immediate post Second World War years were even more *larmoyante* [tearful] than those created by the Moscow Art Theatre. Indeed, when the Russian company brought their production of *The Cherry Orchard* to London in 1958, Tynan used their interpretative approach as the norm by which to judge the failings of English Chekhov. In particular Tynan attacked the way that productions in Britain tended to turn the Russian play into a distinctively upper-class English affair:

The great thing about the Moscow Art Theatre's production of *The Cherry Orchard* is that it blows the cobwebs off the play. And who put them there? Why we ourselves. We have remade Chekhov's last play in our image ... Our *Cherry Orchard* is a pathetic symphony, to be played in a mood of elegy. We invest it with a nostalgia for the past which, though it runs right through our culture, is alien to Chekhov's. His people are country gentry: we turn them into decadent aristocrats. Next, we romanticise them. Their silliness becomes pitiable grotesquerie; and at this point our hearts warm to them. They are not Russians at all: they belong to the great line of English eccentrics ... Having foisted on Chekhov a collection of patrician mental cases, we then congratulate him on having achieved honorary English citizenship. Meanwhile the calm, genial sanity of the play has flown out the window.⁸

Trevor Griffiths, whose controversial 'new English version' of *The Cherry Orchard* was directed by Richard Eyre in 1977, attests to the resilience of the 'pathetic symphony' approach to the play that Tynan had pilloried in the late nineteen-fifties. Griffiths felt alienated from the kind of Chekhov that 'especially from the early sixties on ... had come to seem, in his content as much as his form, inalienably bound up with the fine regretful weeping of the privileged fallen on hard times'.⁹ As a Marxist, Griffiths was less worried about questions

of genre than about political questions. What he objected to in previous English translations and productions was that they created a 'reactionary' rather than a 'progressive' Chekhov. This Griffiths attributed to the fact that: 'For half a century now, in England as elsewhere, Chekhov has been the almost exclusive property of theatrical class sectaries for whom the plays have been plangent and sorrowing evocations of an "ordered" past no longer with "us", its passing greatly to be mourned.'¹⁰

Griffiths' political interpretation of *The Cherry Orchard* was an attempt to reactivate the element of social criticism that he felt was implied in Chekhov's play and was a reaction against those productions that transformed the play into a sentimental elegy. Griffiths' version of the play, by not allowing audiences to feel enough for the characters whose world was passing away, lost some of the essential Chekhovian balance between the happiness associated with future hopes and the sadness associated with the loss of the past. Nevertheless, his version of *The Cherry Orchard* was salutary because it restored the element of hope and the possibility of social improvement that had been totally lacking in earlier English productions.

David Magarshack's reaction against the kind of tearful productions that Griffiths hated was to attack them for being too gloomy. He has argued strongly that Chekhov's plays should be interpreted as comedies. Unfortunately his sensible advice has, on occasion, been taken too far. Moravcevic claims that as a result of following Magarshack's approach, 'everything serious and sombre that the author ever expressed in his plays was deliberately minimised and tucked beneath the alleged optimism and skittish boisterousness of the Chekhovian comic muse.'¹¹

The positive effect of Magarshack's emphasis on the comedic elements in Chekhov has undoubtedly been that productions that follow his approach tend to include some humour and even optimism. It is now rarer to find directors presenting totally lugubrious interpretations of a play such as *The Cherry Orchard*. However, there have been certain directors who have pushed Magarshack's corrective idea to an extreme. We find some productions of Chekhov's play that reduce it to farce.

In 1977, Andrei Serban directed the play in New York. Within an impressionistic setting, the production, while not avoiding the play's class politics, emphasised its farcical elements. There were scenes of almost slapstick physicality. Senelick commented: 'understatement was less common than athleticism: Dunyasha performed a striptease and at one point tackled Yasha like a football player.'¹² The overall effect, according to Senelick, was that, 'The visual images were often striking, but the meaning was often perverse, and the result unmoving'.¹³ The cause of this failure to move the audience almost certainly lay in the overemphasis on comedy which, as Bergson noted, requires

from spectators an 'anaesthesia of the heart'. Rocco Landesman is probably correct when he asserts: 'Serban takes Chekhov's statement that *The Cherry Orchard* is a comedy too literally'. Arguing that Serban has turned Chekhov's *comédie humaine* into the *Comédie Française*, Landesman points out how both the staging and the interpretation are overstated. The production presented yet another polarised reading of the play that made it ludicrous rather than comic:

... literalness is the problem with every aspect of this production. To show that the characters are all children, Serban has them play with toys; to present the threat of a new, strange world, Serban puts in a physical stranger in the background. When Gayev speaks of 'glorious nature' the backdrop of smokestacks gets brighter. But worst of all is Serban's Trofimov, whose vision of the coming brave new world is literalized in a Soviet army overcoat with red lapels. He and Anya, it seems, go off together to start a new and better society.¹⁴

Possibly one of the most extreme examples of the tendency to privilege the comical, or even farcical, aspects of *The Cherry Orchard* at the expense of the more sombre elements is provided by Joel Gershmann's 1986 postmodern production. In what the director called 'a comic *Cherry Orchard* for the 80s', Gershmann almost totally destroyed the nexus between the playwright's play and this ninety-minute production of it. Senelick's description gives us some idea of just how far the director was willing to go in order to raise a laugh:

Spilling out of this cornucopia of Reagan-era pop culture was a Gaev obsessed by television rather than billiards, Anya and Varya played by men in drag, and Yasha and Firs their female counterparts. In the finale, Ranevskaya and her brother departed for the future carrying a giant American Express card, as Lopakhin entered with a buzzing chainsaw. The anarchic exuberance of iconoclasm provoked a good deal of laughter ...¹⁵

Magarshack's corrective to the gloom and doom interpretations of Chekhov may have been salutary, but when the comic aspects of Chekhov's plays are overemphasised, as they were in Gershmann's production, an equally unbalanced reading results. Examining this production, Ronald Leblanc attempted to answer the question: 'Does Gershmann's farcical production of *The Cherry Orchard* "liberate" Chekhov or does it instead "destroy" him?'¹⁶ His answer is that the production does both:

By emphasising the play's humorous elements, Gershmann's version certainly liberates the comic Chekhov from the Stanislavskian captivity of naturalism and psychological realism that long imprisoned his play. But in combining rock music, drug use, and sexual promiscuity with a highly emotional style of acting, the American director at the same time so modernised and vulgarised Chekhov that he rendered him virtually unrecognisable.¹⁷

Leblanc seems to me to have incorrectly analysed Gershmann's production. The comedy created by all of the business the director introduced did not so much 'liberate the comic Chekhov', as liberate the comic Gershmann. Furthermore, Leblanc incorrectly assumes that 'the comic Chekhov' cannot be liberated if one employs the 'psychological realism' that Stanislavski advocated. Just because Stanislavski's own use of 'psychological realism' was in the service of an overly lugubrious interpretation of Chekhov's play does not mean that it cannot be used in such a way as to allow for the comic aspects of the play to be realised on stage.

The problem with polarised approaches to Chekhov, be they the tragic approach popularised by Stanislavski or the comic approach encouraged by critics like Magarshack, is that they both lose the vital sense of balance between apparently conflicting polarities. In terms of characterisation, for instance, we need a both/and rather than an either/or approach. I have argued that Vershinin in *Three Sisters* should not be played as simply either 'an empty windbag' or 'a heroic visionary', but as a flawed human being with a worthwhile vision of the future. Similarly, in *The Cherry Orchard*, it is vital that the character Trofimov should not be played as either 'the heroic visionary Bolshevik' or as 'an emotionally immature student', but as a combination of both. Michael Frayn is one of the few writers to see that Chekhov presents characters like Trofimov from a dual perspective. Noting that in some English productions Trofimov had been played as a totally 'inadequate and immature personality', Frayn writes:

Chekhov plainly takes Trofimov seriously as a man who holds sane and genuine convictions for which he is prepared to suffer. But then to go to the opposite extreme, as was done in Trevor Griffiths' adaptation of the play and to turn him into a 'positive hero' in the Socialist Realist sense, is also an absurdity.¹⁸

The both/and approach to characterisation needs to be applied not just to individual characters but to the entire cast. This is part of what Raymond Williams is driving at when he argues that:

... the contradictory character, of the group and its feeling, has to be conveyed in the tone: a kind of nobility, and a kind of farce, have to co-exist. (This is not, by the way, a cue for the usual question: are we supposed to laugh or cry at such people and such situations? That is a servile question: we have to decide our response for ourselves. The point is, always, that the characters and situations can be seen, are written to be seen, in both ways; to decide on one part of the response or the other is to miss what is being said.)¹⁹

An audience is more likely to experience that complex response to his plays which, for want of a better term, we call 'Chekhovian', if this fusion of opposites is effected in performance. A number of critics and directors are aware of the

need for this fusion to be made apparent to audiences. Herbert Müller, for example, notes:

In his humanity [Chekhov] was ... more keenly aware at once of the ludicrous and the tragic aspects of man's folly and futility. Humor runs all through his serious drama. It is only slightly more pronounced in *The Cherry Orchard*, which he labelled a comedy, and which might be called the quintessence of tragicomedy.²⁰

Styan, perhaps more clearly than any other critic, sums up Chekhov's extraordinary achievement in *The Cherry Orchard*. He points out the difficulty that Chekhov faced in trying to achieve his desired sense of balanced ambiguity and the many ways in which, as we have seen, such a balance is easily lost in polarised interpretations of the play. Styan writes:

In *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov consummated his life's work with a poetic comedy of exquisite balance, but so treads the tightrope that his audience has a hard time keeping its wits. This ultimate exercise in Chekhovian comedy is a lesson in funambulism. If, like recent Soviet audiences watching the work of the Moscow Art Theatre, they want rousing polemics from Trofimov, they can hear them. If, like most Western audiences, they want to mourn for Mme Ranevsky and her fate, they can be partly accommodated. It is possible to see Lyuba and Gayev as shallow people who deserve to lose their orchard, or as victims of social and economic forces beyond their control. It is possible to find Anya and Trofimov far-sighted enough to want to leave the dying orchard, or terribly ignorant of what they are forsaking. But if production allows either the heroics of prophesy or the melodrama of dispossession to dominate, then all of Chekhov's care for balance is set at naught and the fabric of the play is torn apart.²¹

Chekhov's characters function on both objective and subjective levels. On the subjective level of the subtext, life may indeed appear tragic, since characters in Chekhov's later plays are sadly aware that they have wasted their lives. On the objective level of the text, however, these same characters often behave in a silly trivial manner that is essentially comic. The audience's perception of the inter-relationship between these two levels of reality creates Chekhovian synthetic tragi-comedy. Chekhov's tragi-comedy is synthetic because the tragic and comic dimensions of a character's behaviour are perceived at the same time. Vanya's entry with a bunch of flowers for Helen in Act III of *Uncle Vanya* is both tragic *and* comic. In a Shakespearean tragi-comedy, by contrast, there is a tendency to alternate serious and comic scenes.

Again, Chekhov's tragi-comedy is synthetic in the way that it deals with characters. In Chekhov, there is no clear separation into high and low characters

as occurs in a play such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Instead, each character combines traits that are both noble and ludicrous. As Karl Guthke comments:

... this device of internal character dichotomy realises its tragi-comic effect by exploring the two sides of the *dramatis persona* in such a way that they not only offset each other, but impart their aesthetic quality (comic and tragic respectively) to each other. Thus a ludicrously disproportioned physiognomy may make an isolated noble mind all the more tragic in its suffering while the contrast with the highly valuable human substances will make the shortcomings of the outward appearance all the more comical ...²²

One can readily see how, when dealing with a play such as *The Cherry Orchard* in which the land-owning gentry are dispossessed of their estates, a director like Stanislavski, with his wealthy merchant background, should quite naturally sympathise with those 'dispossessed' characters. It is equally clear how a playwright such as Chekhov, the grandson of a serf, whose ideal was personal freedom and who had 'squeezed the slave out of himself, drop by drop'²³ should have a much more ironic attitude to the demise of a highly privileged class.

Peter Holland's sociological analysis provides a partial explanation of Stanislavski's interpretation of the play. Holland, who sees Stanislavski 'imposing the values of his own class on Chekhov's play' argues that Chekhov's science-based 'gently liberalizing progressivism' was appropriated by Stanislavski, 'whose every instinct throughout his life was as reactionary as his theatre work was supposedly revolutionary and radical in its method'.²⁴

Robert Corrigan's attack on Stanislavski's misinterpretation of *The Cherry Orchard* is not couched in socio-political terms, but in terms of what he sees as the director's privileging of the actor over the playwright:

Because Stanislavski, in the final analysis, failed to distinguish between art and nature, because he was more concerned with creating *natural truthfulness* of character rather than expressing with *artistic rightness* the role of a character who served a specific function in the playwright's formulation of a statement about life in theatrical terms, it was inevitable that Stanislavski would be a failure as an actor and director of Chekhov's plays.²⁵

Like Holland, Corrigan's analysis is only a partial explanation of Stanislavski's misreading of Chekhov's play, and both critics are too extreme in their criticisms of the director. Stanislavski was not a totally insensitive man. What he saw in Chekhov's play was indeed there. There *is* a tragic element in his dramas and this element is to be located in the subtext that constitutes the inner life of his characters. It is perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the co-founders of the Moscow Art Theatre that they developed an acting system that allowed actors to play not just the externalised text, but also the hidden subtext. The

use of this system was the essential means required for the full realisation of Chekhov's plays. As Alexandr Skaftymov rightly observed:

K. S. Stanislavski and V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko detected the most significant principle of the dramatic development in Chekhov's plays, the so-called 'undercurrent'. Behind the surface of quotidian episodes and details they revealed the presence of a ceaseless inner intimate-lyrical current ...²⁶

Stanislavski was involved in an attempt to develop a naturalistic system of acting based on theories of human behaviour that were currently being propounded by psychologists such as Ribot and Pavlov. He was deeply interested in the hidden subjective reasons and causes for overt objective behaviour. Quite naturally, he was sensitive to this new inner reality, which in Chekhov tends to be tragic. Stanislavski's weakness, I believe, stems from the *overemphasis* he placed on this tragic subtext, which led him to encourage his actors to allow these darker elements to almost totally suppress the comic elements of the text.

A similar overemphasis on the subtext is to be found in Harvey Pitcher's critical analysis of Chekhov's plays. Pitcher recounts how Chekhov had been dissatisfied at the overly theatrical manner in which the actress played Sonya in the Moscow Arts Theatre production of *Uncle Vanya*: '[She] had at one point in Act III thrown herself at her father's feet and started to kiss his hand.' Pitcher proceeds to quote Chekhov's reaction, but his comment following Chekhov's statement reveals that Pitcher has only partially seen what the playwright was driving at:

'That's quite wrong,' he [Chekhov] commented, 'after all, it isn't a drama. The whole meaning, the whole drama of a person's life are contained within, not in outward manifestations ... A shot, after all, is not a drama, but an incident.' This is a helpful indication of Chekhov's general approach to playwriting, and suggests that his presentation of the characters' inner lives might be regarded as the central feature of Chekhov's plays.²⁷

'The ostensible action of *The Cherry Orchard* is very simple.'²⁸ What the audience sees is the presentation of a story in which a group of impoverished owners of an estate have gathered together in the vain hope that they can save the property. They reject a practical plan that, while saving them financially, would involve cutting down the orchard and demolishing the old house. As the owners of the orchard do nothing to save the estate, the orchard is sold to a rich man of peasant stock. The former owners and their children leave, expressing their various hopes about their future life.

The general structure of the play is built around a pattern that Chekhov used in all of his plays after *Ivanov*. It consists of an arrival, a sojourn, and a departure. 'The principal action of *The Cherry Orchard* is not dramatised.'²⁹ Behind the

humdrum life of the text, however, is an extremely complex story which, as Valency says:

... is told in snatches first by Anya, then by Lyubov Andreyevna herself. Nobody dwells on it. It is known to all the characters, and they have no desire to hear it again from anyone. It is an exposition without the slightest urgency.³⁰

There are, in fact, several stories which are not dramatised but which are alluded to. Mrs Ranevsky's love affair and her attempted suicide would have made the perfect subject for a Scribean melodrama. Every character has their own individual story which, though not dramatised, is mentioned indirectly in the play, and awareness of their stories helps to make the behaviour of each character comprehensible to an audience. For instance, a director must make an audience aware that the reason that 'the eternal student', Trofimov, has not yet finished his degree and has been thrown out of the university is not because of laziness but because of his political activities.³¹

A detailed analysis of the opening scene of the play reveals just how systematic Chekhov is in his depiction of the two lives of his characters. It also reveals the clues that he has provided for actors to assist them in portraying this duality of character. *The Cherry Orchard* opens in the nursery of the main house. It is near dawn and Lopakhin is in an obvious state of excitement and expectation:

LOPAKHIN. The train's arrived, thank God. What time is it?³²

Lopakhin's excitement is objectively shown to the audience, but the reason for it remains a hidden part of his subjective life. We immediately learn that Lopakhin had intended to meet the train on which Mrs Ranevsky and the rest of her entourage were expected to arrive, but that he had fallen asleep. The gap between Lopakhin's subjective intention to meet the train and the objective fact of his failure to do so is thus established by Chekhov, who then gives Lopakhin the play's first 'disguised soliloquy'. Although he is ostensibly talking to the maid Dunyasha, Lopakhin is essentially musing out loud to himself, especially since the maid is so preoccupied with her own inner life that she fails to listen to him. The first 'disguised soliloquy' provides for the audience the dramatically necessary exposition. More importantly, it establishes the existence of Lopakhin's inner life, his subtext, by allowing his normally hidden private hopes and beliefs to rise briefly to the visible surface of the text's dialogue. As Magarshack says:

... their inner life bursts through the outer shell of their everyday appearance and overflows into a torrent of words. It is this spontaneous and almost palpable transmutation into speech of hidden thoughts and deeply buried emotions that is perhaps the most subtle expression of dramatic action in a Chekhov play.³³

In the opening 'disguised soliloquy' of *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov was careful to provide a realistic motivation for Lopakhin's speech by making it seem

like the natural response to his already illustrated state of excitement. Lopakhin reveals part of the reason why he has risen before dawn to meet Liuba Ranevsky. He tells how, as a child, he had been a peasant on the Ranevsky estate. Liuba had shown sympathy towards him when his father had beaten him. Lopakhin, though he has now risen to be a rich and powerful man, has never ceased to be grateful to Liuba for her kindness:

LOPAKHIN. ... 'Don't cry, little peasant,' she said. 'You'll soon be right as rain.' [Pause.] Little peasant. It's true my father was a peasant, but here I am in my white waistcoat and brown boots, barging in like a bull in a china shop. The only thing is, I am rich. I have plenty of money, but when you really get down to it I'm just another country bumpkin. [Turns the pages of his book.] I was reading this book and couldn't make sense of it. Fell asleep over it. [Pause.]³⁴

This momentary closing of the gap between the two levels of reality, in which the subtext bubbles up into the text, provides the spectators with the information necessary for them to see another gap that will be of central importance later in the play. Objectively Lopakhin is a rich man, subjectively he is still a peasant.³⁵ The disjunction between his two lives is realised theatrically by creating an obvious gap between Lopakhin's elegant clothes and his gauche and clumsy movements. Lopakhin is aware of the gap between what he feels himself to be and what he is and has attempted to bridge the gap. The ignorant peasant attempts to educate himself, but fails. He can't understand the book he is reading. The gap between his aims and his achievement is emphasised by the fact that he not only fails to understand what he is reading but, having fallen asleep, also fails to meet the train.

Lopakhin now proceeds to upbraid the maid, Dunyasha:

LOPAKHIN. You're too sensitive altogether, my girl. You dress like a lady and do your hair like one too. We can't have that. Remember your place.³⁶

Lopakhin's observation is objectively correct and, as we find out later when Dunyasha reveals a little of her own inner life, she does have vague hopes of climbing socially. Her manner of dressing, her affected ladylike behaviour, epitomised by her 'fainting', her white lady's hands and her constant powdering of her nose are noticeably at variance with her actual social position. The absurdity of Dunyasha's pretensions operates as a parody of Lopakhin's situation. His style of dressing doesn't correspond with his behaviour. It is precisely his problem that he is not sure of his 'place' — peasant or rich man. Consequently, there is an ironic disparity between what Lopakhin says to Dunyasha and what he himself does. This disparity between what characters say and what they actually do helps to communicate Chekhov's dramatic world in which the characters' actions fail to live up to their aims.

The most extreme example of the kind of dislocation between the subjective and objective lives of the characters is provided by Yepikhodov, the accident-prone clerk, who enters immediately after Lopakhin's admonition of Dunyasha:

*Yepikhodov comes in carrying a bunch of flowers. He wears a jacket and brightly polished high boots which make a loud squeak. Once inside the room he drops the flowers.*³⁷

Yepikhodov seems, on the surface, to be a clown-like figure. His boots squeak, he drops the flowers, he breaks a billiard cue, he bumps into furniture, he finds blackbeetles in his kvass, he wakes up with an enormous spider on his chest and, to top it all, he talks in an extremely pretentious and silly manner. This walking disaster, who in some translations is given the nickname of 'Two and twenty misfortunes', cannot help appearing ludicrous to both the other characters and to an audience. Viewed from the outside, on the objective level, he is, as Magarshack describes him, 'a conceited half-wit who imagines himself a highly educated person because he possesses the bovine patience to wade through "learned" books he has not the brain to understand'.³⁸

But Yepikhodov, with his pretensions to learning and his absurd manner of speaking, is not simply the one-dimensional character who appears in the text. That is merely his objective manifestation; how he appears to others. His subjective inner life is far from farcical. He is, in fact, so unhappy with himself and his maladroitness that he seriously contemplates committing suicide, and it is for this reason that he carries a gun.

The manifestations of the gap between Yepikhodov's inner and outer lives are essentially physical. His subjective self is almost totally cut off from the objective world. The yawning gap between his inner and outer selves, shown by his inability to express what he inwardly feels except through his ludicrous manner of speech and behaviour, is further underlined by what Bergson would call his comic 'inelasticity'.³⁹ Yepikhodov's inner self is unable to control his outer self or the world of physical objects which overpowers him. Indeed, it almost appears that the physical world is actively plotting against him. The result is that Yepikhodov's sensitive action of bringing flowers, possibly for Mrs Ranevsky, but more probably for Dunyasha, whom he loves, is undercut when he drops the flowers.

Yepikhodov's pain is hidden from other characters partly because he tries to hide it. Just as Lopakhin, in the famous non-proposal scene with Varya in Act IV, will talk about the weather to hide what he is really feeling, so Yepikhodov, apart from allowing himself a sigh that wells up from the subtext of his inner life, covers his own anguish by discussing trivialities:

YEPIKHODOV. There are three degrees of frost this morning and the cherry trees are in full bloom. I can't say that I think much of our climate. [*Sighs.*] That I can't. It isn't exactly co-operative, our climate isn't. Then if you'll permit a further observation, Mr Lopakhin, I bought these boots the day before yesterday and, as I make so bold to assure you, they squeak like something out of this world. What could I put on them?⁴⁰

Lopakhin, whose own inner life is occupied with his own concerns about greeting Mrs Ranevsky and telling her his plan to save the estate, pays little attention to Yepikhodov's worries. His cursory dismissal of Yepikhodov leads the clerk to reveal a tiny part of his anguished inner life. In what is in effect a miniature 'disguised soliloquy', Yepikhodov momentarily closes the gap between his inner and outer lives by bringing his own subtext into the text:

LOPAKHIN. Leave me alone. I'm tired of you.

YEPIKHODOV. Everyday something awful happens to me. Not that I complain. I'm used to it. Even raise a smile.⁴¹

Even though Lopakhin may not register the significance of Yepikhodov's remark an audience should be made aware of its significance. From this point in the play, whenever Yepikhodov smiles at the 'disasters' that occur to him, the audience should see the ludicrous behaviour that is manifested in the text and also be aware of the suffering that is being endured in the hidden subtextual inner life behind this maladroit character's smile. As Yepikhodov exits, he bumps into a chair and presumably grins as he departs.

The vain and rather stupid Dunyasha, who doesn't understand anything that Yepikhodov says to her, has only one interest in the clerk and that is that 'he's crazy about me'.⁴² We learn that the besotted Yepikhodov has already proposed to her. As we see in Act II, Dunyasha's slight interest in Yepikhodov vanishes the moment that the odious social climbing servant Yasha arrives. At this early point of the play, Dunyasha has no other love interest. She says to Lopakhin, 'I do sort of like him'⁴³ and continues to provide important information for the audience concerning Yepikhodov. In an early example of what Magarshack called the 'messenger' element, Dunyasha informs her uninterested stage companion:

He's a most unfortunate man, everyday something goes wrong. That's why he gets teased here. They call him 'Simple Simon'.⁴⁴

At this point in the play, the audience has been given all the necessary information to be able to read Yepikhodov as a tragi-comic character. Without knowledge of both his subjective and objective lives, how he sees himself and how others see him, an audience would not be able to read the extraordinary scene that occurs at the beginning of Act II, which I will analyse later.

Just before the arrival of Mrs Ranevsky [Liuba], the old servant, Firs, crosses the stage muttering unintelligibly. In his characterisation of Firs, Chekhov creates an extreme example of the disjunction between a character's subjective and objective lives. Firs is a man who exists almost entirely in his subjective inner world. Cut off from the world because of his deafness, he is quite literally living in the past: *'He wears old-fashioned servant's livery and a top hat.'*⁴⁵ He treats the middle-aged Gayev as though he were still a child. He lives his life as though the emancipation of the serfs had never happened. He is physically cut off not just from the subjective lives of the other characters, which is the normal situation for most of Chekhov's characters, but also cut off from their objective lives, since most of their behaviour is expressed in speech that he can't hear.

After Firs' brief traversal of the stage in Act I, Mrs Ranevsky and Gayev enter. At this point, Chekhov employs the technique of the 'tactless comment' to illustrate how unaware Liuba Ranevsky is of the inner lives of others:

MRS. RANEVSKY. [Liuba] The nursery! My lovely room! I slept here when I was a little girl. [*Weeps.*] And now I feel like a little girl again. [*Kisses her brother and VARYA, and then her brother again.*] Varya hasn't changed a bit, she still looks like a nun. And I recognised Dunyasha. [*Kisses DUNYASHA.*]

GAYEV. The train was two hours late. Pretty good, eh? What price that for efficiency?⁴⁶

Liuba is so bound up with her subjective world that she is unaware of the subjective lives of others. Consequently, she makes two 'tactless' remarks. Her remark about Varya looking like a nun might not at first be read as tactless by an audience as it has not as yet learnt anything about the adopted daughter's inner life. It is only later that we find out that Varya is single but in love with Lopakhin, who has not yet declared his own love for her. We soon learn that Varya, possibly out of frustration at Lopakhin's failure to declare his love, has contemplated becoming a nun. To make the audience aware that Varya is not pleased with Liuba's comment, the actress playing Varya need only show signs of embarrassment at the tactless remark.

Liuba's second 'tactless comment' is immediately perceivable to an audience. She says that she has recognised Dunyasha, and by implication this suggests that she has failed to recognise Lopakhin. Having been made aware of Lopakhin's inner life in his 'disguised soliloquy', the audience is aware of how much this 'peasant', as he subjectively sees himself, desires to be recognised by Liuba, the woman he so admires and loves, and for whom he has thought out a plan to save the estate. The audience has just heard Lopakhin's last line before he goes out to welcome Liuba: 'I wonder if she'll know me, we haven't seen each other for five years'.⁴⁷ An audience must therefore be well aware of the deep disappointment Lopakhin feels subjectively at not being recognised while the

maid was remembered. The actor playing Lopakhin should re-enter the stage in a manner that shows his disappointment.

Gayev's remark about the lack of efficiency of the railways is another example of creating a perceivable disparity between what a character says and what he does. Gayev is aware of others' inefficiency but is totally unaware that he is one of the most inept and inefficient persons in the play.

The opening section of the play that I have just analysed is only three pages in its printed form yet, through Chekhov's application of such dramatic devices as the 'disguised soliloquy' and the 'messenger element', the audience is supplied with enough information to construct a coherent subtext for each of the characters. Providing that directors guide their actors to create their subtextual life, then an audience will be able to perceive the systematically established gap that appears between the objectively presented text and the implied subtext. By the use of the 'disguised soliloquy' and the 'messenger element', Chekhov was able to satisfy the demands of realism and yet overcome its limitations by communicating more than is said in the dialogue. He was able to present the humdrum surface of life, while at the same time presenting fully rounded characters, each of whom, like real human beings, has already lived through past experiences which have affected the way each acts, thinks and feels at the time when the audience sees them.

It is because an audience has been provided with access to the inner life of a character such as Lopakhin that the otherwise bizarre scene in which he intrudes on Varya and Anya in Act I becomes intelligible. The two sisters have been talking about the family's shortage of money and the desperate need that they have to pay off the interest on the mortgage on the estate:

ANYA. ... Have you paid the interest?

VARYA. What a hope.

ANYA. My God, how dreadful.

VARYA. This estate is up for sale in August.

ANYA. Oh my God!

LOPAKHIN. [*Peeping round the corner and mooing like a cow.*] Moo-oo-oo.
[*Disappears.*]⁴⁸

Lopakhin's intrusion is impossible for an actor to justify or for an audience to interpret unless it is grounded in reality. Lopakhin has probably overheard the sisters' fatalistic conversation and, given that he believes that he has a plan that will save the estate, he jokingly pokes fun at the pessimism expressed by the two young women. With some sort of realistic justification, such as the one I have suggested, the bizarre animal noise becomes playable and intelligible.

Possibly one of the most subtle uses that Chekhov makes of the disjunction he has created between the two lives of his characters in *The Cherry Orchard*

relates to the 'love' relationship between Lopakhin and Varya which culminates in the 'non-proposal' scene towards the end of Act IV. Before analysing this justly famous scene it is important to examine precisely how Chekhov provides his audience with all the information necessary to read it.

The first mention of a possible marriage between Varya and Lopakhin is given in the scene between Anya and Varya that takes place immediately after Lopakhin's bizarre 'mooing' episode. The sisters quite naturally begin to talk about him:

ANYA. ... Has he proposed, Varya? [VARYA *shakes her head.*] But he does love you. Why can't you get it all settled? What are you both waiting for?

VARYA. I don't think anything will come of it. He's so busy he can't be bothered with me, he doesn't even notice me. Wretched man, I'm fed up with the sight of him. Everyone's talking about our wedding and congratulating us, when there's nothing in it at all actually and the whole thing's so vague. [*In a different tone of voice.*] You've got a brooch that looks like a bee or something.

ANYA. [*Sadly.*] Yes mother bought it.⁴⁹

The audience is now apprised of the fact that there is general consensus among the other characters that Lopakhin and Varya will marry each other. What is also of interest is that Anya believes that Lopakhin does love Varya. Clearly, with everyone expecting this marriage and yet with Lopakhin, for some reason or other, not proposing, Varya is placed in a situation that is painful for her. Not surprisingly, she changes the subject and Anya picks up the hint and goes on to change the subject herself.

One of the clichéd ways of solving problems in nineteenth-century well-made plays was to marry off the indigent hero or heroine to a wealthy partner. In this case the *scène-à-faire* would be the proposal scene which would bring about the reversal in the fortune of the hero or heroine, and this would then lead to the happy ending. Chekhov keeps teasing his audience with this possible wish-fulfilment ending. The very real possibility that Varya will prove to be the saviour of the estate as a result of marrying Lopakhin is avoided by her. Instead, her 'plan' involves a dream in which Anya achieves that desired end:

VARYA. [*Standing near the door.*] You know darling, while I'm doing my jobs round the house I spend the whole day dreaming. I imagine marrying you off to a rich man. That would set my mind at rest and I'd go off to a convent, then on to Kiev and Moscow, wandering from one holy place to another. I'd just wander on and on. What bliss!⁵⁰

The spectators have just heard that Varya has been vainly waiting for a proposal from Lopakhin. More significantly, they have *not* heard her suggest that she would refuse him if he finally did propose to her. Consequently, they are able to read Varya's description of the prospect of being a nun as 'bliss' as

a cover for her true feelings. Being a nun is certainly not Varya's first choice of occupation. Even in the abortive proposal scene near the end of the play — a scene which acts as a parody of all such clichéd scenes in the drama of the time — Varya places herself in a situation where she hopes that Lopakhin will finally get round to asking for her hand.

The Varya–Lopakhin marriage is again alluded to at the end of Act I. Lopakhin has overstayed his welcome and, just before he exits, tries once too often to get Gayev and Liuba to think about his unpalatable plan to save the estate:

LOPAKHIN. ... [*To* MRS. RANEVSKY.] Think it over about those cottages, let me know if you decide to go ahead and I'll get you a loan of fifty thousand or so. Give it some serious thought.

VARYA. [*Angrily.*] Oh do for heaven's sake go.

LOPAKHIN. All right I'm going. [*Goes.*]

GAYEV. Ill-bred lout. Oh I beg your pardon, Varya's going to marry him. He's Varya's 'young man'.

VARYA. Don't overdo it, Uncle.

MRS. RANEVSKY. But I should be only too pleased, Varya. He's such a nice man.⁵¹

Gayev is always tactlessly talking out of place. Later in Act I, he describes his sister as 'a loose woman'⁵² in earshot of Liuba's daughter, Anya. Here, he tactlessly makes insulting comments about Lopakhin in front of his possible future wife. As usual, the rest of his family try to get him to keep quiet. Importantly, the audience learns that Liuba Ranevsky, if not Gayev, approves of the match between Varya and Lopakhin. As we shall see, Liuba's approval is extremely important to Lopakhin.

The third major discussion of the Varya–Lopakhin marriage takes place in the middle of Act II. Liuba has just accused Lopakhin and his ilk of leading 'drab lives' and of talking a lot of 'rubbish'. He agrees with her but, after a pause, launches into a speech that recapitulates his first 'disguised soliloquy' in Act I, in which he informed us that subjectively, despite his wealth, he still feels himself to be a peasant:

LOPAKHIN. Quite right. To be honest, the life we lead is preposterous. [*Pause.*] My father was a peasant, an idiot who understood nothing, taught me nothing, and just beat me when he was drunk, with a stick too. As a matter of fact I'm just as big a numbskull and idiot myself. I never learned anything and my handwriting's awful. A pig could write as well as I do, I'm ashamed to let anyone see it.

MRS. RANEVSKY. You ought to get married my friend.

LOPAKHIN. Yes, that's true enough.

MRS. RANEVSKY. Why not marry Varya? She's a very nice girl.

LOPAKHIN. True.

MRS. RANEVSKY. She's a nice simple creature. She works all day long, and the great thing is she loves you. And you've been fond of her for some time too.

LOPAKHIN. All right, I've nothing against it. She is a very nice girl. [*Pause.*]⁵³

One 'messenger', Anya, has told Varya that Lopakhin loves her. Now another 'messenger', Liuba, has told Lopakhin that Varya loves him and reminds him that he seems 'fond' of her. Lopakhin works from morn till night and Varya is likewise a worker. While neither party seems to be wildly in love with the other in any romantic sense, the match is nevertheless extremely suitable. Varya has not voiced any abhorrence at the idea and Lopakhin has nothing against it. The ground for their proposal scene would seem to have been prepared. Certainly, Liuba thinks that the preparations are complete since, later in Act II, after she has been flustered by the begging Passer-By and has given him a gold coin that the family can ill afford to lose, she covers her own embarrassment at the incident by borrowing more money from Lopakhin, and then tactlessly announcing the Varya-Lopakhin engagement in front of the stunned couple. Their ensuing embarrassment again fails to result in any overt proposal:

VARYA. ... Oh mother, we've no food in the house for the servants and you gave him all that money.

MRS. RANEVSKY. What's to be done with me? I'm so silly. I'll give you all I have when we get home. Yermolay, lend me some more money.

LOPAKHIN. At your service.

MRS. RANEVSKY. Come on, everybody, it's time to go in. Varya, we've just fixed you up with a husband. Congratulations.

VARYA. [*Through tears.*] Don't make jokes about it, Mother.

LOPAKHIN. Amelia, get thee to a nunnery.⁵⁴

Varya, who is often likened to a nun, is placed in an extremely awkward position by her mother's remark. She sees her mother 'sponge' yet more money from Lopakhin. For her to happily go along with Liuba's announcement could only make it appear that she is also after Lopakhin's money. Lopakhin, who had shown his anger at the Passer-By for frightening Varya, is clearly out of his depth in the face of Varya's distress at her mother's tactless announcement about their marriage. In his embarrassment, he could hardly have chosen a less felicitous quotation than the garbled line from *Hamlet* about a 'nunnery'.

The next reference to the Varya-Lopakhin marriage occurs at the beginning of Act III where Trofimov, who objects to Varya keeping such a close watch on Anya and himself and who claims to be 'above love', pokes fun at the poor young woman who reacts with anger:

TROFIMOV. [*Teasing her.*] Mrs Lopakhin! Mrs. Lopakhin!

VARYA. [*Angrily.*] Seedy-looking gent!⁵⁵

The antagonism between the two continues later in the Act and leads to a revealing interchange between Liuba and Varya that explains much to an audience about why Varya finds her situation in relation to her possible engagement to Lopakhin so difficult to deal with. It provides information that will be vital for helping an audience to read the Act IV non-proposal scene:

TROFIMOV. [*Teasing* VARYA.] Mrs. Lopakhin!

VARYA. [*Angrily.*] Hark at the eternal student. He's already been sent down from the university twice.

MRS. RANEVSKY. Why are you so cross Varya? If he teases you about Lopakhin, what of it? If you want to marry Lopakhin, do — he's a nice attractive man. And if you don't want to, don't. Nobody's forcing you darling.

VARYA. I'm perfectly serious about this, Mother, I must tell you quite plainly. He is a nice man and I do like him.

MRS. RANEVSKY. Well, marry him then. What are you waiting for? That's what I can't see.

VARYA. I can't very well propose to him myself, can I? Everyone's been talking to me about him for the last two years. Everyone goes on and on about it, but he either says nothing or just makes jokes. And I see his point. He's making money, he has a business to look after and he hasn't time for me. If I had just a bit of money — even a hundred roubles would do — I'd drop everything and go away. I'd go to a convent.

TROFIMOV. What bliss!⁵⁶

Trofimov's cruelly ironic response, which echoes Varya's earlier comment about entering a convent, is nevertheless appropriate, since the audience now hears from her own mouth how seriously she wishes to marry Lopakhin, rather than become a nun. After crying, Varya leaves the stage to reprimand Yepikhodov who has now broken a billiard cue. The antagonism between Varya and Yepikhodov and the remarkable difference between them in terms of their respective efficiency will also prove important when the audience comes to interpret the non-proposal scene. It is this antagonism that leads to a brief moment of real interaction between Varya and Lopakhin in Act III. It is one of the few moments in the play when they are on-stage alone together. Having had an argument with Yepikhodov, Varya loses her temper and, thinking that he is coming back into the room, she lashes out with a stick as Lopakhin, rather than the clerk, enters. He has just returned from the auction at which he bought the cherry orchard:

VARYA. ... Oh, so you're coming back, are you? ... Then take that. [*Lashes out just as LOPAKHIN comes in.*]

LOPAKHIN. Thank you very much.

VARYA. [*Angrily and derisively.*] I'm extremely sorry.

LOPAKHIN. Not at all. Thank you for such a warm welcome.

VARYA. Oh don't mention it. [*Moving away, then looks round and asks gently.*]
I didn't hurt you did I?

LOPAKHIN. No, it's all right. I'm going to have a whacking bruise though.⁵⁷

The defensive cover of joking is briefly dropped when Varya's tone becomes 'gentle', and an audience might well hope that this might at last be the scene where they can talk to each other and perhaps even become engaged. However, Chekhov thwarts the audience's expectations once again by bringing on Pishchik to interrupt the would-be lovers.

When Lopakhin announces to everyone that he has bought the cherry orchard, Mrs Ranevsky is 'overwhelmed' and nearly faints. Varya's response appears to involve the total rejection of Lopakhin, for she 'takes the keys from her belt, throws them on the floor in the middle of the drawing room and goes out'.⁵⁸ Certainly, Lopakhin seems to think that Varya's behaviour marks the end of their relationship. Towards the end of his speech in which he recounts what happened at the auction and muses amazedly at his good fortune, he refers to Varya's melodramatic exit:

LOPAKHIN. ... [*Picks up the keys, smiling fondly.*] She threw away the keys to show she's not in charge here now. [*Jingles the keys.*] Oh well, never mind.⁵⁹

Following this apparent rejection by the aristocratically brought up Varya, Lopakhin almost aggressively adopts the pose of the crass new owner as he orders the band to play. He tells those present that they can 'just watch Yermolay Lopakhin get his axe into the cherry orchard, watch the trees come crashing down'.⁶⁰ Almost immediately, the more sensitive side of this man who cares for the Ranevsky family, and especially for Liuba, manifests itself when he tries to comfort the woman he so admires and loves:

LOPAKHIN. [*Reproachfully.*] But why, oh why, didn't you listen to me before? My poor friend, you can't put the clock back now. [*With tears.*] Oh, if all this could be over quickly, if our miserable, mixed-up lives could somehow hurry up and change.⁶¹

Pishchik, however, tells Lopakhin to 'leave her alone' and takes Liuba into another room. This second rejection by the members of the class that he has tried to help leads Lopakhin to revert to the coarse peasant self that the gentry imply is his true nature. He becomes the vulgar 'ill-bred lout' that Gayev had said that he was and that he secretly feared was true. There is both sadness and bitterness mixed in with the rich peasant's joy at owning the estate. Chekhov alerts us to this by supplying the actor with the stage instruction 'ironically':

LOPAKHIN. Hey, what's up? You in the band, let's have you playing properly. Let's have everything the way *I* want it. [*Ironically.*] Here comes the new squire,

the owner of the cherry orchard! [*Accidentally jogs a small table, nearly knocking over the candelabra.*] I can pay for everything.⁶²

It seems as if Lopakhin's bitterness is partly a result of his own failure to succeed in his original plan to save the cherry orchard for the Ranevsky family and is surely, in part, due to the loss of any hopes he might have had of marrying Varya. His coarse behaviour is a response to their rejection of him. As a character who has failed to squeeze the last drop of 'slave' out of himself, he hardly seems to have expected anything better. However, Lopakhin is to get one more chance in Act IV to propose marriage to Varya.

With about five minutes to spare before the Ranevsky family have to leave the estate, Mrs Ranevsky speaks to Lopakhin about her two remaining worries. Her first worry concerns Firs, but she is assured, wrongly as it turns out, that Firs has been sent to hospital. Liuba now tries for the last time to get Lopakhin to propose to Varya. Her first move is to try and make him take pity on her. When he fails to respond in the 'Pause', Liuba is forced to be more direct with him:

MRS. RANEVSKY. My other worry's Varya. She's used to getting up early and working, and now she has nothing to do she's like a fish out of water. She's grown thin and pale and she's always crying, poor thing. [*Pause.*] As you know very well, Yermolay, I had hoped — to see her married to you, and it did look as if that was how things were shaping.⁶³

Having begun her last-ditch attempt to get Lopakhin to propose to Varya, Liuba does everything she can to enable the couple to be alone together. Presumably she gives instructions to Anya to prepare Varya for the big event and begins to clear the room of other people. Liuba's speech and actions continue as follows:

[*Whispers to ANYA, who nods to CHARLOTTE. They both go out.*] She loves you, you're fond of her, and I haven't the faintest idea why you seem to avoid each other. It makes no sense to me.

LOPAKHIN. It makes no sense to me either, to be quite honest. It's a curious business, isn't it? If it's not too late I don't mind going ahead even now. Let's get it over and done with. I don't feel I'll ever propose to her without you here.⁶⁴

The audience must feel at this point that, at last, they are going to get the long awaited proposal scene that will, at the last minute, solve everyone's problems. Lopakhin will get his bride, Varya will get her man and the family will now have access to money through Varya's marriage so that all the characters can live happily ever after. But this is Chekhov, not Scribe or Sardou. The hint that all may not go well in the forthcoming proposal scene is given by Lopakhin when he says that, without Liuba being present, he doesn't think he will be able

to propose. The new owner of the cherry orchard still sees himself as a peasant and Varya as one of the gentry. He thus feels that it is inappropriate for him to step above his class to ask her to marry him. Early in the play, Lopakhin had said to Dunyasha: 'Remember your place'. Now, unlike Dunyasha or the other servant, Yasha, Lopakhin finds it almost impossible see his new 'place' in the changing social order. He needs Liuba, the woman whom he has admired, respected and even loved since childhood, to *actively* support him in his proposal.

The scene continues with rising excitement on the part of both Liuba and Lopakhin and the only other remaining person, Yasha, is ordered out of the room. The one sour note that is sounded occurs when it is discovered that the valet has drunk the champagne that could have been used to celebrate the engagement:

MRS. RANEVSKY. [Liuba] That's a very good idea. Why, it won't take more than a minute. I'll call her at once.

LOPAKHIN. There's even champagne laid on. [*Looks at the glasses.*] They're empty, someone must have drunk it. [*Yasha coughs.*] That's what I call really knocking it back.

MRS. RANEVSKY. [*Excitedly.*] I'm so glad. We'll go out. Yasha, *allez!* I'll call her. [*Through the door.*] Varya, leave what you're doing and come here a moment. Come on! [*Goes out with YASHA.*]⁶⁵

Liuba, having unsuccessfully attempted to call Varya into the room, makes the fatal mistake of leaving the room to get her. This leaves Lopakhin on his own without the support that he needs in order to have the nerve to ask Varya to marry him. The audience sees the nervous Lopakhin waiting for Varya and Liuba to return. The audience, like Lopakhin, hears the off-stage encouragement of Varya to go into the room to be proposed to:

LOPAKHIN. [*With a glance at his watch.*] Yes. [*Pause.*]

[*Suppressed laughter and whispering are heard from behind the door. After some time VARYA comes in.*]⁶⁶

Finally, Varya appears, but she is without Liuba, and the non-proposal scene takes place. Both parties know why they are in the room alone. Both of them wish to get engaged, yet both are incapable of asking the other. Lopakhin needs the assistance of Liuba or at least the help of Varya herself. Varya feels that she cannot ask Lopakhin to marry her. She is, after all, the financially dependent one. Her gentrified upbringing and her perception of her gender role, as we discovered earlier, precludes her from popping the question, or even overtly encouraging Lopakhin to do so. She must be courted. As Magarshack accurately notes:

Face to face with Varya he [Lopakhin] is so conscious of her social superiority that he cannot bring himself to propose to her, while Varya ... is quite incapable

of disregarding the conventions which demand that the lady has to wait for the gentleman to propose to her.⁶⁷

In this play that is centrally concerned with the idea of change, Chekhov depicts Varya and Lopakhin as two people whose objective outer lives have changed radically. He has risen and she has fallen, economically and socially. However, because Chekhov recognises that change is painful, he shows that Varya and Lopakhin are unchanged in their subjective selves. The 'tragic' serious subtext underlies the 'comic' triviality of the text.⁶⁸ Chekhov has provided the means to access the text and subtext and perceive the disjunction between the two. Providing that the director encourages the actors to play the two elements, an audience should experience the full complexity of the Varya/Lopakhin relationship.

The 'non-proposal' scene that follows Varya and Lopakhin being left alone on stage, incorporates behaviour that is similar to that required in the acting exercise called 'passing the ball'. This exercise involves the actors passing back and forth to each other the responsibility for progressing the scene. The audience should clearly sense the movement of responsibility. This scene is like a tennis match in terms of 'passing the ball':

VARYA. [*Spends a long time examining the luggage.*] That's funny, I can't find it anywhere.

(Subtext: 'Well we are alone. I'm waiting for you to make your proposal.' Passes ball.)

LOPAKHIN. What are you looking for?

(Subtext: 'Oh no, please. You start.' Passes ball.)

VARYA. I packed it myself and I still can't remember. [*Pause.*]

(Subtext: 'No, you are the one who has to ask.' [*Pause.*] 'Well, go on. Say it.' Passes ball.)

LOPAKHIN. Where are you going now, Varya?

(Subtext: 'Where will you go if you don't stay here with me?' Passes ball.)

VARYA. Me? To the Ragulins'. I've arranged to look after their place, a sort of housekeeper's job.

(Subtext: 'Well, unless I stay here and continue to run this estate, I will be forced into the demeaning position of being a lowly housekeeper for the Ragulins. It's up to you.' Passes ball.)

LOPAKHIN. That's in Yashnevo, isn't it? It must be fifty odd miles from here. [*Pause.*] So life has ended in this house.

(Subtext: 'Yashnevo? Surely you don't want to be that far away from here, and from me? [*Pause.*] Well from your lack of response, I assume that you don't care. You realise that life in this house is over unless you stay here?' Passes ball.)

VARYA. [*Examining the luggage.*] Oh, where can it be? Or could I have put it in the trunk? Yes, life has gone out of this house. And it will never come back. (Subtext: 'I can't stay here forever. Are you going to say anything? Yes life in this house is over unless you choose to let it continue by doing something like living here with me.' Passes ball.)

LOPAKHIN. Well, I'm off to Kharkov. By the next train. I have plenty to do there. And I'm leaving Yepikhodov in charge here, I've taken him on. (Subtext: 'Please hurry up and make some effort to show me whether you want to marry me or not. There's not much time. Since you don't seem to want to stay, I've had to replace you. I've chosen Yepikhodov. How do you feel about that?' Passes ball.)

The choice of Yepikhodov, the most inept, accident-prone person in the play, certainly seems a strange choice of character to replace the highly efficient Varya. What Lopakhin seems to be trying to do here is to goad Varya into objecting to Yepikhodov's appointment. He knows how much she dislikes 'Simple Simon'. All he needs is to get Varya to respond by saying something like, 'How on earth can you think of employing that fool?', and he will be able to respond with something like, 'Well who else is there who can do the job properly?' This in turn is likely to elicit the response, 'I can'. Once Lopakhin can engineer some such overt response from Varya to the effect that she wishes to stay, the possibility of his proposing to her becomes much more likely. What actually happens in Chekhov's non-proposal scene is that Varya is too proud to object overtly to Lopakhin's choice of Yepikhodov as manager for the estate:

VARYA. Oh, have you?
(Subtext: 'Surely not? Oh well. If that's what you really want, it's up to you.'
Passes ball.)

This seems to me to be the moment when an audience should be made to feel that Varya's inner life expressed in the subtext is going to bubble up into the text and so establish the sort of contact between her and Lopakhin that will lead to the desired proposal. Lopakhin's ploy nearly succeeds but Varya's proud self-control triumphs over her desires. Seeing that there is no response from Varya, even after he has attempted to goad her to speak, Lopakhin gives up any hope of marrying Varya. He resorts to talking about the weather until he is rescued from this embarrassing scene by being called elsewhere:

LOPAKHIN. This time last year we already had snow, remember? But now it's calm and sunny. It's a bit cold though. Three degrees of frost, I should say. (Subtext: 'I see, she doesn't want me. I've got to get away from here somehow. I've no idea what to say to her now. I feel a complete fool standing here.')
VARYA. I haven't looked. [*Pause.*] Besides, our thermometer's broken. [*Pause.*]

(Subtext: 'I see, he doesn't want me. [*Pause.*] I feel totally wretched and don't know what to do or say.'))

The painful scene is brought to an end by an external means:

[*A voice at the outer door: 'Mr. Lopakhin!'*]

LOPAKHIN. [*As if he had long been expecting this summons.*] I'm just coming.

[*Goes out quickly.*]

(Subtext: 'Thank God! I can go.')

[*VARYA sits on the floor with her head in a bundle of clothes, quietly sobbing. The door opens and MRS. RANEVSKY comes in cautiously.*]

MRS. RANEVSKY. Well? [*Pause.*] We'd better go.⁶⁹

Varya allows her anguish to surface from her inner life only *after* Lopakhin has left and Liuba enters only when it is too late to help the couple to achieve what they both desire. The gap between aim and achievement could hardly be more poignantly expressed. The wonder is that Chekhov was able to find the way to allow an audience to experience the characters' dual lives through the interaction of the grotesque comic text and the pathetic tragic subtext. Neither Varya nor Lopakhin can express objectively their subjective feelings because it is impossible for them to escape from their subjective view and enter the objective world where they could communicate with each other.

'Life as it should be' is implied by Chekhov throughout the play. Though little is actually achieved by the characters, there is a prevailing sense of the possibility of a better future. This optimistic vision is carried mainly by the younger generation, particularly Anya and Trofimov. Audiences may experience the sadness associated with the fate of Gayev and Mrs Ranevsky but this is balanced by a sense of hope for the future. If the characters cannot themselves achieve a better future, the audience can. Trofimov may be laughed at for his comic rigidity, especially his absurd priggishness about 'love'. Chekhov uses the conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama to poke fun at the student who claims to be 'above love'. In Act III, his extreme reaction to Liuba's statement, 'Fancy being your age and not having a mistress!', is as absurdly histrionic as Arcadina's ham-acting in *The Seagull*. Chekhov gives Trofimov a melodramatic exit, which is itself humorous, but then proceeds to move into the realm of farce by having him return to make a second exit, which is then followed by his falling down a flight of stairs. This really is a 'banana skin' farcical *lazzi*. Trofimov's ideas, however, like those of Vershinin in *Three Sisters*, should not be discounted by an audience. As Robert Corrigan has noted:

Throughout his life Chekhov constantly made the statement that 'the truth about life is ironical' and since he was showing 'life as it is' almost all of his dramatic devices were ironic. The irony is best seen in the disparity between what his characters say and what they do. Thus we find in all of his plays

characters making brilliantly incisive remarks about themselves and other people, and yet they are said in such a way and are put in such an incongruous and ludicrous context that we do not stop to take them seriously when we hear them. The force of these statements is driven home cumulatively; we are suddenly aware as the play ends that in their actions the characters have done just the opposite to what in their dialogue they have expounded they should do.⁷⁰

One of the clearest examples of this ironic technique in *The Cherry Orchard* occurs when Trofimov expounds on what is wrong in the Russia of his day. He has just criticised the human race for being 'crude, stupid and profoundly miserable' and claims that: 'It's time we stopped admiring ourselves. The only thing to do is work'.⁷¹ This last statement is truly ironic in that Trofimov seems to do very little work. The irony deepens when the mature-aged student launches into what in Hingley's translation runs to twenty-four lines. This 'tirade' is in fact the longest speech of the play. This searing indictment of the laziness of the intelligentsia in Russia concludes with the deadly earnest and rather humourless Trofimov making one final attack on this group within society:

TROFIMOV. ... I loathe all these earnest faces. They scare me, and so do earnest conversations. Why can't we keep quiet for a change?

LOPAKHIN. I'm always up by five o'clock, you know. I work from morning till night ...⁷²

The sight and sound of the earnest and prolix intellectual, Trofimov, railing against everything that he himself embodies is certainly comic and undercuts the character. Lopakhin is quick to point out how, in contrast to people like Trofimov, he actually does work. Even though Trofimov is undercut by the fact that he does not practise what he preaches, his arguments make good sense. Commenting on this speech, Raymond Williams concedes that Trofimov 'does practically no work', but astutely argues: 'This does not mean that he is wrong, or that what he says can be disregarded'.⁷³

We should remember that this speech of Trofimov's was one that the censors insisted on cutting because the material was felt to be too inflammatory in its criticism of the intelligentsia's lack of action in assisting in the improvement of the appalling social conditions that Chekhov depicts as prevailing at the time. Once we concentrate less on the singer and more on the song, we can recognise the truth and importance of the content of Trofimov's speech:

TROFIMOV. ... Here in Russia very few people do work at present. The kind of Russian intellectuals I know ... aren't looking for anything. They don't do anything. They still don't know the meaning of hard work ... They talk of nothing but weighty issues and they discuss abstract problems, while all the time everyone knows the workers are abominably fed and sleep without proper

bedding, thirty or forty to a room — with bedbugs everywhere, to say nothing of the stench, the damp, the moral degradation.⁷⁴

Trofimov's 'tirade' expresses opinions about the intelligentsia that are remarkably similar to comments Chekhov made several years earlier. He wrote in a letter to I. I. Orlov about the failure of the intelligentsia to improve the quality of life in Russia:

I have no faith in our intelligentsia, hypocritical, false, hysterical, ill-bred, lazy; I have no faith in them even when they suffer and complain, for their oppressors come from the same womb as they ... whatever comes to pass, science keeps advancing, social-consciousness increases ... And all this is being done ... despite the intelligentsia *en masse* ...⁷⁵

Knowing that Chekhov had this mistrust of the intelligentsia, it is tempting for a director to see Trofimov as Chekhov's mouthpiece. According to Graham Greene, Tyrone Guthrie even had the eternal student 'interestingly made-up to look like Chekhov himself'.⁷⁶ The point is, however, that Trofimov is himself a member of the intelligentsia and is the object of Chekhov's irony. Like the good advice given by Polonius in *Hamlet*, Trofimov's good sense is not to be taken on its face value. While a reactionary production of *The Cherry Orchard* is likely to present Trofimov as a comically inadequate and pretentious student, the more radical productions, such as that of Trevor Griffiths, present the character as a serious Bolshevik visionary. In both cases, the dualistic nature of Chekhov's characterisation is obscured and the disjunctive gap between 'what is believed and what is lived' closed.⁷⁷ In contrast, Chekhov's Trofimov is both fool and seer.

Perhaps the most extreme example of Chekhov's depiction of the two lives that his characters lead is to be found at the opening of Act II. Chekhov was aware that this act was different from anything else he had written and was worried that it might not be 'theatrical' enough. He wrote to his wife, Olga Knipper:

My play is moving, and I'm finishing copying Act Three today and starting Act Four. Act Three is the least boring, but the second act is as boring and as monotonous as a cobweb.⁷⁸

It opens with a group of four characters employed by the Ranevsky family lounging around in the open air not long before sunset. The fates of Charlotte, Yasha, Dunyasha and Yepikhodov will all be determined by what happens to the cherry orchard. Anya's governess, Charlotte, is the most vulnerable of this quartet as her charge has now grown up,⁷⁹ and it is she who speaks first, in a 'disguised soliloquy'. We discover that she acquired her performing skills from her parents, who died when she was young, and that she had been adopted by

a 'German lady'. She recounts how she feels herself to be alone and an outsider. At the moment when her speech becomes most poignant and moving Chekhov undercuts her by introducing a totally comic effect:

CHARLOTTE. [*Meditatively.*] ... Well, I grew up and became a governess. But where I come from and who I am I've no idea. Who my parents were I don't know either, very likely they weren't even married. [*Takes a cucumber out of her pocket and starts eating it.*] I don't know anything. [*Pause.*] I'm longing for someone to talk to, but there isn't anyone. I'm alone in the world.⁸⁰

Eating a cucumber at the most 'tragic' moment in her speech is a perfect example of what Bergson is talking about when he outlines as a general law of comedy that: 'Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned'.⁸¹

As the context shows us, the 'someone' she is longing to talk to at this moment is Yepikhodov. The clerk, however, fails to register Charlotte's subtextual appeal because he is longing to talk to Dunyasha. He serenades his loved one. It is through the words of the song that he is able to express his subtextually felt love for the maid. She is not interested in his attentions at this moment, as she is more interested in making herself attractive to Yasha, whom she is longing to talk to. She brusquely dismisses the serenade. Meanwhile, Yasha is not really interested in Dunyasha's attentions, as he seems more interested in admiring himself. Each of the characters, except Yasha, hurts the one who is asking for contact, and each lays themselves open to being hurt by the one they wish to contact. Again, the interplay between the 'physical' and the 'moral' is emphasised by Chekhov. Where Charlotte had her cucumber, Yepikhodov has his guitar, Dunyasha has her hand-mirror and Yasha has his cigar:

YEPIKHODOV. [*Playing the guitar and singing.*]

'I'm tired of the world and its bustle,

I'm tired of my friends and my foes.'

How nice to play the mandolin.

DUNYASHA. That isn't a mandolin, it's a guitar. [*Looks at herself in a hand-mirror, and powders her face.*]

YEPIKHODOV. To a man crazed with love it's a mandolin. [*Sings softly.*]

'If only my heart were delighted

By the warmth of an ardour requited.'

[*YASHA joins in.*]

CHARLOTTE. The awful way these people sing — ugh! Like a lot of hyenas.⁸²

As part of his attempt to impress Dunyasha, Yepikhodov pulls out a revolver that he says he thinks of using to end his woes. Eventually, Yepikhodov's total rejection of her leads Charlotte to leave, but not before, with heavy irony, she ridicules the clerk's amorous pretensions:

DUNYASHA. [*To YASHA.*] You're ever so lucky to have been abroad, though.

YASHA. Yes, of course. My sentiments precisely. [*Yawns, then lights a cigar.*]

YEPIKHODOV. It stands to reason. Abroad everything's pretty comprehensive like. Has been for ages.

YASHA. Oh, definitely.

YEPIKHODOV. I'm a cultured sort of person and read all kinds of remarkable books, but I just can't get a line on what it is I'm really after. Shall I go on living or shall I shoot myself, I mean? But anyway, I always carry a revolver. Here it is. [*Shows them his revolver.*]

CHARLOTTE. Well, that's that. I'm off. [*Slings the gun over her shoulder.*] Yepikhodov, you're a very clever man and a most alarming one. Women must be quite crazy about you. Brrr! [*Moves off.*] These clever men are all so stupid, I've no one to talk to. I'm lonely, oh so lonely. I'm on my own in the world, and — and who I am and what I'm for is a mystery. [*Goes out slowly.*]⁸³

Chekhov had juxtaposed the existential and tragic with the trivial and comic in *The Seagull* when he had Treplev shoot himself while his mother and friends were playing Lotto. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the tragic/comic juxtaposition was created without Chekhov feeling the necessity to employ any overtly theatrical device such as suicide. Chekhov's aim had always been to write a truly realistic play in which characters involve themselves with life's trivialities, while 'all the time their happiness is being established or their lives are broken up'.⁸⁴ As we saw earlier, Lopakhin and Varya quite literally 'talk of the weather'⁸⁵ while just such a personal disaster is happening to them. In the case of Yepikhodov, Chekhov finally achieved his aim. He knew that 'in real life, people do not shoot themselves, or hang themselves, or make confessions of love every minute'.⁸⁶ Chekhov's Yepikhodov is a potential suicide rather than an actual one.⁸⁷ Now, in *The Cherry Orchard*, through making it possible for an audience to read the two lives of his characters, Chekhov was able to be 'dramatically effective' without resorting to the theatrics of melodrama.

As soon as Charlotte leaves, the maladroit Yepikhodov continues his attempt to make himself 'interesting'. In his verbose manner, he relates the disasters that are always happening to him. He then pauses in the hope that Dunyasha will make some comment. She doesn't respond, and so he continues his would-be courtship of the girl with what must be one of the most inappropriate and, consequently, pathetically funny small-talk lines that one could make to someone as feather-brained as Dunyasha. His attempt to move her interest away from Yasha is the following:

YEPIKHODOV. ... [*Pause.*] Have you ever read Buckle's *History of Civilisation*?⁸⁸

Not surprisingly, the poor girl makes no response and so, after another pause, Yepikhodov screws up his courage and asks her directly to speak to him alone.

The seemingly trivial scene, like that in which Irina Arcardin plays Lotto in *The Seagull*, takes place while momentous events are occurring, unbeknown to most of the characters on stage. A chance remark by Dunyasha averts a potential tragedy:

YEPIKHODOV. ... [Pause.] Might I trouble you for the favour of a few words, Miss Dunyasha?

DUNYASHA. All right, carry on.

YEPIKHODOV. I would prefer it to be in private. [Sighs.]

DUNYASHA. [Embarrassed.] Very well then, only first go and get me my cape. You'll find it in the cupboard or somewhere. It's rather damp out here.

YEPIKHODOV. Oh certainly, I'm sure. At your service. Now I know what to do with my revolver. [Takes the guitar and goes out strumming it.]

YASHA. Simple Simon! The man's a fool, between you and me. [Yawns.]

DUNYASHA. Heavens, I hope he doesn't go and shoot himself. [Pause.]⁸⁹

An audience needs to be made aware that, had Dunyasha simply told Yepikhodov to leave her alone, the clerk would indeed have known what to do with his gun. He would, like Treplev, have shot himself. Instead, Dunyasha, while trying to get rid of him, asks her admirer to do her a little favour, and the happy clerk puts his gun away and picks up his guitar. Dunyasha, for one fleeting moment, contemplates the possibility of Yepikhodov committing suicide but, after a pause, she forgets the clerk and concentrates all of her attention on making herself agreeable to Yasha.

Throughout the play, trivial events mask significant happenings. For example, whenever anything occurs that Gayev finds hard to deal with, he either pops a sweet into his mouth or practises imaginary billiard shots. In Act III, a dance takes place while off-stage the estate is being sold. At the end of the play, a misunderstanding leads to the sick Firs being left behind to die in a locked house.

It is in Act II that Lopakhin makes the most concerted attempt to get Liuba Ranevsky to face the reality of her financial situation and abandon such fantasy plans as saving the estate by getting enough money from an aunt, or by marrying Anya to a rich man. Instead, he proposes the financially responsible, but emotionally unacceptable, idea of replacing the orchard and the old house with summer cottages that could be let profitably.

In a well-made play, Act II would set into motion activities that would either succeed or fail in the final act of the play. In *The Cherry Orchard*, however, the only viable plan to save the orchard is quashed. The reason again results from the inability of characters to change as society changes. Just as Varya and Lopakhin do not become engaged because they cannot adjust their subjective views of themselves and others to the changed circumstances in which they are now placed, so Gayev and Liuba still think and behave like rich landed gentry

rather than bankrupts. Their response to Lopakhin's economically sensible plan is to avoid the question of economics altogether and to concentrate on outmoded concepts of tradition and class. Facing the fact that the cherry orchard does not produce a saleable crop every year, Gayev had responded in Act I with the economically useless statement that 'This orchard is even mentioned in the Encyclopedia'.⁹⁰ Now, in Act II, when time to do something about their plight is really running out, both Gayev and Liuba respond to Lopakhin's irrefutable argument that the estate will be lost unless they follow his plan with statements that show that they have simply refused to adjust to their changed situation:

MRS. RANEVSKY.[Liuba] Cottages, summer visitors. Forgive me, but all that's so frightfully vulgar.

GAYEV. I entirely agree.

LOPAKHIN. I'm going to burst into tears or scream or faint. This is too much. I've had about all I can stand!⁹¹

What the audience knows from this is that the estate will inevitably be lost and that no activities to save it will take place. One of Chekhov's innovations in this last play was to place the *anagnorisis* or recognition scene in Act II rather than, as was the usual dramatic method, near the end of the play. The whole of Act II is a series of recognitions that there is 'nothing to be done' about saving the cherry orchard because 'no one is doing anything' to save it. Liuba's complete disregard for her dire financial situation is captured perfectly by the fact that, though she knows that Varya is scrimping and scraping in order to pay for food to feed the servants, she goes around 'squandering money'. She spills what little money she has left on the ground and later gives a gold coin to the Passer-By. Each of the characters who comes up with their ideas on how to save the orchard is undercut by another character, usually someone who is important to the character with the idea. So when Gayev talks of 'a general who might let us have a loan', Liuba destroys that illusion with the remark: 'He's only talking nonsense. There is no such general'.⁹²

Each character's vision of a better world is undermined by someone else. Trofimov's visionary future where, 'Mankind marches on, going from strength to strength'⁹³ once people learn to work, is undercut by Lopakhin, who points out that he already does 'work from morning till night'. His own vision of Russia is in turn undercut by Liuba:

LOPAKHIN. ... When I can't sleep I sometimes think — the Lord gave us these huge forests, these boundless plains, these vast horizons, and we who live among them ought to be real giants.

MRS. RANEVSKY.[Liuba] You're calling for giants. That's all very well in fairy-tales, but elsewhere they might be rather alarming.⁹⁴

At this point in the Act, the recognition scene occurs. What everyone sees is that the orchard will be lost. In terms of the conventions of realism operating in this play, Gayev's observation that 'The sun has set, my friends', simply refers to the time of day. In addition, however, Chekhov informs his audience that, symbolically, the sun has set on the gentrified world of Gayev and Liuba. Chekhov uses Yepikhodov as a device to trigger the other characters' individual recognition scenes. All are aware that, like Yepikhodov, their inner subjective reality does not match up with the objective reality of their social situation. Each of the onstage characters project onto Yepikhodov their own sense of anguish at being unable to bridge the gap between their two lives:

[YEPIKHODOV *crosses the back of the stage playing his guitar.*]

MRS. RANEVSKY. [*Pensively.*] There goes Yepikhodov.

ANYA. [*Pensively.*] There goes Yepikhodov.

GAYEV. The sun has set, my friends.

TROFIMOV. Yes.

GAYEV. [*In a quiet voice, as if giving a recitation.*] Nature, glorious Nature, glowing with everlasting radiance, so beautiful, so cold — you, whom men call mother, in whom the living and the dead are joined together, you who give life and take it away —

VARYA. [*Imploring him.*] Uncle dear!

ANYA. Uncle, you're off again.

TROFIMOV. You'd far better pot the red in the middle.

GAYEV. I am silent. Silent.

[*Everyone sits deep in thought. It is very quiet. All that can be heard is FIRS' low muttering. Suddenly a distant sound is heard. It seems to come from the sky and is the sound of a breaking string. It dies away sadly.*]⁹⁵

The sun has indeed set on all of the characters' hopes and illusions. The sunshine of the opening of Act II has been replaced by darkness.

In a 'disguised soliloquy', which superficially appears to be a trivial piece of rhetoric, Gayev recognises the truth that Nature is 'cold' or, as Frayn translates it, 'indifferent'. There is no divine plan underpinning 'glorious Nature'. Left to Nature alone, the impecunious characters may be saved, as Pishchik is by pure luck, or ruined as are Gayev and Liuba. There is no plan in Nature's interaction with man. This clearly means that humans must actively do something to control their lives. Gayev's 'vision', though absurdly expressed, is not a stupid one, and it is too painful for the other characters to face. Consequently they silence him. It is in that silence that we hear the sound of the breaking string.

This discordant note reflects the disharmony felt by the characters. Chekhov, who loved to observe that 'You must never put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is going to fire it',⁹⁶ has used Yepikhodov as his 'loaded rifle' in this scene. The clerk's traversal of the stage appears, at first, to merely be a piece of

incidental realism. However, Yepikhodov serves a much deeper purpose here. On the realistic level, the sound is, as I have noted earlier, that of poor Yepikhodov's guitar string breaking. The accident-prone 'Simple Simon' has once again been unable to control the objective world. If Yepikhodov is Chekhov's 'loaded rifle', then the breaking string is the playwright firing it.⁹⁷

All of the characters provide a different explanation for the sound and project onto it their own particular concerns. For the practical Lopakhin it is the sound of a cable breaking in one of the mines; for Gayev it is one of Nature's creatures, a heron (a large wading bird); for the eternal student it is a wise old owl. All agree that the sound is unpleasant. This sound crystallises the moment of recognition that the estate is lost. In a quite brilliant piece of dramatic writing, Chekhov reintroduces this same sound towards the end of the play. In doing so, he ensures that the moment of sad recognition, associated by the audience with the breaking string heard in Act II, is recalled. This is more likely to be effective if the director heeds Chekhov's advice to Stanislavski and keeps superfluous sound effects out of the production.

The second appearance of this sound is linked with another sound that makes concrete the general sense of impending loss associated with the breaking string.⁹⁸ The sound is, of course, that of the axes striking into the cherry trees. The abandoned Firs in the play's final disguised soliloquy rambles on about how life has somehow passed him by. His comments, and the sounds that end the play, sum up Chekhov's depiction of a social group who have, through their inability to adjust to change, wasted their lives. The audience sees that the way of life of the older generation of Gayev and Liuba is now over, but the hope remains that the younger generation of Anya and Trofimov will not repeat the cycle of wasted potential:

FIRS. ... [*Mutters something which cannot be understood.*] Life's slipped by as if I'd never lived at all. [*Lies down.*] I'll lie down a bit. You've got no strength left, got nothing left, nothing at all. You're just a — nincompoop. [*Lies motionless.*] [*A distant sound is heard. It seems to come from the sky and is the sound of a breaking string. It dies away sadly. Silence follows, broken only by the thud of an axe striking a tree far away in the orchard.*]

CURTAIN.⁹⁹

The Cherry Orchard is not merely what Francis Fergusson called 'a theatre-poem of suffering and change',¹⁰⁰ for this suggests a too fatalistic and passive view. It fails to take into account the implied criticism of the characters who suffer the effects of change without doing anything to adjust to it. Nor will David Magarshack's interpretation of the play as being the depiction of 'the destruction of beauty by those who are utterly blind to it'¹⁰¹ do as an adequate description of the play's action. In the first place, this interpretation lays the

blame for the destruction of the cherry orchard on Lopakhin, whom Chekhov was at great pains to say was not some philistine peasant bent on the destruction of all that was beautiful. Lopakhin, a man with the hands of an artist, expresses this combined aesthetic and economic response to his poppies when offering to lend money to Trofimov. Both the cherry blossom and the poppies are 'beautiful', but only the latter has any economic value. The point is that when Lopakhin looks out at a field of poppies he sees *both* their beauty *and* their financial value:

LOPAKHIN. I put nearly three thousand acres down to poppy in the spring and made a clear forty thousand roubles. And when my poppies were in flower, that was a sight to see.¹⁰²

Magarshack's interpretation privileges Liuba and Gayev, the defenders of 'beauty' but Chekhov, while being equally aware of their good qualities, implicitly criticises them for their totally impractical approach to their financial problems.

Any balanced interpretation of Chekhov's last four plays needs to avoid taking an 'either/or' stance. In order to portray the duality of Chekhov's vision of reality, any sense of despair must be balanced by a sense of hope. Equally, any production that wishes to create the duality of the Chekhovian form must balance the tragic with the comic.

Chekhov's achievement of having written a play in which he did not have to use the overtly theatrical conventions of melodrama and the well-made play is truly remarkable. *The Cherry Orchard* is, on the surface, a play about real people living their everyday lives, yet this play, when properly performed, is far from being drab or ordinary. The interplay between their private yearnings and their public behaviour transforms these seemingly banal characters into truly extraordinary people and creates a drama that is full of emotional intensity.

ENDNOTES

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⁵ Gilman, R., *Chekhov's Plays: An Opening into Eternity*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995, p. 203.

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¹⁰ Ibid.

Interpreting Chekhov

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- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Landesman, R., 'Comrade Serban in *The Cherry Orchard*', *Yale Theatre*, Vol. 8, Nos 2 & 3, Spring 1977, pp. 139–40.
- ¹⁵ Senelick, L., op. cit., p. 336.
- ¹⁶ Leblanc, R., 'Liberating Chekhov or Destroying Him? Joel Gershmans' Farcical Production of *The Cherry Orchard*', in Clayton, J. D., ed., *Chekhov Then and Now: The Reception of Chekhov in World Culture*, Peter Lang, New York, 1997, p. 59.
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- ²² Guthke, K. S., *Modern Tragi-Comedy*, Random House, New York, 1996, p. 84.
- ²³ Chekhov, A., Letter to A. S. Suvorin, 7 January 1889, in Yarmolinsky, A., op. cit., p. 107.
- ²⁴ Holland, P., 'The Director and the Playwright: Control over the Means of Production', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 11, August 1987, p. 210.
- ²⁵ Corrigan, R., 'Stanislavski and the Playwright', in Corrigan, R., ed., *Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, Grove Press, New York, 1965, pp. 190–1.
- ²⁶ Skaftymov, A., quoted in Senderovich, S., 'The Cherry Orchard: Chekhov's Last Testament', *Russian Literature*, Vol. 35, 1994, p. 239.
- ²⁷ Pitcher, H., *The Chekhov Play: A New Interpretation*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1973, p. 4.
- ²⁸ Valency, M., *The Breaking String*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p. 268.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 269.
- ³¹ Michael Frayn notes that, in England, Trofimov has sometimes been portrayed 'as an inadequate and immature personality who is afraid to emerge from university and face the real world'. (Frayn, M., loc. cit.) Frayn argues that Trofimov is 'perpetually being thrown out of the university ... Exiled, of course, for his political activities ...' (Ibid.) Trofimov's 'story' is only glanced at obliquely in the play, but it must be subtextually implied in performance if Trofimov is not to be reduced to some silly pretentious failure whose opinions are not to be taken seriously.
- ³² Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 3, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p. 145.
- ³³ Magarshack, D., *Chekhov the Dramatist*, Eyre Methuen, London, 1980, p. 169.
- ³⁴ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 145.
- ³⁵ Lopakhin's problem is that he has changed his objective situation by becoming rich but, unlike his creator, has failed to 'squeeze the slave out of himself', and so remains, subjectively, a peasant.
- ³⁶ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 146.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 284.
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- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 146–7.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 147.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 149–50.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 150. Chekhov again teases his audience with the prospect of this clichéd solution to the family's financial problems when, later in Act I, Gayev echoes Varya's 'dream'. In a list of highly impractical ways that the estate might be saved, Gayev indulges in his fantasies: 'GAYEV. ... I have plenty of remedies, any amount of them, and that means that I haven't really got one. It would be a good thing if someone left us some money. It would be a good thing to marry Anya to a very rich man ...' (Ibid., p. 159.) Possibly the aristocratic Gayev cannot conceive of the very real possibility of their estate being saved through Varya marrying Lopakhin. In Gayev's eyes, Lopakhin is still an ignorant peasant. Being such a complete elitist, Gayev becomes ludicrous when he claims to have a close rapport with the peasants. 'GAYEV. ... I'm a man of the eighties ... I've suffered quite a lot for my convictions, I can tell you. Do you wonder the peasants like me so much? You have to know your peasant course. You have to know how to ...' (Ibid., p. 161.)

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 156.

⁵² Ibid., p. 159.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 167–8.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 172.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 184–5. In production it is quite common, and, I would argue, quite appropriate, for Lopakhin to cringe in terror when the stick bears down on him. This is, after all, the man who, though he has just bought the cherry orchard, subjectively is still a peasant who was commonly beaten by his father when he was young. It is a conditioned reflex that his behaviour reverts to that of his peasant youth, origin and experience.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 185–6.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 186.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 187.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 194.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 278.

⁶⁸ I am not suggesting that the subtext is as fixed as the text, but *something like* the subtext I suggest here is implied by Chekhov in his playtext. Different productions will, of course, highlight different aspects of the implied subtext.

⁶⁹ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, pp. 197–8.

⁷⁰ Corrigan, R., 'The Plays of Chekhov', in Corrigan, R. and Rosenberg, J. L., eds, *The Context and Craft of Drama*, Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton, 1964, p. 155.

⁷¹ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 169.

⁷² Ibid., p. 170.

⁷³ Williams, R., op. cit., p. 116.

⁷⁴ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 170. Chekhov's experiences as a doctor treating the peasants during epidemics and his research work on Sakhalin led him to have first-hand knowledge of suffering. For all that he in no way lives up to his ideals, Trofimov's description of the appalling conditions, the hardships endured by the peasants and the lack of concerted action by the intelligentsia has the ring of authenticity about it.

⁷⁵ Chekhov, A., Letter to I. I. Orlov, 22 February 1899, in Friedland, L. S., *Letters on the Short Story, the Drama, and Other Literary Topics by Anton Chekhov*, Dover Publications, New York, 1966, pp. 286–7.

⁷⁶ Greene, G., *Spectator*, 5 September 1941.

⁷⁷ Williams, R., loc. cit. Chekhov's ambivalent attitude towards the Russian intelligentsia is captured well by Vladimir Nabokov. He writes: 'Chekhov's intellectual was a man who combined the deepest human decency of which man is capable with an almost ridiculous inability to put his ideals and principles into action; a man devoted to moral beauty, the welfare of his people, the welfare of the

universe, but unable in his private life to do any thing useful; frittering away his provincial existence in a haze of utopian dreams; knowing exactly what is good, what is worthwhile living for, but at the same time sinking lower and lower in the mud of a humdrum existence, unhappy in love, hopelessly inefficient in everything — a good man who cannot make good'. (Nabokov, V., *Lectures on Russian Literature*, Picador, London, 1981, p. 253.) Trofimov is a perfect example of such an 'intellectual'.

⁷⁸ Chekhov, A., Letter to O. L. Knipper, 9 October 1903, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 3, p. 320.

⁷⁹ Charlotte covers her worries by constantly performing stage tricks. In Act IV, when the cherry orchard has been sold and her future is insecure, the anguish of her inner life bursts forth into the text breaking through her overtly comic behaviour:

GAYEV. Charlotte's happy, she's singing.

CHARLOTTE. [*Picking up a bundle which looks like a swaddled baby.*] Rock-a-bye baby. [*A baby's cry is heard.*] Hush, my darling, my dear little boy. [*The cry is heard again.*] You poor little thing! [*Throws the bundle down.*] And please will you find me another job? I can't go on like this. (Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 193.)

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸¹ Bergson, H., *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1935, pp. 50–1.

⁸² Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, pp. 162–3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁸⁴ Chekhov, A., quoted in Lewis, A., *The Contemporary Theatre*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1971, p. 65.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ For Chekhov, the central problem of his dramaturgical approach was how to avoid the demand made by almost every critic 'that the hero and heroine be dramatically effective' (Chekhov, A., quoted in Lewis, A., loc. cit.), while at the same time avoiding theatrical clichés. Chekhov's elation at having avoided cheap theatrics is evident in the excited tone of the letter he wrote to his wife about the play in September 1903: 'However boring my play may be, I think there's something new about it. Incidentally, there's not a single pistol shot in the whole play'. (Chekhov, A., Letter to O. L. Knipper, quoted in Hingley, R., *The Oxford Chekhov*, Vol. 3, p. 320.)

⁸⁸ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 163.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 168–9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 170–1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁹⁶ Chekhov, A., quoted in Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 45.

⁹⁷ One can easily see why Chekhov objected to Stanislavski introducing extra sound effects. While they may have made the play seem more realistic, they were like having a whole series of unloaded rifles on stage. Every sound that Chekhov specifies has both a surface realistic reference and a deeper significance which, being 'loaded', adds meaning to the action of the play.

⁹⁸ The use of these two sound effects illustrates Chekhov's capacity to employ the two forms of symbolism outlined by Wimsatt that I noted in Chapter 2. The sound of the axe is both real [used to chop down the trees] and symbolic [an evocation of the end of an era]. The sound of the breaking string which, on its first use was both real [Yepikhodov's guitar string] and symbolic [an evocation of the end of an era] is here used only in its purely symbolic sense.

⁹⁹ Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 198. There is further evidence that Chekhov wished to suggest to his audience that the main characters had also 'let life slip by'. In an earlier draft of the ending of Act II, Chekhov had Charlotte help Firs look for the items that Liuba had dropped. While looking, she had commented: 'Mrs. Ranevsky's forever losing things. She's thrown away her life as well'. (*Ibid.*, p. 324.)

¹⁰⁰ Fergusson, F., *The Idea of a Theater*, Doubleday Anchor, New York, 1953, p. 175.

¹⁰¹ Magarshack, D., op. cit., p. 274.

¹⁰² Chekhov, A., *The Cherry Orchard*, p. 190.