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Class, Power, and Social Change: A New Historicist Approach to August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

Salam el Baba, PhD Student
Professor Lutfi Hamadi
Beirut Arab University, Lebanon

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Abstract

This paper conducts a new historicist analysis of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (2008) and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1951), exploring how these plays reflect and respond to the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By examining the interaction between literature and history, this study reveals how these works depict the tensions between old and new social orders, the shift of power dynamics, and the struggles of individuals caught in the midst of profound societal changes. Although both classic works have been the subject of a lot of critical studies, neither has been studied from a new historicist perspective. The shift in power dynamics at the very beginning of the twentieth century with the deterioration of the aristocratic sovereignty and the rise of the middle class is a prominent theme in both plays. This shift conveys the inevitability of change that disrupts routines, norms, and tradition. From a new historicist perspective, those who are marginalized do not necessarily match readers' initial assumptions, as the measures used to exhume the stigmatized characters are never the same as those utilized in other theoretical frameworks. It is not a battle between two antagonistic groups; nor is it a Greek tragedy that instigates catharsis upon the heroes' tragic falls, simply because there *is no hero*, only an antihero. While Strindberg focuses on the changing role of women and the emergence of feminism in addition to class struggle, a new historicist approach reads these

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radical social, political, and economic changes as a result of historical changes taking place in Europe during that era. Chekhov, in turn, depicts the historical fall of aristocrats who had started to lose power on behalf of wild capitalism during the same era.

Keywords: New Historicism - Class Struggle - Power Dynamics - Social Change - Literature and History

Introduction

Both plays, *Miss Julie* and *The Cherry Orchard*, depict the absurdity of the human condition in the modern, realistic world of loss, despair, and change. They serve as cultural artifacts of their time, where characters reflect their thoughts, beliefs, and actions onto a wider scale touching the very essence of the Swedish and Russian societies. Strindberg's Julie and Chekhov's Luba and Gayev are symbols of the falling upper class in a rapidly evolving world. Their beliefs in the plays, as displayed by the playwrights, are the common ideologies of the people of their times in their societies. Swedish female aristocrats of the late nineteenth century struggled with the enforced gender roles (Hirdmann, 1996) in contrast to the male lower-class, Jean, whose socioeconomic status dictates his miserable life (Therborn, 1983). Unlike the aristocrat Julie, Luba in *The Cherry Orchard* suffers from a different kind of turmoil. Luba, a representative of the Russian aristocracy of the late twentieth century, mirrors Russian idleness and denial of change as time passes by. Both plays exemplify the historic fall of the aristocracy as a result of the transformation of epistemic powers.

This alteration in power dynamics conveys the inevitability of change, a change that disrupts routines, norms, and tradition. From a new historicist perspective, those who are marginalized do not necessarily match readers' initial assumptions, as the measures used to exhume the stigmatized characters differ from those utilized in other theoretical frameworks. It is not a battle between two groups, one good, the other bad; nor is it a Greek tragedy that instigates catharsis upon the heroes' tragic falls simply because there *is no hero*, only an antihero. In fact, the purpose behind analysing such plays from the core concepts of new historicism is threefold: understanding today's power dynamics in comparison with worldwide historical events, anticipating how history has shaped, is shaping, and will shape societies, cultures, and ideologies, and studying the determinants that form the lives, thoughts, and reactions of the marginalized in Sweden and Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000).

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Methodology

Just as much as a typical research paper aims to bridge a certain gap in literature, so does new historicism, a literary critical theory that proposes an attempt to fill in the hollow chasm of current reality's uncertainties utilizing a plethora of approaches that ridicule the minimalistic, inaccurate method on which old historicists tend to base their entire presumed "factual" argument (Montrose, 1989). In fact, it is the extent of factuality in old historicists' analyses that new historicists examine (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). New historicism dares to question the credibility of historians worldwide, not for the sake of attacking them because such lack of credibility stems from the historian's conscious as well as their subconscious, but rather to present a wider picture of how current issues are shaped, who sets certain supposedly-fixed dynamics, norms, and rules, and why there are marginalized peoples and voices still present in the allegedly-advanced and "progressive" twenty-first century. In fact, it can be understood that in questioning what and who defines "progressive", new historicists propose a radical capsize of the present order of being (Greenblatt, 1992). This inversion of the current chain of power is manifested as a threat to all kinds of authorities, ranging from governmental jurisdictions to cultural traditions to gender roles and expectations, because their position of power is, first and foremost, a result of a series of events, cultural discourses, social determinants, and ideological hegemonies.

One way to smoothly move along the very extensive pathway that new historicists pave is to understand the three main points they negate in traditional historicism and new criticism. Adopting Michel Foucault's idea, a new historicist believes that linearity and causality of history are fallacies, objectivity is out of place when writing historical accounts, and the idea that history is progressive is promptly invalidated (Tyson, 2006, p. 282-3). In their analysis of a text, advocates of new criticism minimize the importance of history for the sake of the "object of primary concern, the text" (Bressler, 2011, p. 182). History, a mere appositive in their analysis, is important only as much as it is useful for the text it serves. Contrary to new criticism is old historicism in its maximizing the importance of history at the expense of the text. Thus, by isolating the text from its historical background, new critics and old historicists mistakenly believe they can study it in more depth because readers get the chance to focus solely on their target without any external interferences that might jam the communication between the only two elements of analysis: the text and the reader.

Various core concepts arise from the interrogation of old historicism, which form the basis of the rather "inclusive" theory, new historicism. Instead of isolating the text from all its surroundings, new historicism welcomes an interplay of discourses and approaches that would help form a holistic perspective of the text (Lemert, 2015). Thus, a new historicist adopts an

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omniscient way to approach a literary text. It is imperative that, upon tackling a text from a new historicist approach, the researcher be aware of the complexity of the road map on which they are about to embark; a road map similar to a nervous system, a spider web, a maze; each and every concept is so interconnected to the other that it is concepts of new historicism, actually, that have a causal relationship, not events of history as per traditional historians claim (Tyson, 2006). The question here lies, however, in why these concepts originated in the first place because the answer is not to solely dispose old historicists' efforts only for leisure – the attack is an outcome, not a catalyst (Eagleton, 2002).

Understanding how each tenet separately works would be useless due to the interrelated nature of the relation among them, making it somewhat impossible to find the thread of needle, but one can never go wrong with Michel Foucault and the role he played in shaping new historicism. Foucault argues that "language and thought" have the power to shape the way reality is perceived by the individuals of a certain group in a certain period (Bressler, 2011, p. 189). Borrowing this concept from ancient Greek philosophy, Foucault focuses on how epistemes are shaped and, in turn, the role they play in shaping history, culture, society, and axioms. In his attempt to understand history through epistemes, Foucault argues that totalitarian regimes and dystopian societies purposefully distort the past to serve their own interests (Foucault, 1995).

In *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault explains that each culture has its own episteme, over which it holds great power. In his definition of power, Foucault (1977) declares that it is not simply oppressive as it seems on the surface, but rather performs in more ingrained milieus through various mechanisms of discourse, knowledge, and institution, making subversion a mere reassurance of the power it denounces:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, p. 119)

So if episteme *A* controls culture *A'*, *B* culture *B'*, and so on, then episteme *A* decides what the people in culture *A'* believe in or reject, find conforming or nonconforming, abide by or ignore, the same way episteme *B* would in culture *B'*; in other words, it is because *A* can never be *B* that each culture is so unique.

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Another way to look at epistemes, Foucault adheres, is through its changeable nature over time (Foucault, 2005). With the passage of time, a theme further highlighted in the paper throughout the discussion of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, epistemes change because their nature with time is as reciprocal as it is with culture. This explains why cultures change, and not necessarily develop, over time. What is thought to be considered unacceptable, like raping women and girls as a form of cultural torture (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024), is now practiced by certain dictatorships, leading to Foucault's interrogation of old historicists' progressiveness of history. Jonathan Goldberg argues that with the differences found in various historical periods come a variety of "modes of power" that determines people's perspectives on reality, resulting in contradictory notions of what truth is (Goldberg, 1985).

As a result, time and place are as important to epistemes as they are to a narrative, story, literary text. In Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, the interchangeability of history and literature is highlighted for "In literature can be found history and in history, much literature" (Greenblatt, 1980, p. 184). This necessitates a two-way examination which focuses on the "reciprocal concern with historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose, 1988, p. 20). First, literary works encompass discourses that serve as representations of the era and culture in which the setting takes place, helping the reader understand the underlying power dynamics of the culture. Other discourses are left for the reader to analyse and investigate, gathering enough input on what has not yet been said about the individuals, namely marginalized groups, in this culture at the time in which the text was written and received. Therefore, any text, novel, play, or poem is considered a historical and cultural artifact that reflects and participates in the social dynamics of its time.

Second, new historicists firmly argue that history *is* literature, forming guidelines on how to approach it. Tyson (2006) explains this in simple terms: because the primary sources on which historians rely are in the form of written texts, they require interpretation the same way literary texts are handled, highlighting the futility of an objective history. Such inseparability between literature on one side and culture and history on another creates another equally important link between literature and society and enhances the new historicist's claim that many literary texts are "collective social constructions" (Greenblatt, 1982, p. 6). This is why texts are considered "mediators" that draw a clear trajectory among "diverse discourses in society such as religion, philosophy, the sciences, and the arts" (p. 6). It also explains why texts are embedded within broader socio-political contexts and shaped by the "cultural transactions" – interactions, negotiations, and conflicts – that occur within the society at the time of the creation of the text (Midekke, 2012, p. 205). These

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transactions encompass power struggles, ideological clashes, social tensions, and cultural exchanges that influence both the production and reception of literature, resulting in a literature that serves as a "battleground" where competing interests and worldviews intersect and vie for supremacy (Bressler, 2011, p. 191). Consequently, in their attempt to uncover the complex interplay of power, ideology, and social dynamics, new historicists shed light on themes related to class struggles, gender relations, colonialism, nationalism, and other socio-political concerns.

Essential for the study at hand is Clifford Geertz's term, "thick description", coined in his seminal work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973, pp. 31-32), and the role it plays in filling the gap between "what our body tells us and what we have to know to function in society" (Bressler, 2011, p. 190). This elucidates why people's perceptions of society differ and why society lacks omniscience regarding the occurrences taking place among its people. Due to these lacks and discrepancies, individuals and societies tend to fill the "information gap" with what they believe, or perhaps want to believe, happened, adding more logical claim to the new historicists argument of subjectivity of history (Geertz, 1973, p. 50).

Then, it is in its fixation on the marginalized that new historicism becomes a quest rather than a mere theory because it aims to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities of human society, including how power operates, how cultural norms are constructed, and how historical events shape individuals and collective identity, thereby contributing to a broader discussion about culture, politics, and social change. If it is understood that every thought and action is a reaction to the culture in which one was raised, insight into identity and culture can be gained by exploring how equally important discourses interact within society or the society presented in the literary text under study. Hart (1991) rightly says, "New historicism constitutes a complex and indirect practice that encourages a plurality of methods and interests, displays the ability to change and shows the power to endure. In time, and for various reasons, the works of new historicism will still be read" (p. 105).

Briefly, when examining a text from a new historicist perspective, certain steps and aspects are to be kept in mind. First and foremost, the author is an indispensable part of the text they produce, making them a crucial component of a study based on new historicism. Second, scrutinizing the text's historical context and background is as crucial to the analysis. Thus, by studying the author and the background in which the text was written, the researcher will be able to unearth the underlying power dynamics and ideologies it encapsulates. Further exploration also requires an understanding of the social power structures and hierarchies taking place as a means to uncover who the marginalized groups are in both the text and the society it

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portrays. Thus, it is the researcher's task to investigate and pinpoint the ways in which these subjugated individuals/groups are stigmatized, including the widely-known social, economic, racial, and lingual oppressive techniques in August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.

Analysis

Because both playwrights belong to what Brustein (1991) calls the theatre of revolt, finding common grounds between new historicism and the aforementioned theatre is quite essential. In fact, these concepts begin to align with the portrayal of modern life present in the theatre of revolt, which reiterates the new historicist argument that history is *not* progressive. From this point forward, themes found in the plays of revolt coincide with new historicist concepts such as societal norms, class distinctions and struggle, gender expectations and roles, and passage of time. These themes serve as Foucault's epistemes that shape and are shaped by the domineering culture of their era. The characters in both plays, *Miss Julie* and *The Cherry Orchard* are subject to external determinants that control their thoughts, beliefs, actions, and reactions.

August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*

From a new historicist approach, *Miss Julie* in this paper is inspected firstly from its historical context during the late 19th century Sweden, where shifts in class dynamics changed the entire societal hierarchy and gave way to the emergence of new social movements, challenging traditional gender roles and expectations (Frykman & Löfgren, 2003). Then, a thorough investigation of Strindberg's background and influence is highlighted, followed by a deep textual analysis that includes studying the resistance and subversion of the marginalized characters, Miss Julie and Jean, that results from Foucault's epistemes – the play's power structures and ideologies of the time, including class struggles and gender inequality. Such an investigation revolves around the extent these epistemes affect the stigmatized, their actions, reactions, ideologies, and goals. In turn, it also suggests how these responses play a vital role in shaping a new, on-the-move society, highlighting inevitability of change, a theme present in almost all plays of the theatre of revolt.

19th Century Sweden

19th-century Sweden underwent a holistic reform ranging from political changes to economic developments that affected the social, cultural, and intellectual trends of the country. Politically speaking, the descent in the monarchy's supremacy reshaped power dynamics and social hierarchies. With constitutional monarchy in its place, a bicameral parliament was established in 1866, expanding political participation, reflecting broader movements

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toward liberalization and democratization (Norrby, 2008). This is highlighted in suffrage expansion, workers' rights, and social welfare measures that are reflected in class, gender, and power – central concepts to *Miss Julie*. Economically, Sweden witnessed both industrialization and agrarian reforms. Growth in steel production, mining, and manufacturing led to urbanization and the emergence of a working-class population, correspondingly creating economic disparities and tensions between social classes, all of which are depicted in *Miss Julie*. In addition, reforms aimed at modernizing agriculture and land tenure systems also impacted late 19th-century Sweden, triggering shifts in agricultural practices, land ownership, and rural livelihoods, all of which are explored through the character of Jean, the valet, who is inflicted by the resulting social structures and relationships.

Urbanization, thus, brought about growth of cities in Sweden such as Stockholm and Gothenburg, generating significant social changes in family structures, gender roles, and social norms, augmenting the tensions between tradition and modernity, rural and urban life. With the change in gender roles arose new women's rights movements that fought for women's autonomy, agency, and liberation, intersecting with the play's themes of power, desire, and social constraints. These social alterations charted the course for new cultural and intellectual trends in late 19th-century Sweden. Intellectual movements, artistic innovations, and literary achievements contributed to a sense of national identity and pride. Strindberg's engagement in contemporary cultural debates and his experimentation with dramatic form and expression are vividly evident in *Miss Julie.* Therefore, by examining the play in the context of these historical, political, economic, and social events in the 19th-century Sweden, a new historicist analysis accurately unravels the ways in which the play reflects and responds to the complexities of its time while also shedding light on enduring themes of power, class, gender, and identity.

August Strindberg

Pivotal to the study at hand is a specific breakdown of the author's own life and background. Firstly, a new historicist approach would suggest studying Strindberg's personal experiences and their effects on the creation of *Miss Julie*. His personal financial struggles and societal upheavals triggered him to adopt certain opinions about the socioeconomic levels of late 19th-century Sweden, subconsciously affecting the construction of the play. Since "more than any other dramatist who ever lived, Strindberg writes *himself*" (Brustein, 1991, p. 46), he surely does not share the same worldviews with his aristocrat Julie. However, it is the struggling valet of the lower class, Jean, who vividly resonates with the playwright.

Another similarity is their common views on women. The author's failed marriages and his conflicting relationship with his mother are clearly

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reflected in the play, whether in the sex struggle between Jean and Julie or the love triangle among Miss Julie, Jean, and Kristin. Two of his predominant concerns are "social conflicts" and "the sexual war between men and women" (p. 59). His personal thoughts on gender roles and socioeconomic hierarchies affect the play's conception, recapitulating the new historicist key concept of the inseparability between text and author. Secondly, Strindberg's critique of the bourgeoisie society, gender roles, and societal norms is clear in *Miss Julie*, where the characters face issues of power, desire, and social statuses. His social and political views are reflected in his portrayal of morality, ethics, and the human condition in the play, highlighting the existential despair and nihilism that the characters face. This is highlighted in Julie's words in a conversation with Jean, "Who is to blame for all this? My father, my mother, myself? But I have no self of my own. I haven't a thought I didn't get from my father, not an emotion I didn't get from my mother, and this last idea – that everyone's equal – I got that from him, my fiancé" (Strindberg, 2008, p. 108). In the play's preface, Strindberg (2008) himself explains the following:

> As modern characters, living in an age of transition more urgently hysterical at any rate than the one that preceded it, I have depicted the figures in my play as more split and vacillating, a mixture of the old and the new, and it seems to me not improbable that modern ideas may also have permeated down by way of newspapers and kitchen talk to the level of servants. That is why the valet belches forth certain modern ideas from within his inherited slave's soul. (p. 59)

Strindberg's ideas clearly align with those of new historicism, particularly in their emphasis on the inseparability of author and a literary work (Robinson, 1998), something that requires further research into how Strindberg projects his tumultuous relationship with his mother and his resulting aversion to feminism in *Miss Julie*.

Contextualization of Epistemes and the Marginalized

The aforementioned historical and authorial backgrounds provide a new historicist analysis with the bedrock of the study at hand. Thus, a more narrow investigation regarding the play's themes and motifs as well as the role epistemes play in shaping characters' beliefs are needed to grasp the holistic perspective aimed by the theory. Initially, Strindberg's characters, Julie, Jean, and Kristin, are placed in the late 19th-century Sweden, making them prone to all societal, political, cultural, and historical epistemes, producing various discourses according to their place in society. Despite her privileged and aristocratic status as the Count's daughter, Julie is still considered a victim within the context of patriarchal society and oppressive gender norms – the play's epistemic determinants. Her attempt to assert agency and autonomy in

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defiance of traditional gender roles and expectations only results in her isolation from both her upper class and Jean and Kristin's working class.

The affair with Jean serves as an attempt to escape her cultured and sophisticated aristocratic background, yet her tragic fate reflects the futility of such an attempt. Challenging social conventions and asserting her independence in a patriarchal society that seeks to confine and control her can be seen as a culmination of the tensions she faces, including her struggles with her own suppressed desires that resulted from the limitations imposed by her gender and social class. This intensifies her tragic death at the end of the play, a result of a societal episteme, shaping future events and beliefs and taking the form of liberation from the constraints of patriarchy. She, then, becomes a symbol of feminist resistance and subversion that plays a huge role in shaping her society even through her death.

A reflection of Strindberg's misogyny, Julie is represented as a "man-hating woman" whose "descent" takes the trajectory from "spirit to flesh", unlike Jean whose "ascent" takes the opposite direction. While Julie is "motivated by her attraction to dirt and death", Jean is attempting to flee this dirt-like life and dreams of becoming a Rumanian Count who owns a Swiss hotel, but only one of them wins this game (Brustein, 1991, p. 59). Through her death, Julie manages to break free from her constraints whereas Jean is instantly snapped out of his dream and brought back to the reality of filth, dirt, and grime upon hearing the sound of the Count's bell. This is a clear manifestation of the author's convictions that neither sex would ever coexist with parity and that, as Brustein puts in, the "Nietzschean" male hero is superior to his female "antagonist" but often falls as the victim in the end. This is clear from the very beginning of the play through the conversation between Jean and Julie after the former informs the latter that he "wouldn't take the liberty" to "sit down", "not in her presence". Only after Julie "order[s]" Jean to sit down does he point out that he would "obey" (Strindberg, 2008, p. 77). He is torn between a farfetched dream and a dire reality, "an aristocratic affectation of French manners and tastes" and "a slavish servility amidst the Count's boots" (Brustein, 1991, p. 60).

The contrasting lives and life philosophies of Jean and Julie highlight new historicist argument that history, culture, and society contribute to the shaping of ideologies and beliefs of individuals in a certain society. The romantic Julie is attracted to the realist Jean in a modern world who "regards love merely as an honorific term for a purely animal act" (p. 60). He refuses Julie's proposal to get married and bluntly expresses that to him, marriage is a "mésalliance", highlighting the dynamics of their relationship (Stridnberg, 2008, p. 96). He is a survivor who, unlike Julie, cannot take his own life because he is a man, and, according to Camus, suicide is for the weak. He also states that he would not commit suicide because it goes against his beliefs, as

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it is a "crime against the providence that gave us life" (p. 96). Finally, "she has remained an aristocrat and died" while "Jean has remained a servant and lived" (Brustein, 1991, p. 61). Shrewdly remarked by Brustein (1991), Jean is a "sexual aristocrat" and a "social slave", yet Julie is a "sexual slave" and a "social aristocrat" (p. 59).

Julie and Jean characters meet only twice; once throughout the seduction process, and once in their despise of their parentage. Because of their parents, their economic statuses, and their social representations, both form certain perspectives about others and their own. The reason as to why Julie despises men is her father's weakness. A failing leader like his class, the count is easily manipulated and lacking moral authority. He is "the symbol of dead relations; he has no existence" especially since "the nobility and aristocracy became weaker after the decline of feudalism" (Hossein & Mostafa, 2017, p. 72). Jean, on the other hand, believes that his parents brought him to an unfair world of social hierarchies and economic inflictions. Through the characters of Jean and Julie, Strindberg stages his own uncertainties: "nobility and baseness, spirit and matter, masculine and feminine, purity and dirt" (p. 61).

In summary, *Miss Julie* serves as a historical and cultural artifact that can add to the readers' understanding of late 19th century Swedish society. Because of the political, economic, and social changes that took place at the time, the characters of *Miss Julie*, in other words, the individuals of 19th century Sweden, are, according to new historicism, the implications of the resulting power dynamics of their changing world. Their subsequent beliefs and actions play their own role in altering the society they live in. In her subversion, Julie challenges class and gender dynamics, affecting her own household from one side and her society on a larger, futuristic scale.

Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*

Similar to the analysis of *Miss Julie,* investigating *The Cherry Orchard* from a new historicist approach requires a dive into the early 20th century Russia and the changes it underwent. The radical fluctuations of statuses at the time affected individuals living in Russia, including Chekhov, whose ideologies were formed as a result of his surrounding environment. By building on major historical events, Chekhov creates characters who either interact with their society in order to rise from their conundrums or remain idle, unable to accept reality's shocking transformations. Lopakhin, the play's only practical and productive character, is a manifestation of the working-class, sick of their current status, subverting against the detriments inflicted on them by the aristocrats. Luba and her brother, Gayev, resort to denial as a means of escaping from their demolishing status in the face of the rising bourgeoisie. Consequently, a new historicist perspective suggests that the

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play's victims are excavated from the historical, social, and cultural contexts at the time of production. They are also a result of historical changes and personal struggles. Only from such a lens can peasants, serfs, *and* aristocrats all be categorized as victims.

In the early 20th century, Russia encountered various political, industrial, and social changes that altered the lives of the Russians, namely the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats. In 1861, a promising future was at the tip of the serf's fingers but not yet fully realized. Social inequality prevailed as many remained tied to the land in a state of economic dependency (Hosking, 2011). With the struggling yet rising class came Lopakhin, a former serf who turned to business in order to escape his abject past and take huge steps up the economic and social ladder. Furthermore, Russia witnessed rapid industrialization, leading to urbanization throughout the entire country. This was followed by significant economic and social changes that would alter the entire predominant power dynamics, highlighted in Lopakhin's suggestion to cut down the cherry orchard and develop the land for profit as well as in the decline of the estate, which represents old Russia. It is through this transaction that Chekhov mirrors the rise of the bourgeoisie and fall of the aristocracy in early 20th-century Russia. This emerging class of Lopakhins is composed of merchants, industrialists, and professionals who challenged traditional power structures dominated by the aristocracy, Luba and her family, who are disbelievingly trying to adapt to changing economic realities.

Finally and most importantly, because the abolition of serfdom did not bring the anticipated results at which it aimed, the Russian Revolution of 1905 took place as a challenge to Tsarist authority. Intent on discarding the Tsar's practices of autocracy, divine right, repression, censorship, social hierarchies, and paternalism, revolutionary movements arranged strikes and protests to demand political reform. Interestingly enough, this six-month long revolution took place just one year after the publication of *The Cherry Orchard* and six months after Chekhov's death. As a matter of fact, it took the Russians only 12 years after that to topple down the Tsarist regime and the aristocratic class. The play's setting is thus shown through the characters' varied attitudes toward political and social upheavals, highlighting the playwright's visionary insights. *The Cherry Orchard*, thus, is a battle between maintaining the status quo and embracing change. Actually, while the play predates World War I, its themes of loss, uncertainty, and societal change resonate with the upheavals of the early 20th century and the aftermaths of the drastic war.

Chekhov's Life and Influence on the Play

It is because Chekhov (1887) states that literature's goal is "absolute and honest truth" attained through echoing "life as it actually is" (Brustein, 1991, p. 73-4) that his works can be placed under a new historicist lens.

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However, new historicists' belief that nobody can ever be objective proves the futility of their common aim. Another surprising similarity between Chekhov and new historicism is the transformation of Chekhov's motto from portraying "life as it is" to explaining "life as it should *not* be" (Magarshack, 1952), intensifying the presence of authorial subjectivity in his works. He depends on his readers to "add the subjective elements that are lacking in the telling", also aligning with new historicism. Due to the author's own struggle in the modern age, he beholds "sympathy for human suffering" and an "outrage at human absurdity" in this same modern age of his (Brustein, 1991, p. 74).

Numerous discourses are introduced in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* due to his personal interests in politics, sociology, and philosophy "because [they] are threads in the fabric of reality" (p. 76), reaffirming new historicists argument that a literary text is a mirror of its time. He illuminates his own time by giving characters "class roles, political convictions, and philosophic attitudes". Luba and Gayev, the aristocratic landowners, are a representation of the fading Russian nobility, clinging to whatever is left of the supposedly glorious past. They resort to denial and resignation against the inevitability of social change. Luba, for example, sees her dead mother, all-white, walking along the cherry orchard and wants to feel and contemplate every single second of this obvious hallucination. Her grief over her dead son, Grisha, remains palpable, explicitly manifesting Chekhov's attempt to make the reader sympathize with her. Indeed, Brustein (1991) argues that Luba's "negligence is a determining factor in their present condition," further insinuating her complicity in Grisha's death and the family's bankruptcy (p. 90). She, as Ania, her seventeen-year-old daughter says it, "couldn't grasp that [she is broke because] she would order the most expensive dishes and tip the waiters a rouble each" (Chekhov, 1951, p. 30). Her brother's reminiscence is highlighted in his association with his "dearest bookcase" (p. 34) and Luba's precious "nursery, [her] dear and precious room!" (p. 28). From a Foucauldian perspective, it is in their sloth that individuals like Luba and Gayev effectively contribute to the "chain of command" in Russian society, taking on their role as epistemes of future generations.

Lopakhin, nonetheless, represents everything the aforementioned idles are not. The role of his class is represented by his ambitious and practical nature, exemplified in his wild capitalist attitude toward the cherry orchard. This attitude resonates with new historicism in its challenge of traditional authority of the aristocracy, threatening prevailing power structures. Unlike Luba and Gayev, Lopakhin is ecstatic as he ponders over the much brighter future awaiting him. He is also progressive in his swift but meticulously studied actions and reactions. Upon climbing the socioeconomic ladder, Lopakhin stumbles upon an opportunity of a lifetime, and he grabs it. He firmly believes that the sale of the cherry orchard is a chance to advance

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economically and socially. Resonating with the Lopakhins of his time, he is a dreamer who believes in building a better tomorrow – for himself. Lopakhin develops into Chekhov's "despoiler" who slowly disinherits the victims of their rightful birth right.

Intellectual Trofimov, at whose glimpse Luba growls, was Grisha's former tutor. His presence in the play embodies a symbol of change and progress against Russian traditional aristocracy. Luba and everything she represents are threatened by Trofimov's challenging traditional values and his criticizing the aristocracy's lack of social awareness and lifestyle. To add, in a society where almost only the aristocrats are educated, Trofimov becomes a unique intellectual rival of Luba and her family, linking the text with the new historicist concept of resistance and subversion against dominant ideologies. He believes he "shall be a student to the end of [his] life" (Chekhov, 1951, p. 41). His boldness in opinion forces Luba and Gayev to face uncomfortable truths about themselves and their society. A representative of the intellectual class of 20th-century Russian society, he is clearly inclined toward idealism. He is an advocate of social justice and equality, fulfilling his role in a changing society, while despising both the inhuman aristocracy and the rising middle class.

Chekhov's portrayal of his characters reflects his both sides, the realist and the moralist. He displays them without idealizing them, their beliefs, or their actions. He does not attempt to mimic reality because reality is unparalleled. As a matter of fact, Chekhov's portrayal of his characters in a manner where the usually attacked aristocrats can easily become targets to be pitied is so wittingly written that it reverberates Greenblatt's (1980) and Foucault's thoughts that power and subversion are interwoven. They believe that a period's subversive elements – artistic and intellectual movements challenging traditional authority – only serve to reinforce power structures. In fact, acts of subversion, while appearing to challenge established norms and authority, often become co-opted by those in power to maintain control. They become absorbed and utilized by existing power structures to the extent that they become what they were once attacking.

The battlefield that Chekhov creates in *The Cherry Orchard* is a resemblance of his own "[impatience] with his cultured idlers" (Brustein, 1991, p. 74). In his most farcical plays, according to Brustein, he portrays a "cultured elite before the forces of darkness […] in a comic-ironic point of view" (p. 74). His use of irony, not unlike Strindberg's, is directed towards the circumstances in which the characters are situated, rather than targeting the characters themselves, shedding light on the inseparability of society, culture, and history in the course of events, itself a new historicist core concept. After the new order of powers is enforced, this battleground creates societal disorder, intensifying confusion in class roles. In only a few words, Chekhov

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uses *The Cherry Orchard* to condemn a gloomy, God-less, modern world controlled by an interminable chain of epistemes, rendering individuals mere spectators of their alienated lives.

Conclusion

Life is out of hand, reach, and control, and this is what new historicism aims to show. This does not mean that the theoretical framework suggested is going to solve all of today's predicaments, but in its attempt to unearth the layers at which a literary work is produced, it offers a deeper analysis of the factors affecting the overall power dynamics that control societies and individuals. Such conceptions provide readers with the chance to better understand their current realities, roles, and ideologies. It explains why they think and act the way they do. It reassures history's part in its manipulating current and future events and suggests that power is a tool used by those who control the narratives of history in order to keep the order of their societies the way it is for as long as they can. By rejecting the good/evil polarity in a literary work's characters, new historicists blame not the products of society, but the wrongful inception of history. When studied from a new historicist perspective, the plays become guides on which readers can rely to uncover covert clues kept hidden by historians, contributing to a better human understanding of history, present life, and future.

Strindberg's pivotal scene in the kitchen where Jean and Julie discuss their dreams not only portrays the characters' psychological and mental states but also highlights a larger socio-economic collapse in aristocracy as Jean challenges traditional hierarchies. As wealth became more attainable through industry rather than inheritance, Strindberg clearly illuminates the growing social mobility and gradual erosion of rigid class structures of late 19th-century Sweden. As for Chekov, this is shown in Lopakhin's speech about cutting the cherry orchard. Such a suggestion mirrors broader economic transformations occurring in Russia as the old feudal order gave way to capitalism. Jean and Lopakhin are similar in their desire to rise above the social restraints of their times; however, unlike Jean, Lopakhin does achieve his desire, reflecting the rising bourgeoisie as a result of his practical, business-minded approach. In brief, the fall of hierarchy in *Miss Julie* and that of landownership in *The Cherry Orchard* shed light on one of man's major crises: the inevitability of change. The wave of social, economic, and historical transformations captures the personal tragedies that the characters face, and no matter how personal these tragedies may seem, they surely have a dramatic and epistemic effect on the generations that follow simply because they act as socio-political forces of their cultures.

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