

# *The Cherry Orchard: Acting Analysis*

Rafael Collado

Throughout *The Cherry Orchard*, actors assumed very specific mannerisms and behaviors to enhance the individuality of their characters. Two actors that set their characters apart were Chuck Cooper, who played Pishchik, and Diane Lane, who played Lyubov Ranevskaya. The play revolves around the fate of the Ranevskaya family's cherry orchard and Madame Ranevskaya's unwillingness to sell the estate in order to pay off the mortgage. Through their voice, movement and physical appearance, the actors were able to deliver solid character performances independent of the plot.

Chuck Cooper voiced his character in a high-volume, high-pitched tone. Regardless of the mood of the scene, Pishchik maintained his whimsical mode of speech. From the character's arrival at the house in the beginning to the celebration post-intermission, Cooper spoke in this high tone. Slightly increasing this tone facilitated making Pishchik seem drunk at the party, therefore making voice a vital tool in Cooper's acting. In contrast, when playing Barney Hull, the Mayor of Columbia County in *House of Cards*, Cooper assumes a much deeper and more serious tone commonly found in politicians. In his dialogue with Kevin Spacey (in which Cooper discusses his intentions to manipulate Congress), Cooper uses an entirely deep and sinister tone, the complete opposite of his tone as Pishchik.

As owner of the estate, Diane Lane played on Ranevskaya's privilege by assuming an assertive and elevated tone of voice. When she spoke to Firs, she addressed him as one would address a child. Similar to Pishchik, Ranevskaya's tone remained elevated regardless of her mood. Her tone should not be confused with the volume in which she spoke. As an actress in the recent film *Man of Steel*, Lane portrayed Martha Kent, the adoptive mother of Clark Kent (Superman). Her voice, while still slightly elevated, was much softer and grounded. This might reflect their different classes as Madame Ranevskaya is an aristocrat while Martha Kent is a simple farmer. There was an optimistic presence in both characters as Lane used a more dramatic, high-pitched voice when she became distraught as Madame Ranevskaya, but a silent and more tearful approach as a distraught Martha Kent.

In terms of movement, Chuck Cooper and Diane Lane used the stage differently. Chuck Cooper's Pishchik was dominating with his animated certainty and cheerful jokes. Cooper also gave his character a subtle waddle adding to the character's gluttonous vibe. The waddle became more exaggerated due to Pishchik's drowsiness after taking Ranevskaya's medication. Also, during the costume party, Pishchik's drunkenness was enhanced by Cooper's exaggerated movements. Pishchik's overall movement onstage asserted his dismissive attitude towards his own debts and obligations. Cooper's Barney Hull, on the other hand, maintains a solid and static posture in *House of Cards* further promoting his serious

and pragmatic nature. His movement is subtle and calculated, giving him an air of power in comparison to Pishchik whose continuous borrowing from Ranevskaya portrayed him as a shameless beggar. Diane Lane's Madame Ranevskaya, while unquestionably privileged, still showed compassion towards others regardless of status. Lane made eye contact with all actors throughout the play to convey this compassion. Her airy gait was very telling of her nature to flee. She often bounced from one character to another, from her daughter Anya to her brother Leonid, from Lopakhin to her adopted daughter Varya, expressing her joys for life despite her current hardships. When she was confronted by Lopakhin about splitting the estate into cottages, she ran away from the idea. When she received a letter from her lover from Paris, she ripped it up without ever reading it. The celebration she threw during the time of the estate's auction was the most convincing evidence of her tendency to run away. Her depiction of Martha Kent, while also a mother, was much more realistic, decisive and head-on in terms of movement. She, too, was loving towards her children, but Martha Kent was assertive where Ranevskaya was not. Kent's posture was the result of a life as a farmer from Kansas as she was shown plotting new plants on her land.

While other actors wore simpler outfits for their characters in *The Cherry Orchard*, Chuck Cooper's character sported exaggerated attire from three-piece suits to a jester's costume, pushing the idea that Pishchik was trapped in a luxury he could not afford. Similarly, Cooper's Barney Hull, as a politician, wore suits; but while Pishchik struggles to equate the man with the suit, Hull's stability as mayor spares him that struggle. Diane Lane's character, on the other hand, dressed in much simpler garb. Expressing the simplistic nature of Ranevskaya was of the utmost importance in this play. While simple, the clothing seemed expensive and of high quality, conveying just how wealthy Ranevskaya and her family truly had been. During their arrival at the house in the beginning of the play, Lane's character wore what seemed like expensive outer garments such as a fur coat, scarf, and gloves. Similarly, her clothing during the picnic scene in the cherry orchard was also that of a wealthy woman; she wore a sundress, a sunhat, and an umbrella. In contrast, Lane's Martha Kent often wore denim and plaid button-downs along with a straw hat to protect her from the sun as she tended to her farm land. She wore work boots and never minded getting soil or dirt on her clothes due to her lifestyle.

Chuck Cooper and Diane Lane's ability to play such drastically different roles exemplifies the versatility needed to be an actor suited for both live performances and film.

Nominating Faculty: Professor Shauna Vey, Theatre 2180, Department of Humanities, School of Arts and Sciences, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

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