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The Harbour is a bi-yearly, blind peer-reviewed graduate students journal launched by the English Graduate Students' Society (EGSS) at the Université de Montréal in 2020. Its purpose is to promote the diffusion of the work of students from Canadian and international universities on literature and other cultural productions and the role they play in a variety of cultural imaginaries. Each student contributing to the operations of the journal has specialized knowledge in specific fields such as Post-Colonial studies, Canadian studies, Indigenous studies, popular culture studies, and others. This offers diverse approaches in the journal's editorial vision throughout all of the journal's issues.

Université de Montréal is situated on land where, long before the arrival of the French, people of many Indigenous nations came together and interacted. We wish to acknowledge these nations, their descendants and the spirit of fraternity that presided over the signing in 1701 of the Great Peace of Montreal, a treaty that fostered peaceful relationships between France, its Indigenous allies and the Haudenosaunee federation (pronunciation: O-di-no-sho-ni). The spirit of fraternity that inspired this treaty serves as a model for our own university community.

English Graduate Students' Society
3150 rue Jean-Brillant Montreal,
Qc., Canada, H3T 1N7

https://udemegss.wordpress.com/

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Disruptive Entanglements:

Transnational Considerations of Performance and Adaptation

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The Harbour

—Disruptive Entanglements—

This year's issue is a particularly exciting one for *The Harbour* as a series of changes has opened possibilities for Mayurakshi Dev, Roxanne Brousseau and Sahar Sadeghi to join the executive team as Editor-in-Chief Academic Division, Editor-in-Chief Creative Division and Editorial Assistant respectively. We also had the pleasure of welcoming back Ashley-Marie Maxwell as Guest Editor for this issue which we have titled *Disruptive Entanglements: Transnational Considerations of Performance and Adaptation*, which draws focus on graduate students' interests in adaptation around the world. But more to this, we have also officially launched the creative division of this journal so as to give voice to creatives both within and without academia to share their work with us. In this first issue of our new volume, we introduce three articles and three creative pieces. The first article, "Tolkein's Translation of *Beowulf* as an Adaptation", is written by Marithé Collard, a student at the Université de Montréal, and argues for a transcultural translation of *Beowulf* by J.R.R. Tolkein. The second article, "Remaking the Monster: A Study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Adaptation," written by Frabrizio Lacarra Ramirez, who studies at Concordia University, engages various adaptations of *Frankenstein* with Shelley's original work through the lens of technology and family status. The final article, "Dissonant Yet True: Three *Uncle Vanya* Film Adaptations", written by Greg Nussen, addresses three adaptations of Checkov's *Uncle Vanya* to demonstrate the contradicting and paradoxical exchanges of profound emotional reflection and inexpressibility.

In this third issue, we are also proudly introducing a creative writing segment on the theme of spaces of (re)creation, featuring three writers. First, Nizar Zouidi's one-act play *Zarses* fashions a modern world that incorporates classical characters to address the theme of corruption and incompleteness. Next, we have Emi Wood Scully's poem "View of My Neighbor's Back Door," which produces a clear image of a moment of observation, one that gently invites readers to consider the perspectives with which we witness the world. Finally, Ali Armstrong's poem "Pictures Revisited" offers a nostalgic and moving rendition of revisiting the past and remembering those no longer in our lives through the experience of returning to spaces and objects associated with memories.

It is our pleasure to introduce our third issue of *The Harbour* on Disruptive Entanglements: Transnational Considerations of Performance and Adaptation.

Camille Houle-Eichel & Mayurakshi Dev
Editor-in-Chief Academic Division
Roxanne Brousseau
Editor-in-Chief Creative Division
April 20th, 2023

Editorial Letter

The idea for this issue came from the recent flood of cross-media adaptations of oftentimes well-loved and well-known literary works. The fanbases for these narratives have reacted in varying degrees to these transformations; at times, the adaptations have been hailed as fantastic and groundbreaking, and in other situations, they have been ill received by critics and fans alike. However, as with any discussion of adaptation, one must question the importance of authenticity and faithfulness in these transformed works. Do we consider the source material to be immutable and supreme in its artistic quality, or do we allow for parts of it to be modified to accommodate a wider audience? Is there a necessity to reach out to more people if the source material is already appreciated by a select few? Recreation is an important process of how we as humans adopt, adapt, and utilize narratives that have become transcendent. This is especially relevant when discussing adaptations that take on a cross-cultural dimension or, as in the case of this journal issue, transnational approaches. Furthermore, the element of performance plays its part in how we perceive 'good' and 'bad' adaptations of works. The quality of the acting, for example, or the transliteration of works influence this subjective idea of what makes an adaptation successful.

It is our duty as academics to tackle these difficult questions, which is why the essays presented forthwith in this issue offer carefully examined and researched perspectives on the role, place, and reason for adaptation in today's society. Starting with Marithé Collard's "An Adaptation Through Culture and Time: How Tolkien's Prose Translation of Beowulf Balances Antique Quality and Modern Accessibility," the essay examines one of the oldest pieces of English literature and its modernization through the use of curated linguistic choices by the author and scholar J.R.R. Tolkien. The essay "Remaking the Monster: A Study of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Adaptation" by Fabrizio Laccara Ramirez approaches the eighteenth-century Gothic text with a critical eye turned towards the figure of The Creature. The last essay by Greg Nussen, entitled "Dissonant Yet True: Three Uncle Vanya Film Adaptations," looks at Chekhov's family play as different adaptations interpreted on screen rather than on stage. Through these essays, we hope to showcase the varied approaches to the topic of adaptation, from literature-based discussions to film and media recreations.

Since this issue is centered around creation and recreation through the act of adaptation, The Harbour is proud to present a new subsection to the journal dedicated to creative writing. For this issue, we welcome three writers and their original pieces of fiction. Nizar Zouidi's Zarses is a modern one-act play that draws upon literary common knowledge to propose a political polemic. Emy Wood Scully's poem Autumn View of My Neighbour's Back Door is a calming presence in a fast-paced world with its vivid imagery and compelling rhyme scheme. Finally, Ali Armstrong's Pictures Revisited is a piece of prose fiction that tackles the themes of memory, remembrance, and loss.

With these literary and creative pieces, we hope that you will enjoy this latest issue of The Harbour. We thank our collaborators and all those who participated in this project to help bring this idea to life. I would also like to thank my colleagues at The Harbour for bringing me onboard for this issue and allowing me a platform for discussions of adaptation and performance.

Ashley-Marie Maxwell
Guest Editor
Montréal, 3 March 2023

Essays

An Adaptation Through Culture and Time: How Tolkien's Prose Translation of *Beowulf* Balances Antique Quality and Modern Accessibility

Marithé Collard

Abstract

J.R.R. Tolkien, highly renowned author of fantasy fiction, also did much work as a scholar and translator of Old English during his academic career. Most notably, he studied extensively the Old English epic poem *Beowulf,* even producing his own translation of the text in Modern English. His version of the alliterative verse poem, posthumously published in 2014, in *Beowulf: a Translation and Commentary,* has the particularity of being written in prose. The result is a prose text that reads as an English novel, but with a respect to the poetic and antique aspects of the Old English text. Since the author himself states that he values verse translations more than the ones written in prose (Smith 5), this essay explores Tolkien's use of prose in this instance, and its influence on the target text. Indeed, this translation can be positioned within a functionalist approach, as the choices made by Tolkien reflect more of his purpose of production, which he sees as a help to study, than a desire for publication (C. Tolkien 133). Within this framework, this essay argues that Tolkien's translation functions as an adaptation, due to the choice of prose as a medium to convey the meaning of the Old English poem. Tolkien uses prose as a means to reflect his own interpretation of Beowulf, and to place his priority of translation on the meaning, rather than the form. The translation itself employs linguistic devices to convey the antique quality of the Old English poem, making it both accessible and enjoyable to Modern English readers. Tolkien's version is structurally and linguistically coherent, both within itself, and with the Old English poem's meaning. This translation, as an adaptation, is transcultural; both through space, as it depicts Early Medieval Scandinavia in English, and through time, as the tale of *Beowulf* has had to traverse centuries to get to readers of Modern English. The use of prose, despite breaking with fidelity to the Old English text, widens its accessibility, all the while conveying accurately the traditions of early medieval poetry.Key words: J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf*, translation, adaptation, prose

J.R.R. Tolkien is well known for his work of fiction, which includes the *Lord of the Rings* and the *Hobbit*. However, during his academic career as a professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford (C. Tolkien vii), he also did much work as a scholar and translator of Old English. Indeed, Tolkien spent a good portion of his career on the epic poem *Beowulf*, it was "his particular object of study" (Drout 169). Where critics marvel at the historical relevance of *Beowulf*, but doubt its literary qualities, Tolkien praises the work for the beauty of its poetry (Zettersten 233). His famous essay about *Beowulf*, "The Monsters and the Critics," is "widely recognized as a turning point in Beowulfian criticism" (Nicholson x). Tolkien indeed believes that "*Beowulf* is in fact so interesting as poetry, in places poetry so powerful, that this quite overshadows the historical content"

("Monsters and Critics" 54). This way of analyzing *Beowulf* brought a lasting change in the discussion about the poetic and literary value of the poem (Zettersten 233). His interest in the Old English poem thus goes far back, but he did not only analyze the poem; he also translated the entire work into Modern English. He finished a first version of it in 1926 (C. Tolkien vii), but he did not seem satisfied with it, as he writes in a letter: "I have all [*Beowulf*] translated, but in much hardly to my liking" (C. Tolkien 2). He corrected and annotated this version over the years (C. Tolkien 2), but never rewrote it completely; it is therefore unlikely that he intended to publish it (C. Tolkien 133). Christopher Tolkien[1] himself, who was in possession of his father's manuscript, held off the publication of this version of *Beowulf* until 2014. This is the version I am looking at, as it appears in *Beowulf: a Translation and Commentary*. American scholar Michael D.C. Drout praises this translation and says that it is "a successful rendering of the Old English poem and [it] provides both illumination and pleasure to its reader" (157). The text has, however, not been analyzed in scholarly conversations nearly as much as Tolkien's fictional works. Indeed, while Tolkien's fiction is widely discussed, this translation of *Beowulf* and its 2014 publication has been the object of little academic research, despite its literary qualities.

An important point of analysis lies in the fact that Tolkien chooses prose as his medium to translate the epic poem, even as he argues that prose translations of poetry are not as intellectual and artistic as full verse translations (Smith 5). His main objective by doing a prose translation of *Beowulf* seems to have been to provide an aid for study and to be used alongside the Old English text (Tolkien qtd. in Drout 154). This choice thus marks this translation of *Beowulf* as an adaptation from the Old English text, which is written in alliterative verse.

An adaptation, in its most simple definition, is a "change of medium through which meaning is communicated" (Kuhiwczak viii). However, the adaptation process can be complex and intricate, especially when, as it is the case with this work, it transcends the barriers of culture and time. Indeed, the purpose of the text and the target audience must be taken into account; one must ensure to maintain the source text's relevance to the target culture, as it usually motivates the adaptation process (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 25). With such an importance given to the purpose of accessibility, the process in this

[1] Son of J.R.R. Tolkien, he was appointed by his father to be his literary executor. Since his father's death in 1973, he acted as editor and posthumously published many of J.R.R. Tolkien's writings (C. Tolkien inside back cover).

case can be explained through a functionalist approach, which places "particular emphasis on the *function* of the target text" (Palumbo 50). Consideration for the target audience and the purpose of the text is what helps determine the nature of the translation choices. Indeed, these choices must take into account not only linguistic elements, but also "social and cultural factors" (Palumbo 50). This version of *Beowulf*, as an adaptation, must therefore be looked at differently than simply analyzing its translation aspects. The change of medium to convey the narrative further marks Tolkien's translation as a transcultural adaptation, which implies an "exchange between two cultures" (Malinowski lix). This is embodied in *Beowulf* as the depiction of Early Medieval Scandinavia in the Old English language. The cultural exchange, in this case, also spans across time, with the translation into Modern English.

Tolkien takes liberties with the form, but the reading of his version still conveys the feeling of an epic tale. For instance, the themes are accurately conveyed through his writing; Beowulf is introduced as "the chiefest of them men in arms" (*Beowulf* 293[2]), keeping in with the language proper to the description of adulated warriors. The writing itself has an epic quality to it, since Tolkien uses linguistic devices to recreate the ancient atmosphere of the Old English tale. When considering the "binary opposition" (Palumbo 49) between fidelity to the source text and freedom of creativity in translation, Tolkien's version of *Beowulf* positions itself in the middle, since it uses the freedom of the prose medium to incorporate elements that are reminiscent of early medieval poetry. In the case of *Beowulf*, the benefits of a literal translation, that is "a mode of translation that remains close to the form of the original" (Palumbo 49), would be to respect the Old English alliterative verses and the structure of the poem. However, its meaning and artistic message can be more difficult to convey, which is when a "free translation" (Palumbo 49) might be preferred. Thus, a translation that steers more in the direction of an adaptation, while losing some fidelity to the source text, has more possibilities to stay true to the epic elements of the poem itself. This translation or, as I argue, this adaptation through culture and time, strikes a balance between fidelity and creative liberties. Therefore, Tolkien's rendition closely resembles what could have been an epic poem in the form experienced by Old English speakers. In this sense, the adaptation, despite the liberties taken with

[2] The line numbers used in this paper follow the London edition of 2014 by Harper Collins Publishers, hardback cover.

the choice of medium, successfully recreates the overall feeling of literacy, all the while widening its accessibility to an audience of Modern English readers. I will thus look at three main aspects to argue that this translation is successful as an adaptation. Firstly, this translation was a personal work for Tolkien, and his views on translating Old English help this version to be consistent and well-rendered. Secondly, the text itself, from a linguistic point of view, is technically sound and recreates the feeling of reading an epic poem in Modern English. And thirdly, the use of prose as a medium to convey the story enhances its accessibility, all the while keeping with the traditions of Old English poetry.

Christopher Tolkien had reservations about the publication of his father's translation of *Beowulf*, which resulted in the publication of the book *Beowulf: a Translation and Commentary,* relatively late in time[3]. Indeed, about his father's career and his reasons for delaying publication, Christopher Tolkien states: "[t]he translation was completed in 1926, when my father was 34; before him lay two decades as the professor on Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, two decades of further study of Old English poetry [...] and reflection most especially on *Beowulf*" (C. Tolkien vii). He also describes the state in which he found the manuscript of his father's translation; Tolkien made annotations and modifications in handwriting, first with ink, then in pencil (C. Tolkien 132). According to Christopher Tolkien, "the earlier parts of the commentary have a distinct character. They were written fairly carefully and legibly [...], but after some thousand lines of the Old English text [the commentary work] becomes by degrees rougher and much less uniform" (C. Tolkien 132). For him, this seems to confirm that Tolkien's intention, with the corrections he made, was simply to clarify his material, and not to aim at publication (C. Tolkien 133). Furthermore, Tolkien faces a dilemma of choosing the audience which would be receiving his translations. For his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1975, posthumous), he has in mind that "[t]he main target is, of course, the general reader of literary bent but with no knowledge of Middle English; but it cannot be doubted that the book will be read by students, and by academic folk of 'English Departments'" (C. Tolkien x). In the case of *Beowulf*, the result goes beyond Tolkien's scholarly intent, as it appears that he asserts a more creative choice in translation, by keeping in mind the themes and literary

[3] *Beowulf: a Translation and Commentary* was published in 2014. Christopher Tolkien passed away in 2020, only six years later.

devices that compose the Old English epic poem. Christopher Tolkien's publication presents the text in its entirety, incorporating the changes his father made throughout the years as an account for his most 'recent' version (C. Tolkien xii). The result is a text that can be read as prose, from start to finish, thus resembling the form of an English novel. This choice therefore makes *Beowulf* accessible not only to scholars and students (already familiar with the subject), but also to any English-speaking reader who would be interested.

Moreover, this internal coherence in the text allows for a result that is both structurally sound and a lyrical work of prose. Where "most translators sought to strike a balance between semantic fidelity and poetic charm, influenced in most cases by the additional need to respect the restrictions of the alliterative verse form" (Smith 6), Tolkien's choice of prose allows him more freedom. The medium thus serves as the base that conveys the epic poem's mythical quality.

Through his lectures and writings on the subject of *Beowulf*, Tolkien asserts his own interpretation of the poem. He considers that the poem was written "by a learned man writing of old times, who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent and something symbolical" ("Monsters and Critics" 78). This transpires in his translation, as the act itself of adapting *Beowulf* pays homage to the tradition of heroism of early medieval times in Northern Europe. The nostalgia of old times and places is reflected in the poem itself, but it can equally be found in Tolkien's adaptation of the poem. For instance, the very first lines of the poem are rendered with an insistence on ancient and epic times: "Lo! the glory of the kings of the people of the Spear-Danes in days of old we have heard tell, how those princes did deeds of valour" (*Beowulf* 1-3[4]). Moreover, the Old English text of *Beowulf* is most likely stemming from oral tradition of storytelling (*Broadview* 83); this marks *Beowulf* as an adaptation itself. Tolkien's act of changing the medium to make it more accessible thus mirrors the role of the Old English text for its own contemporary audience.

Tolkien's translation is structurally and technically sound enough to carry and adapt the ancient elements of the Old English text. Indeed, Tolkien uses linguistic devices and techniques to convey an old and epic quality in his translation. Christopher Tolkien argues that his father's choice of writing in

[4] Tolkien's translation is numbered in lines, keeping in line with the marking traditions of poetry, despite the use of prose. This results in numbers of lines that do not match the Old English ones, whereas an alliterative verse translation's lines would.

prose is justified by the enhanced poetry of his writing:

> Abandoning his fragmentary work on a fully alliterative translation of [*Beowulf*], imitating the regularities of the old poetry, my father, as it seems to me, determined to make a translation as close as he could to the exact meaning in detail of the Old English poem, far closer than could ever be attained by translation into 'alliterative' verse, but nonetheless with some suggestion of the rhythm of the original. (C. Tolkien 8)

Tolkien thus prefers to convey meaning rather than form; he uses the freedom granted by prose to stay as close as possible to the meaning of the Old English lines. To achieve this, he employs linguistic devices to maintain the rhythm and the poetic aspects of the text. The section which describes Beowulf's introduction to Hrothgar gives an illustration of these devices: "Words he spake – his mail gleamed upon him, woven like stuff in crafty web by the cunning of smiths: 'Hail to thee, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and vassal; on many a renownéd deed I ventured in my youth[']" (*Beowulf* 326-31). Such writing techniques contribute to add an archaic quality to the text.

An element that stands out is the use of an added written syllable on instances of *-ed*-ending adjectives followed by a noun, as in "renownéd deed" (*Beowulf* 330). However, the added syllable's insertion is not systematic: neither the section "flushed with drink" (*Beowulf* 388) nor "a renowned and treasured sword" (*Beowulf* 833) employ this method. Similarly, the use of verbal endings in *-s* and the archaic forms in *-eth* are used interchangeably (C. Tolkien 10), for instance in the passage: "as wide as the sea encircleth the windy walls of the land. Be thou blessed, O prince, while thy life endures!" (*Beowulf* 1013-14). On a visual and rhythmic level, the use of these older forms helps maintain the aesthetics of ancient poetry. Christopher Tolkien notes that these changes are made for rhythmic purposes, adding that "inversion of word-order can often be similarly explained" (C. Tolkien 10-11). Indeed, the aforementioned syntactic inversions, where the verb is featured at the end of the proposition, are common throughout the translation; they are visible even in the lines above: "on many a renownéd deed I ventured" (*Beowulf* 330-31). Another example of this can be found in the introduction of Scyld's son: "Beow was renowned – far and wide his glory sprang – the heir of Scyld in Scedeland" (*Beowulf* 14-16), which has a melody in its rhythm by the inversion and by the similarity in final sounds:

'renowned', 'sprang', 'Scedeland'. The use of these linguistic devices brings an antique feel to the text and helps recall the mythical era of the epic poem. The passivity of the voice imparts on the text a feeling of old times being depicted; moreover, those details are more noticeable when read out loud, which keeps in line with the oral traditions at the roots of *Beowulf*. The rhythmicality and musicality brought by these elements add to the poetic quality of Tolkien's prose.

Furthermore, the use of old language adds to this ancient quality of the translation. For instance, Tolkien uses distinctly old language throughout the text, especially within dialogues. The way Hrothgar addresses Beowulf after Grendel's mother's attack on Heorot depicts this choice of language: "[n]ow once more doth hope of help depend on thee alone. The abode as yet thou knowest not nor the perilous place where thou canst find that creature stained with sin. Seek it if thou durst!" (*Beowulf* 1149-52). The use of 'thou', 'thee', and *-st* final to verbs such as 'knowest', 'canst' and 'durst' are all associated nowadays with an old use of English, which helps recreate the atmosphere of bygone times of *Beowulf*. This insistence on the fact that this tale refers to an ancient past, even by the poet of *Beowulf*s standards, conveys accurately the spirit of the Old English text. The use of modern language could have made it more readily accessible to a modern audience; however, the use of older wording brings authenticity to the reading experience. Tolkien's view about the poem being nostalgic of old times and heroism ("Monsters and Critics" 78) thus transpires in his own adaptation. These choices bring forward the narrative and poetic elements of *Beowulf* and help the work to keep the ancient spirit of this epic poem.

Tolkien makes translation choices that mark his work as different from other translations of *Beowulf*. An example of this stands out: the name of Scyld Scefing's son. This man is called "Beowulf" (*Beowulf* OE18) in the Old English text, just like the hero of the story, yet they are two different characters. Tolkien argues that the repetition of the name was a mistake made by scribes who copied the manuscript (*Beowulf* commentary 148). He believes that the poet, an "artist, a man very sensitive to repetitions and significant correspondences" (*Beowulf* commentary 147), was unlikely to have written this on purpose. Therefore, he prefers the use of "Beow" (*Beowulf* 14), which signifies 'barley' in Old English (*Beowulf* commentary 145). For Tolkien, "there is fairly conclusive evidence that the character in the mythical genealogy should have the mythical monosyllabic non-heroic name *Beow* 'barley' going with *Scéaf* 'sheaf'" (*Beowulf* commentary 145). The use of

Beow provides further contrast with the etymology of Beowulf that has general consensus amongst scholars, which "requires the name to break down into the themes *beo* (bee) and *wulf* (wolf) and for these elements to recombine into a sort of kenning, which was first solved as "woodpecker" and subsequently as 'bear'" (Abram 390-91). Indeed, the analysis of the name as 'bear' emphasizes the imposing nature of Beowulf, which in turn helps to define him as the hero of the poem. Tolkien's analysis of the presence of two Beowulfs in the poem leads him to diverge, in this instance, from an exact translation of the name of Scyld Scefing's son. It is a justified choice, but a marked translation choice, nonetheless. Similarly, Tolkien chooses to translate the term 'wyrd' (*Beowulf* OE 2526) into Modern English, whereas more literal translations may keep it in Old English (Liuzza 2526). Indeed, 'wyrd', the equivalent of 'fate' in Modern English, has a quasi-personification quality (*Broadview* 66). Tolkien's translation thus features the term 'fate,' in some instances even with a capitalized 'f,' as it is in the following passage: "but to us twain hereafter shall it be done at the mound's side, even as Fate, the Portion of each man, decrees to us" (*Beowulf* 2122-24). This translation choice keeps a consistency in the story that will not deter the reader. When leaving 'wyrd' untranslated in the text, one needs to add commentary or notes to ensure the meaning of this term is understood. Tolkien compromises the quasi-personified nuance of 'wyrd' by translating it to 'fate;' however, this choice has the effect of bringing to life a coherent story that is self-contained, and therefore more accessible to a Modern English audience. These translation choices show the solid grasp Tolkien has on *Beowulf* and add weight to his own researched interpretation. They therefore anchor this rendition of *Beowulf* further in the realm of adaptation, which relies on the freedom allowed by the choice of prose to convey the cultural and antique elements of the epic poem.

In a broader perspective, Tolkien's interpretation of the poem is shown in his depiction of a mythical era, as well as in the structure of the text. Tolkien's *Beowulf* enhances the conflicts in their poetic evocation of the Early Medieval period, especially the changes from paganism to Christianity that are portrayed in the poem (*Broadview* 83). Indeed, Tolkien believes that "before *Beowulf* was written Christian poetry was already established, and was known to the author. The language of *Beowulf* is in fact partly 're-paganized' by the author with a special purpose, rather than [C]hristianized [...] without consistent purpose" ("Monsters and Critics" 99). His vision therefore

acknowledges the past as a non-static reality. Tolkien asserts his mythical reading of the text with the description of the three main adversaries that Beowulf faces, which he calls "monsters" ("Monsters and Critics" 52). Indeed, the monsters are made to have a cursed quality that indicates that they are not purely evil, but that their wrongness is brought upon them as a consequence of turning their back on God. In "Monsters and Critics," Tolkien states that "the monsters become 'adversaries of God', and so begin to symbolize [...] the powers of evil" (69). In this sense, their evil deeds are the result of this curse of unfaithfulness. It is particularly true of Grendel, as seen with the description of his origins: "[f]rom thence sprang many creatures doomed of old; of whom was Grendel one, outlawed by hate as is the deadly wolf" (*Beowulf* 1052-54). It implies an imposed condition, both fueled by this curse and by the will of the monster. Tolkien's choice of language, by referring to terms such as 'creature' and 'wolf,' enhances the mystical quality of the monsters, which adds to their belonging to older days, to myths and legends, before Christianity. As Beowulf, the heroic warrior representing the pagan war ideals, defeats the last monster, a new age begins, but it also leads him to his own demise. This representation highlights the idea that the end of the mythical monsters' era must come at the price of Beowulf's life, as both the dragon and the hero "now had journeyed to the end of passing life" (*Beowulf* 2390-91). Therefore, Tolkien's translation conveys the cultural elements of the age of heroes depicted in *Beowulf*, through his interpretation of the text and his choice of language.

In this reading of the poem, there are two distinct parts: the rise of a pagan hero during his youth, in a more distant past, and its fall, which brings about the Christian era in which the poem was most likely composed (*Broadview* 83). Tolkien's view of the poem was that "[i]t is essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms it is in a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death" ("Monsters and Critics" 81). This interpretation of the poem's timeline is reflected in the structure of the prose translation. Indeed, the Old English alliterative verse poem is divided into 43 sections (*Broadview* 81), and previous critics have doubted the strength of combination between the two major parts previously mentioned (Zettersten 233). However, Tolkien's translation is not separated into sections; rather, it flows as one single text.

The only structural divide, the moment that marks the turn between the rising of Beowulf as a young and strong warrior and his decline as an aging man who represents an era long gone, is marked in the text with a section separation at line 1851, indicating where Tolkien thinks the text shifts. This single instance of section division structures the text and uses the prose format to recreate the line of the story. In this case, the choice of prose offers a solid ground for storytelling and brings consistency and continuity to the text. Therefore, "Tolkien proves very clearly that the poem forms a unity of two connected parts, which help to create a poetic wholeness" (Zettersten 233). The strengthening of the structure anchors the translation further in the realm of adaptation, since the unified story aligns more with the form of a novel rather than the structure of a poem.

Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* sought accessibility, but also fidelity to the ancient quality of the Old English poem. Indeed, the balance between the old and the new is carefully respected, and "it is difficult to imagine any other arrangement of text, or any different set of editing practices, that would make Tolkien's work on *Beowulf* more accessible to multiple audiences" (Drout 169-70). Tolkien's use of prose brings his translation closer to the format of the modern novel, one that can be read as much for entertainment as for purposes of study. However, the accessibility of Tolkien's work on *Beowulf* is only made possible with the choice of Christopher Tolkien to publish his father's translation of the poem. While it is doubtful that Tolkien himself would have made the same choice (C. Tolkien 133), the scholarship of Beowulfian studies finds itself significantly enriched, especially with the large amount of commentary that was included with the prose version (Drout 169).

As far as translation goes, a literal translation would not have been as successful in conveying the meaning and themes of this epic tale. The case of *Beowulf* is complex, since the translator "must decide whether to proceed half line by half line, line by line, clause by clause, or sentence by sentence" (Drout 155). In this case, a line by line translation would be akin to a literal translation, since it would focus on the format and individual meaning of words (Palumbo 49), instead of prioritizing consistency within the text. Indeed, "while translating each half line individually would allow readers to orient themselves immediately in the text, this practice would come at the cost of often producing [...] a collection of words whose syntactic relationships are unclear" (Drout 155). Tolkien makes the choice to convey

meaning before all else (C. Tolkien 8), therefore adopting an approach more akin to the aforementioned sentence by sentence method of translation. However, despite the liberties with the form, his structure and his depiction of ancient times are both solid and sound, as Tolkien "manages to keep the clauses, full lines, and even half lines in the same order that they appear in the Old English text" (Drout 155). The choice of prose in this context allows for more freedom, which Tolkien uses to stay as close as possible to the form and structure of an epic poem. He thus incorporates a balance of creativity and fidelity to *Beowulf*'s antique tradition.

As an adaptation, this translation therefore achieves the goal of being accessible, all the while being truthful to the Old English text. The combination of the linguistic devices together actively respects the old quality of the poem. The antique feel they add to the text has the effect of recreating the reading experience of an epic poem, even as centuries separates the modern audience from the *Beowulf* manuscript. Indeed, although the translation's medium is prose, the technical agility of Tolkien's writing enhances the poetic elements of his rendering of *Beowulf*. According to Drout, "experience shows that when read aloud by a gifted speaker, some passages have great rhetorical and aesthetic power" (157). Thus, the archaic wording and the passive voice of the syntactic inversions act as a reminder of ancient tales and their oral tradition. The choice to write in prose permits the use of this older language, of the inversion of sentences, and of a line of narration that can be easily followed. This translation, by its resemblance to the English novel as well as its evocation of the grandness and epic character of *Beowulf*, plunges the reader into ancient days of myths and legends, as Tolkien assumes was intended by the poet of the Old English text ("Monsters and Critics" 78). Additionally, he believes that the term best fit to describe *Beowulf* would be an "elegy" rather than an "epic," and considers it as an "heroic-elegiac poem" ("Monsters and Critics" 85). His translation reflects that sentiment, for it bridges the heroic themes with the embraced nostalgia of old days. It pays homage to the Old English text by incorporating a distinct ancient quality in the writing, and by conveying the cultural legacy of the epic hero of the Early Medieval era. Thus, his adaptation succeeds in accurately depicting the meaning and content of the Old English text, as it replicates the experience of reading an epic poem.

Finally, I argue that Tolkien's translation belongs to the realm of transcultural adaptation, as this version of *Beowulf* depicts the Early Medieval era of

Northern Europe that crossed over to Britain and jumped over the centuries to get to us. Tolkien uses prose to convey the atmosphere of this era, keeping in line with the heroism, the mythical elements and the orality that characterizes the epic poem (*Broadview* 83). Furthermore, *Beowulf*, despite being written in Old English, depicts an Early Medieval Scandinavia. It adapts the oral traditions of storytelling to the manuscript medium. *Beowulf* itself can therefore be considered as a transcultural adaptation, as the language of the manuscript is different from the culture it depicts.

Tolkien's translation picks up this role of adapting stories into a more modern medium: in this case, the novel in prose. In addition, the adaptation depicts an overarching crossing of culture, since it adapts the cultural referents of Old English to a Modern-English speaking audience, all the while staying true to the Old English text's spirit. This is made possible by Tolkien's choice to adapt the meaning of the poem into prose (C. Tolkien 8). Tolkien's *Beowulf* is, effectively, an adaptation of a work that was already an adaptation. It is transcultural through space and culture, with the depiction of Early Medieval Scandinavia and the heroism of an old era; but it is also transcultural through time. To achieve this, Tolkien adapts his language and sentence structure to reflect the archaic quality of the epic poem in Modern English. The result is a more accessible text that depicts accurately the ancient times of *Beowulf*. The importance given by Tolkien to the purpose of accessibility places this adaptation process within the functionalist approach, since it focuses on the function of the target text and determines the translation choices made to fulfill this intent (Palumbo 50). Tolkien thus makes *Beowulf* accessible to readers of Modern English, more than a thousand years after the manuscript was written (*Beowulf* commentary 146). As a transcultural adaptation through time, this version of *Beowulf* successfully preserves the cultural legacy of the epic poem. It offers a return to the literary purpose of an epic poem, which further sets this translation in the realm of a functional adaptation. It gives modern readers the occasion to experience this tale in the form that closely resemble that of an epic poem destined for an Old English audience.

In conclusion, Tolkien offers a prose translation of *Beowulf* that can be considered as an adaptation, since it makes "considerable changes [...] in order to make the text more suitable for a specific audience" (Shuttleworth and Cowie 3). In this case, the audience is understood to be the students for whom this would bring aid to study, but also the wider general public, with the publication

of the translation in the novel format. The choice of prose enhances the accessibility of the text, therefore complying with the function of the adaptation. By using linguistic devices to recreate the mythical era of *Beowulf*, the translation conveys an antique quality that evokes the form of an epic poem, despite the use of prose. Tolkien's aim with this translation is thus fulfilled, even going further than the selective use intended, due to Christopher Tolkien's decision to publish it posthumously. The text thus functions as an adaptation that brings the epic poem, normally kept in the circles of literature and history studies, to a broader modern audience. This version of *Beowulf* can thus be considered as an adaptation through both culture and time. In the interest of furthering this topic, this work's status of adaptation could be contrasted with Tolkien's other published translations, for instance his version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Similarly, it would benefit from a comparison with the upcoming *The Battle of Maldon: together with the Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (Harper Collins), another prose translation of an early medieval text, set to be published in April 2023.

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Remaking the Monster: A Study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Adaptation

Fabrizio Lacarra Ramirez

Abstract

In the Introduction to his book *Adaptation Theory and Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA*, Gordon Slethaug shares the perspectives of critics arguing against faithfulness by stating that "adaptations have value, validity, and integrity not dependent upon the originals and [are] able to say interesting and unique things about language and culture" (Slethaug 2014, 3). In this essay, I will use this same viewpoint to look at various adaptations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and identify the ways they engage in dialogue with the original. Through analyzing the status of technology, the family, and the monstrous in these adaptations, I will discuss how they challenge or add to the ideas present in Shelley's work and the value they gain as a result.

Historically, discussion surrounding the concept of adaptation has often been fraught with disagreement over the quality of the adapted work when compared to its source material. If an adapted work deviates too much from its original text, the adapted version might provide a more enjoyable experience to detractors of the original but simultaneously alienate purists who prefer the established structure and substance of the predecessor. This discussion can frequently devolve into an all-or-nothing judgement of an adaptation's merit based on how 'faithful' they are to their source material. While I can see the value in faithful adaptation preserving the vision of the original, I believe adaptations that deviate from their source material have the capacity to offer something equally valuable. In the Introduction to his book *Adaptation Theory and Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA*, Gordon Slethaug shares the perspectives of critics arguing against faithfulness of film to their originating text. He includes a quote by Millicent Marcus where she asserts that "more advanced thinkers" should "ask only that the adaptation be faithful to the *spirit* of its precursor text"[5] (16, my emphasis). This perspective allows us to find value in liberal adaptations as long as they embody some semblance of the original. Slethaug adds to this by stating that

[5] Marcus, Millicent Joy. *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

"adaptations have value, validity, and integrity not dependent upon the originals and [are] able to say interesting and unique things about language and culture" (3). In the pages that follow, I will use this same viewpoint to look at various adaptations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and identify the ways they engage in dialogue with the original. Through analyzing the status of technology, the family, and the monstrous in these adaptations, I will discuss how they challenge or add to the ideas present in Shelley's work and the value they gain as a result.

Before we start, I would like to explain why I will not be referring to Mary Shelley's iconic character as "The Monster" throughout the course of this paper. One of the most compelling discussions to come out of Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* is regarding the question of who the 'real monster' is in the narrative – whether it's Victor Frankenstein or his creation who is more to blame. Referring to Victor's creation as "The Monster" instills a bias in the audience to view as monstrous that which is labelled as such[6]. Therefore, I will refer to him as "The Creature" almost exclusively, only calling him "The Monster" when it pertains to a quote from the text or other circumstance where that label bears significance. I believe this will allow us to hold both creator and creation to the same degree of scrutiny and make our conversation on the status of the monstrous easier to follow.

Now, then – let us begin by talking about what Mary Shelley is doing in *Frankenstein*. While it is often considered the first science fiction novel, *Frankenstein* also serves as an exceptional piece of gothic literature offering mysterious stories-within-stories, a terror-filled atmosphere and a myriad of dark subject matter including graverobbing, pedicide and playing God. Shelley's main takeaway is that there is danger when pursuing scientific power and technology without considering the consequences, emphasized through Captain Walton's return home after witnessing the deaths of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature. The family plays a big role in Shelley's narrative, serving to dictate how excessive focus on work while neglecting one's relatives can have harmful effects on the family unit. Shelley seems to argue in the favor of nurture over nature, since the Creature behaves relatively harmlessly for a while after he is born. The education he acquired from the DeLaceys is a crucial

[6] It is easier for us to think "The Monster is the real monster!" when we've been calling him "The Monster" for the entire discussion.

surrogate for the child-rearing Victor denies him and influences his actions for the rest of the novel. As stated previously, the ongoing discussion of the 'real monster' is a compelling outcome of the novel's conflict between two characters whose goals and sense of morality are constantly in opposition with the other's. While these are by no means the only thematic points of interest present in Shelley's work, these themes appeared prominently in the seven adaptations I will be discussing in this piece. Let us look at how adaptations of *Frankenstein* for the screen and stage have contested with or modified themes from Shelley's original text.

1. Status of Technology

The first adaptation to ever paint the silver screen was the 1910 silent film *Frankenstein*, written and directed by J. Searle Dawley and sporting a runtime of 13 minutes. The time constraints of this film required a streamlining of the narrative – Victor Frankenstein, his father, Elizabeth and the Creature are the only recognizable characters in the film. The film spends almost 3 minutes of its total runtime on the scene where Victor makes the Creature, a notable investment as it presents a unique interpretation of the technology used to bring the Creature to life.

After displaying an intertitle which reads "Instead of a Perfect Human Being, the Evil in Frankenstein's Mind Creates a Monster", *Frankenstein* (1910) depicts Victor mixing various chemicals together before pouring them into a smoking cauldron. He then seals the cauldron behind two doors and bars it with a wooden beam. As Victor observes the chemical reaction happening through a small window, he witnesses the Creature form in real time, bones fixing into place and skin growing over them as the cauldron burns with a vicious fire. While Shelley's depiction of the Creature's birth does include the use of chemicals, the gathering of body parts and use of electricity to galvanize the corpse are absent here. There is no reanimation happening because the components used in the experiment had never been alive in the first place. Unlike Shelley's Victor who brings a fragmented mass of once-living corpses back to life, Searle Dawley's Victor is creating life from nothing more than chemicals and heat. Less emphasis is placed on the use of technology to give life, replaced by what seems to be a magic ritual. The image we are presented instead – Victor creating life through supernatural means by mixing various substances in a large pot – suggests the practice of witchcraft. The smoking, burning cauldron paired with Victor's position in the historically feminized roles of childbirth and

motherhood add to his resemblance of the stereotypical feminine witch in this scene.

Where Shelley's 1818 novel depicts the pursuit of technological advancement and scientific discovery as a dangerous endeavor, Searle Dawley's inclusion of Wiccan imagery in Victor's scientific experiment indicates an additional condemnation of witchcraft. Witchcraft has been regarded widely as an evil practice[7] for hundreds of years – nothing new there – but drawing a comparison between Wicca practices and Victor's scientific alchemy results in a presentation of both magic and science as similarly evil. If Searle Dawley is likening Victor's practice of alchemy to witchcraft, could he be extending this condemnation to include all scientific practice? Shelley's *Frankenstein* focuses on the dangers and evils of 'playing God' through scientific discovery as a major theme. It's possible that Searle Dawley's interpretation of this theme aligned with a preexisting disapproval of scientific theories[8] that contradicted prominent religious beliefs. Alternatively, Searle Dawley might be critiquing the pursuit of creating human life through 'unnatural' means (reproduction that occurs outside the union of cisgender male and female partners) by presenting it as akin to witchcraft and therefore taboo. Given that Shelley's *Frankenstein* could be read as an allegory for cisgender male pregnancy, a process seen as biologically impossible without the reproductive organs of a cisgender female, Searle Dawley may regard the birth of the Creature as a magical occurrence with evil results because of his harassment of and violence towards others. Regardless of Searle Dawley's true intention, the result is one that adapts Shelley's caution of the pursuit of technological advancement to double as a caution of alchemy and witchcraft.

Where *Frankenstein* (1910) excluded the use of electricity from the Creature's birth scene, James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) doubles down on the idea of electricity as a crucial component to reanimation. Dr. Henry Frankenstein[9] and his lab assistant Fritz[10] use a pulley system to raise a bed holding the body

[7] The Oxford English Dictionary define's witchcraft as "1. a. Magic or other supernatural practices; (the use of) magical or supernatural powers, esp. for evil purposes or as used by witches."

[8] Ex. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

[9] James Whale's *Frankenstein* changes the names of its main characters in a way that can confuse those familiar with the source material. Shelley's 'Victor Frankenstein' has been renamed 'Henry Frankenstein', his best friend 'Henry Clerval' has been renamed 'Victor Mortiz', and the beloved housemaid 'Justine Moritz' is absent from this adaptation.

[10] The lab assistant character is present in many of these adaptations, but can differ dramatically in their name and appearance. In James Whale's *Frankenstein*, the lab assistant is a hunchback named Fritz, but this character takes the names of Igor (*Young Frankenstein*, 1974) and Humpy (*Frankenthumb*, 2002) in other versions. Sometimes the lab assistant isn't a hunchback at all, but a pretty German woman (*Young*

up to the top of a tower and exposing it to the stormy sky. Here, electricity is conducted into the body through a lightning rod and galvanizes it, bringing the Creature to life. Shelley's novel alludes to the use of electricity as a key factor, but the reanimation scene is very brief and doesn't discuss the specifics of Victor's experiment. The use of technology to harness electricity for the dramatic birth of the Creature became an iconic motif of the Frankenstein narrative and was a prominent feature in many other adaptations that followed.

This motif is used to a similar effect in Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* (1974) with the additional use of electricity to power the transference that occurs in one of the film's final scenes. In reference to *Frankenstein* (1931), Brooks' adaptation also features an angry mob that hunts the Creature. Unlike Victor, however, Dr. Frederick Frankenstein[11] does not take part in the mob, instead luring the Creature in with violin music and helping him. With the help of Inga and Igor, Frankenstein hooks himself and the Creature up to a machine that uses electricity to swap parts of their brains. Through this transference, the Creature becomes verbal and is able to communicate eloquently with the angry mob, in a similar fashion to that of Shelley's well-spoken Creature. Brooks' film not only uses technology and electricity as a way to create life, but also as a tool for accommodation of disabilities. While this brain transference could be read as a symbol for eugenics, perhaps a more applicable metaphor would be to see the Creature as a person with a speech impediment and the use of technology as speech therapy. In this way, Brooks preserves Shelley's warning of the dangers of technological advancement while also displaying its potential for good when the consequences tied to the pursuit of technology are acknowledged. Where Victor failed to do so, Frederick Frankenstein takes responsibility as the creator of the Creature and puts his own life at risk in order to improve the one of his creation.

While the Creature can itself be considered dangerous technology, the threat it poses to humankind has mostly been tied to its independent agency or lack of intelligence. Shelley's Creature is only dangerous in his pursuit of revenge when he grows frustrated with Frankenstein's refusal to make him a mate. Searle Dawley's Creature does knowingly torment and assault Victor and Elizabeth, but he doesn't kill anyone. Whale's

Frankenstein, 1974) or the Creature himself (*Frankenstein Unbound*, 1990).

[11] Brooks' 'Frederick Frankenstein' is the grandson of 'Victor Frankenstein' and creates the Creature by following his grandfather's notes, taking responsibility of his creation where Victor failed to do so.

Creature only gets violent towards others as a defense mechanism to being oppressed, in the same way a protesting child might cry out of discomfort or bite when irritated. When he encounters the young girl who throws flowers in the lake with him, he unintentionally drowns her because of his. misunderstanding of the concepts of flotation and buoyancy. In fact, the Creature looks visibly distressed after not seeing the young girl float to the top. In these cases, the Creature's potential for danger is conditional and inconstant.

Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990)[12] breaks the mold by discussing the dangers of weaponized technology. The film opens with Dr. Joe Buchanan showing off his 'ultimate weapon', a laser capable of making objects disappear. Where these objects end up is uncertain, but the weapon's use has the unintented effect of causing disruptions in space and time. Anomalous electrical stormclouds appear seemingly out of nowhere, spitting out people and objects from different geographical locations and time periods (like a Kheshig[13] warrior riding a horse, for example) and sucking other nearby things into it. Corman depicts technology as capable of harming people through the weapon's use but also asserts its capacity for harming the world itself through climate change. Given that this film released only a few years after global warming became a widely discussed issue in the late 1980's, its within reason to read Corman's film as a warning of technological advancement as a contributor to climate change.

Corman's message on the dangers of weaponized technology doesn't translate as smoothly when the Creature appears in the film. Due to one of these electrical storms, Dr. Joe Buchanan is transported to Geneva in the year 1818 where he encounters a real Dr. Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. As is with Shelley's original work, the Creature is motivated to violence from Victor's refusal to make him a mate. The Creature seems to have no compassion for others, not even his creator, and is way more bloodthirsty in this adaptation, ripping people's hearts out and knocking their heads off. While the Creature himself is a dangerous, he is never used as a weapon in the way Buchanan's laser is. The source of his danger is entirely tied to his independent agency and pursuit of revenge. He is capable of harming people through his sheer uncontested strength, but he doesn't

[12] This film is not a direct adaptation of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, but instead an adaptation of Brian W. Aldiss' 1973 novel *Frankenstein Unbound*.

[13] Kheshig were the imperial guard for the royalty of the Mongol Empire.

pose the same large-scale threat to the world that a climate crisis would.

Frankenthumb (2002), written by Steve Oedekerk[14] and directed by David Bourla, engages with this discussion by depicting the weaponization of technology as a means to combat and acquire the power of oppression. This adaptation follows most of the same plot beats as Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), excluding the accidental murder of the young girl by drowning. Here, the angry mob is still a presence, but their appearance in the film comes way before the Creature is brought to life. The townspeople gather in front of the mayor's house and demand various acts of violent justice be committed, but when asked who it is they would be punishing, the mob has no answer. The joke here is that these townspeople crave violence without reason and are looking for an excuse to commit acts of brutality against other living things.

Later in the film, after the Creature is born and granted the name 'Pepper' by Dr. Frankenthumb, we are shown a scene with the young girl that parallels the one in Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931). The girl invites Pepper to play patty cake, and they do so until interrupted by the girl's father who startles them. As a response, Pepper accidentally knocks the girl away into the brush, but she returns unharmed. The father shares his disapproval of his daughter playing with Pepper, and the Creature runs away, knocking the father down in the process. This event intensifies the anger of the townspeople: now they have an excuse to mob. They hunt down Pepper, chasing him into a windmill and setting it on fire. In this scene, the angry mob represents. a force of oppression in persecution of a minority (the mostly harmless Creature). As the windmill burns, Dr. Frankenthumb and Humpy decide to help save Pepper. They return to the lab and give life to a second Creature named Frankenbatthumb[15] who aids in the rescue of Pepper. Here, the use of technology to create Frankenbatthumb has a purpose to help rather than harm. Dr. Frankenthumb might be weaponizing technology, but he wields it defensively as a means to counter oppression. After the fire is extinguished, Dr. Frankenthumb takes a stand next to Pepper, Frankenbatthumb and Humpy and declares their intolerance of the mob's behavior. Dr. Frankenthumb says, "Now back off, angry mob! You cannot defeat our collective power.

[14] Steve Oedekerk is the creator of the "Thumbmation" short film series which incorporate the use of human thumbs and CGI faces to parody iconic films. Entries in this series include *Thumb Wars: The Phantom Cuticle* (1999), *Thumbtanic* (2000), *Bat Thumb* (2001), *The Blair Thumb* (2002), *Frankenthumb* (2002), and *The Godthumb* (2002). Most of these films are Unrated, except *Frankenthumb* (2002) which received a Y7 rating.

[15] A reference to the Steve Oedekerk's character 'Bat Thumb' from *Bat Thumb* (2001).

Together, we will rule. There will be a new world order led by me, Pepper and Frankenbatthumb! … Those that stand in opposition will promptly be instructed not to" (*Frankenthumb*, 2002, 28:50). His use of the phrase 'new world order' conjures uncomfortable images of totalitarianism and dictatorship, but in this context it seems to allude to a world where creatures like Pepper and Frankenbatthumb can exist without fearing persecution. By presenting their strength as a collective and refusing opposition, the power of oppression that once belonged to the angry mob is transferred to the oppressed. They may not be exercising that power to hunt and kill the townspeople, but they have the ability to do so if desired. As weaponized technology, these two Creatures exist in limbo as both liberated beings and forces of oppression in their own right.

2. Status of the Family

There's much to say about the role family plays in the Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its countless adaptations. The 1818 novel spends a great deal of time emphasizing the importance of Victor's loved ones, making it all the more devastating when the Creature begins killing them. Justine Moritz, William Frankenstein, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza and Victor's father, Alphonse Frankenstein, are all characters whose loss weighs heavily on Victor in Shelley's original work. Their deaths are what drive the scientist to consider meeting the Creature's demands and eventually motivate him to chase down and destroy his creation.

It is worth examining where the Creature fits into this discussion of family in the Frankenstein narrative. By giving life to the Creature, Victor has become a parent and the Creature his child. The underlying themes of pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood are present in most adaptations of Frankenstein and tie into the way Victor treats his creation, whether that treatment be acceptance, rejection, or somewhere in between. The following section will explore the status of the family in adaptations of Frankenstein and analyze both his connections to the living and to his reanimated Creature.

Bearing perhaps the closest resemblance to Shelley's depiction of family in her original work is *National Theatre Live: Frankenstein* (2011). Directed by Danny Boyle and Tim Van Someran and written for the stage by Nick Dear, this stageplay retells the story of Shelley's *Frankenstein* from the Creature's point of view, beginning with his birth and ending with Victor chasing him into the frigid North. The presence of Victor's loved ones remain virtually unchanged from the way they inhabit Shelley's text, except for a few notable changes. The housemaid Justine Moritz is renamed Clarice and, when William

dies, she does not get put on trial or blamed for his death. Clarice sticks around for the rest of the play and makes an appearance on the night of the wedding. The father character of Alphonse Frankenstein, depicted here as M. Frankenstein, also avoids death throughout the play.

Another noteworthy change is the increased tension between Victor and Elizabeth. Dear's adaptation of Victor Frankenstein is comparatively more agitated and unhinged than Shelley's Victor, a change likely made to appeal to the heightened drama of theatre, and Elizabeth's character becomes more pleading and pitiable as a result. Dear's Victor postpones the attention for his sweetheart to focus on dealing with the Creature first, and the divide between the two lovers grows as Elizabeth learns about the nature of his experiments.

Quite possibly the most shocking change is made to the scene involving Elizabeth's death. We will dissect the horror of this scene to a greater extent in the section on the status of the monstrous, but the aspect I'd like to bring attention to here is the explicit depiction of the Creature's sexual assault on Elizabeth. The detail of sexual assault towards Elizabeth is alluded to in Shelley's original work through the Creature's presence in her bedroom on the night she marries Victor. This allusion is featured in adaptations such as Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* (1910) and Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), and is made more apparent through the Creature's allowance of Elizabeth to live. Compared to other adaptations, Nick Dear's play holds nothing back, allowing the scene to play out with excruciating detail before a live audience. The viewer is made fully aware of the Creature's brutalization of his father figure's wife. In this way, the explicit rape and murder of Elizabeth conjures to mind the Freudian term of the Oedipus complex, albeit slightly altered. Where Oedipus developed an infatuation for his mother and a rivalry toward his father, the Creature uses his rivalry against Victor, his father figure, as a motivator for his revenge. Elizabeth was not a direct contributor to the Creature's birth, but if we picture her as an adopted mother figure, the other half of the Oedipus complex is made manifest. The alterations to the Oedipus complex exist in the Creature's murder and sexual assault both being directed towards the mother figure. In this adaptation, the Creature is committing these acts against Elizabeth consciously, where the Oedipal story gets its tragic irony through him unknowingly committing incest and parricide.

This dark depiction of the family is shared by Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990), where the Creature kills Elizabeth before Victor has a chance to make

his creation a Female mate. Realizing he can't live without her, Victor and the Creature team up and force Dr. Joe Buchanan to help them bring Elizabeth back to life as the Female Creature. Once she's revived, Elizabeth is horrified by the Creature, and Victor orders her to come to him as he raises a pistol towards his first creation. This adaptation is peculiar in how it deals with acceptance and rejection of the Creatures. Since the story is told through Joe's point of view and he only appears in Geneva after William's death, neither he nor the audience witnesses the first half of the typical Frankenstein narrative. Through the conflict between Victor and the Creature over the creation of a Female mate, we can assume that Victor's treatment of his Creature begins as rejection. However, Victor changes his mind and decides to meet the Creature's demands, evidenced by him approaching Joe and asking for help with the process. The Creature, under the impression that Victor is still refusing to do what he asks, gets revenge by killing Elizabeth. Victor's decision to bring Elizabeth back to life under the guise of the Female mate serves as both a treacherous response to the Creature's revenge and a satisfaction of his demands. Victor was going to make him a mate – the Creature just so happened to kill his sweetheart while he was preparing to do it. The fact that the Creature is trusted in the role of lab assistant while they bring Elizabeth back to life implies a flip-flop between Victor's acceptance and rejection of his creations. Upon the Creature's initial birth, there is an implied rejection, followed by an acceptance of the demands to make a Female mate, which then becomes rejection when he sees the broken remains of Elizabeth, turning back into acceptance as he trusts the Creature to help with the experiment, once again leading to rejection as he tries taking the Female mate away from the Creature, and a final acceptance of Elizabeth as a reanimated being. The status of the family in Corman's film is one that teeters between these two states whenever it serves the purpose of satisfying Victor's desires. He had no stakes in giving the Creature what he wanted until he realized the life of Elizabeth was in peril, and he used a veiled acceptance of his creation to get himself what he wanted.

Family in James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) has an impact in a much different way. Henry Frankenstein's loved ones play much smaller parts in the overall narrative, especially since most of them are able to avoid death in this adaptation. The death of the lab assistant Fritz is most notable in Whale's film as it serves as a catalyst for the Creature's behavior throughout the rest of the narrative. Victor is not solely responsible for the birth of the Creature as he is in Shelley's

novel: he has Fritz to help in the bestowing of life. The addition of Fritz makes this a two-parent conception where Frankenstein plays the part of the male mother and Fritz plays the part of the father. If we were to see this as a conception between two cisgender partners, Frankenstein provides the body (a would-be egg), and Fritz provides the brain (a would-be sperm). The cooperation of both parents is what brings the Creature to life in this adaptation.

After the Creature is born, each parent's initial treatment of him is different. In the fashion of the stereotypical mother, Frankenstein begins as gentle and nurturing towards his creation, teaching him how to follow orders and experience the world. Fritz, on the other hand, fits the archetype of the abusive father, tormenting the Creature with a burning torch and whipping him while chained up in the cellar. As a response to the first instance of Fritz's abuse, the Creature defends himself and the other characters perceive it as an act of hostility. While the Creature is subdued, Dr. Waldman[16] calls out "Shoot it! It's a monster!" (*Frankenstein*, 1931, 34:17). Frankenstein's regard of his creation quickly becomes one resembling postpartum depression and animosity towards the would-be child, and the brief period of acceptance towards the Creature is replaced by unending rejection. While he tries to prevent Fritz from abusing the Creature any further, Frankenstein does not make an effort to nurture his creation anymore. As the film goes on, his treatment of the Creature becomes increasingly hostile, and this heavy exposure to hostility at such a young age becomes learned behavior in the would-be child. In the brief time his parents spent raising him, the Creature was subject to violent abuse and aggression by his male mother and father. This traumatic upbringing becomes cyclical, and once he liberates himself from bondage, he explores the world through this learned expression of normalized violence.

Playing off of Whale's adaptation, David Bourla's *Frankenthumb* (2002) follows the previously discussed familial relations almost entirely. Where Bourla's film differs from Whale's in its depiction of the family is during the final scene involving the Creature in the burning windmill. As discussed in the section on the status of technology in this film, Dr. Frankenthumb's sympathy for the Creature motivates him to give life to another Creature (Frankenbatthumb) to aid in the saving of his first creation. Where Whale's

[16] In James Whale's Frankenstein (1931), Dr. Waldman plays the role of Henry Frankenstein's professor at school before he left to pursue his experiments.

Henry Frankenstein begins by accepting the Creature and later rejecting it, Bourla's Dr. Frankenthumb is able to bounce back and regain his acceptance for his creation, ending in a scene that is equal parts perplexing (in its suddenness) and unnerving (still uncomfortable about the 'new world order' line).

Where the redemption in *Frankenthumb* (2002) might seem undeserved, Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* (1974) provides arguably the most wholesome depiction of family so far. Just as the Creature is frightened into violence in Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), Brooks' Creature begins choking Frederick Frankenstein as soon as Igor lights a match. This leads Frankenstein to view the Creature as inherently dangerous and initially rejects him. At the beginning of the film's Third Act, Frankenstein takes responsibility of his creation and puts himself at risk in order to help the Creature. Before locking himself in a cell with him, Frankenstein says "Love is the only thing that can save this poor creature. And I am going to convince him that he is loved even at the cost of my own life" (*Young Frankenstein*, 1974, 1:12:50). This acceptance is not just Frankenstein being responsible for something he created, but it is a clear statement of the true parental love he has for this Creature. This love Frankenstein shows for the Creature is reinforced later in the film when the brain transference is being prepared. Frederick Frankenstein shares an exchange with Igor who questions the safety of this procedure:

IGOR. Are you sure you want to go through with this?

FRANKENSTEIN. It's the only thing that can save him now.

IGOR. You realize you're risking both your lives?

FRANKENSTEIN. Yes.

Frederick Frankenstein's acceptance of the Creature has developed to a point of complete parental responsibility. Not only is he willing to give the Creature what he needs to live comfortably, he is willing to risk his own life to do so. The strength of this bond between Frankenstein and the Creature is notable as one of the few adaptations where the creator goes beyond taking responsibility for his creation and ends up making him family.

Bill Condon's *Gods and Monsters* (1998), a biopic about the life and death of director James Whale, strikes up a dialogue between the status of the family in Whale's personal life and in his film *Frankenstein* (1931). As discussed before, the 1931 adaptation deals with depictions of abusive parenthood and cyclical trauma, themes seemingly inspired by Whale's own upbringing. While his childhood was not as

explicitly abusive as perhaps the Creature's was, Condon portrays young James Whale as an outlier in his family. Whether it be from his artistic aspirations or sexual orientation, Whale is made a subject of rejection by his relatives. In his later years, Whale has achieved much with his life, living comfortably in a big and beautiful house, but he still has no family to speak of. Whale's gardener Clayton Boone also lacks approval from his own family, but instead of living comfortably, Boone's home is that of a rusty trailer. While neither Whale or Boone receive acceptance from their own families or people around them, they find acceptance in eachother. Despite Boone's homophobic rage, Whale welcomes the gardener into his life because he sees the Creature from his 1931 film in him; abandoned, lonely, upset – Whale wants to give him what Frankenstein withheld from his creation. Alternatively, Boone sees a father figure in Whale, an older man who can share his stories and wisdom, and someone he can bond with about their military experience. Granted, the relationship between Whale and Boone is still fraught with antagonism over the director's sexual orientation, and becomes exploitative towards the end, but their companionship is much more than can be said about Henry Frankenstein's regard for his creation.

One of the most experimental depictions of the family in the Frankenstein narrative can be found in J. Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* (1910). Following Victor and Elizabeth's wedding, the Creature sneaks into their bedroom and frightens Elizabeth, as per usual, but what follows is different than any other adaptation I have seen. An intertitle appears that reads, "The Creation of an Evil Mind is Overcome by Love and Disappears", and the Creature is shown entering a room and focusing his attention on a mirror's reflection of himself. After a few seconds, the Creature's physical self disappears, leaving only the reflection of the Creature. Victor enters the room and peers into the mirror, seeing his creation there. Immediately, the reflection of the Creature disappears, leaving Victor's reflection on the mirror, looking at himself. Victor is surprised, but happy, and the film ends with he and Elizabeth celebrating.

If we believe what the intertitles are telling us, we could interpret the Creature's manifestation in this film as Victor Frankenstein's evil side – a result of the self fractured into two halves, with Victor representing the good and the Creature representing the bad. Searle Dawley alludes to this through the previously discussed intertitle "Instead of a Perfect Human Being, the Evil in Frankenstein's Mind Creates a Monster." This implies that the evil within

Victor Frankenstein leaves his mind and becomes the Creature, and is reinforced by how Victor's initial excitement during the creation process becomes pure horror once his experiment is complete. The status of the family here refers to the self, and depicts it as present but divided. We have a father and a son, but they are at odds with one another. When the Creature's physical form disappears into the mirror, and the reflection of the Creature disappears in front of Victor, it seems like these two halves of the fractured self are reuniting. Being that the Creature came from Victor himself, this recession can be seen as an unbirthing – a return of the evil back to the mind that brought it into existence. Fitting into our discussion of the parent's treatment of the child, this could serve as another example of Frankenstein's initial rejection of the Creature leading to an eventual acceptance as he returns to his father.

3. Status of the Monstrous

One of the greatest delights of Mary Shelley's brilliant novel was the way it developed a discourse surrounding who the 'real monster' was in *Frankenstein*. While there are good arguments for either side of the debate, things become muddy when adaptations of Shelley's work are brought into the conversation. Ultimately, I see this as a wonderful development, as it allows for the adaptor to use their work of art as a way to join the discourse and provide an alternate perspective. However, these adaptations can often provide more biased depictions of Frankenstein and his Creature, making it harder to argue the opposing side. This can lead to a shift in the audience's perception of who is more monstrous depending on the text. In this section, we will be looking at how the question of the 'real monster' is explored through each character's behavior and actions in their respective adaptations. With special attention put on the issues of intelligence, communication and sexual assault, we will examine how the Creature is depicted in comparison to his creator, and whether or not the text is biased in favor of one over the other.

What the Creature lacks in aesthetic attributes he makes up for with his eloquent manner of speech. Mary Shelley's Creature may be cursed with a terrifying appearance, but those who take the time to speak with him realize how intelligent he is, evident through the blind older DeLacey's appreciation of the Creature's company. The charisma gained through his verbal expression is lost in adaptations where the Creature is nonverbal. James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) depicts a monster that is born nonverbal, but can understand when spoken to. His lack of intelligence and inability to speak verbally

against his own abuse leads him to be seen as evil. In reality, his physical reaction to being tormented and beaten is no different than that of an infant. The only issue is that this infant is an 8-foot-tall goliath that can easily harm without meaning to. The Creature is seen as dangerous because of his identity as an uncontrollable force.

Unlike Whale's depiction, David Bourla's *Frankenthumb* (2002) shows the Creature, Pepper, as becoming verbal soon after his birth, apparently recalling words from his former life. Pepper kills a bunch of animals in a gag showing how ruthless he is, but immediately after starts crying and begging Dr. Frankenthumb for forgiveness. By the end of the film, Pepper has not killed any people, and the only times he hurts other living beings are accidents or out of self-defense. In terms of who the 'real monster' is in this adaptation, that title belongs to the angry mob. Gathering en masse with the sole purpose of killing for fun is a truly evil act. While it is played for laughs here, it does say something profound about the pursuit of justice through institutionalized violence.

Whale's adaptation also makes a more blatant suggestion at the sexual assault of Elizabeth for the time. On the day of their wedding, Henry Frankenstein locks Elizabeth inside her room to keep her safe, but this inadvertently makes the room a trap for her when the Creature finds his way through her window. There is a shrill scream, and by the time the wedding guests get the room open, they see Elizabeth strewn out on the bed, motionless. She is alive but traumatized, evident when Frankenstein is asked how she is and responds "I don't know. She's still in a daze. Just looks at me and says nothing" (*Frankenstein*, 1931, 57:36). The depiction of intentional sexual assault makes it more difficult to argue the innocence of the Creature. Sure, he might have killed Fritz and Dr. Waldman out of self-defense, and his murder of the young girl was unintentional because he did not know she would drown in the lake, but I cannot bring myself to forgive the Creature when he is shown knowingly committing acts of exploitation against another oppressed person[17].

Bill Condon's *Gods and Monsters* (1998) also explores the status of the monstrous through its depiction of director James Whale and gardener Clayton Boone. An echo of Whale's 1931 film, the director is made to resemble Henry Frankenstein while Boone resembles the Creature, both in their physical appearances and mannerisms. Boone is portrayed as having the larger potential for

[17] It is worth mentioning that no other characters die in this film. Victor Moritz, Baron Frankenstein, Elizabeth and Henry Frankenstein all live through the end of James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931)

the monstrous throughout most of the film, with his violent response to the expression of Whale's sexuality. However, Whale's sexual assault of Boone flips the script. To this point, Boone had not laid a finger on Whale, and now the director is committing an act of sexual violence against the young man. This might have been a more complex discussion if Boone followed Whale's orders to kill him, but he does not. Verbally rejecting his demands, Boone holds Whale to his face and says "I am not your monster" (*Gods and Monsters*, 1998). This adaptation stands apart from the rest in portraying Frankenstein/Whale as the 'real monster' instead of the Creature/Boone.

Nick Dear's *National Theatre Live: Frankenstein* (2011) takes Shelley's depictions of Victor and the Creature amplifies the monstrous characteristics of both characters. The Creature is more violent in his response to the DeLacey's rejection[18] and his intentional killing of William. Victor is more brutal in his destruction of the Female Creature as he presents her to his first creation, taunting him with it, and asking him how much he will love her before slicing her to pieces in front of him. Befitting an audience who has grown used to direct and violent presentation in their media, the Creature's murder of Elizabeth is altered in this version to simultaneously increase its emotional effect and its horrific impact. While she is initially frightened by his presence in her bedroom, Elizabeth behaves respectfully and cordially towards the Creature. She trusts the Creature when he tells her he will not hurt her, but after seeing what a good person she is, he recognizes this as an opportunity for revenge. The Creature gives a final bone-chilling address to Elizabeth, saying, "Tonight, I have met someone perfect. Thank you for trying to understand, but he broke his word. So, I break mine. I am truly sorry, Elizabeth" (*National Theatre Live: Frankenstein*, 2011, 1:41:25). The Creature then brutally rapes Elizabeth on the bed she and Victor were meant to share that same night. Victor enters the room and drops to his knees, watching as the Creature snaps her Elizabeth's neck. Although the murder of Elizabeth in Dear's play resembles the one from its source material, Shelley's novel has the event occur while Victor is out of the room, preventing him from witnessing her death first-hand, a luxury made unavailable to the audience. We are expected to watch as this traumatic event unfolds before our eyes and ask ourselves whether the Creature is innocent here or not.

4. Conclusion

[18] He sets fire to their house while the DeLacey's are still inside it. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* depicts the Creature setting fire to the house in a similar fashion, but the DeLacey's are not inside when he does so.

While these adaptations of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* differ widely in their tone, style, narrative structure and story beats, each work provides a unique and valid interpretation of the source material that fits the adaptor's intention. Studying various adaptations of the same work puts these pieces in conversation with each other, and allows the viewer to witness how the themes and arguments of the source material are modified to reinforce the original text or challenge the views presented. While J. Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* (1910) presents technology and science as taboo, David Bourla's *Frankenthumb* (2002) serves as an example of how technology can be wielded as a tool to fight oppression. Where James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) depicts a broken family that gives rise to a destructive child, Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* (1974) shows us the unconditional love of a parent who will do whatever it takes to make their child happy. In a direct inversion of Shelley's original work, Nick Dear's *National Theatre Live: Frankenstein* (2011) presents its narrative through the eyes of the Creature to influence the audience's sympathy before showing him as a monstrous character. Of course, no adaptation is perfect, and many are far from perfection, but every adaptor has a different variation of story to tell and their voices are worth listening to. Regardless of how faithful an adaptation is to its source material; its value comes from the way it adds to the discourse initiated by the original work. And in rare occasions, an adaptation may even surpass the merit of the work being adapted. The only way to find out is to be like Victor Frankenstein and experiment.

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Dissonant Yet True: Three *Uncle Vanya* Film Adaptations

Greg Nussen

Abstract

Of the thirteen screen adaptations of Anton Chekhov's celebrated *Uncle Vanya*, three stand out for their total rejection of any ethos of accuracy. They exquisitely highlight the play's themes, however, in their very dissonance. My paper takes up the dialectic of authenticity vs. fidelity in an examination of Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), Sophie Barthes' *Cold Souls* (2009), and Ryusuke's Hamaguchi's *Drive my Car* (2021). I focus on two aspects of their meeting with *Vanya*. The first concerns the consistency of every actor who plays Vanya agonizing over the impossibility of separating from the role. The second strand concerns the way these films toy with ambiguities of knowing, or not, where performance begins and ends: in Malle's opening sequence in which reality slips into performance; in Barthes' metatheatrical casting of Paul Giamatti as himself; and in Hamaguchi's resettling of Chekhovian dialogue in conjunction with Haruki Murakami's short stories. All this textual straying constitutes a metalanguage for the original play's mounting entropy, whose characters drift towards no longer knowing what their roles are, and what they want. Despite the transposition to film, with its jarring modes of editing, the casting of transnational actors, the muddling of voices, and the entwining of other authors, these works find ways to be faithful to a radical, more-than-a-century-old, canonical work.

"So were you real *friends? Or* ***was it all just acting****?"*

Kafuku thought for a while. "It was both.

It's gotten so I have a hard time drawing a clear line between the two.

In the end, ***that's what serious acting is all about****."*

- From the short story "Drive My Car" by Haruki Murakami (2015)

Back in 1944, the legendary British actor and director Laurence Olivier adapted *Henry V* for the screen by, perhaps counterintuitively, foregrounding the theatricality endemic to all of Shakespeare's plays. After sweeping shots of Victorian England, Olivier rode a towering crane that, quite literally, brings the audience from the outside world into that of the theater. The first act of the film incorporates the distinct lack of a fourth wall appropriate to Shakespeare's day, for the concept of a barrier between the world of performance and the world of the "outside" was entirely foreign. Nearly twenty years later, in a media landscape more firmly ensconced in postmodernist aesthetics, Olivier continued to use some of those illusory bends of reality with his 1963 adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*.

Olivier's film is one of *thirteen* such screen adaptations to date of Chekhov's late-career masterpiece. Anthony Hopkins stepped into the role of the surly, overworked country Doctor Astrov in 1970, for director

Christopher Morahan, before morphing the story himself in 1996 for the countryside of North Wales in *August*, while a young Andrei Konchalovsky honed in on the text's repeated mention of "stifling weather" for a suffocating, surrealistic adaptation, also in 1970. There have been several, lesser versions, filmed directly from the stage. However, the 1898 play, a serio-comic meditation on the particularities of regret, longing and faded glory, presents peculiar problems for a cinematically minded director. As with most of Chekhov's plays, it is textually *dense*. Characters make a regular habit of launching into all-consuming speeches about philosophy, art, sexual infidelity and the fear of aging. There are no location changes outside the crumbling country estate that Vanya and his niece Sonya look after. It is a play that exemplifies acting theory pioneer Konstantin Stanislavky's pursuit of performance that, as he wrote in 1938, "is above all inward, psycho-logical, subcon-scious" (Stanislavsky & Benedetti, 53). With layers of subtext embedded in every line, it is, in other words, a supremely *theatrical* and *literary* work. Yet, as it is an early example of modernist theater,[19] *Uncle Vanya*'s action is spurred by characters' inner psychology, which makes it particularly useful for emotional release, as it forces a cast to plumb their inner lives. That release ironically lies in its bevy of characters who lack the ability to face their traumas head on, and a few films mine that purposeful contradiction, indulging in an infidelity to Chekhov's text that, against preconceptions, highlights the play's most potent themes.

Part of its usefulness also lies in the play's construction, which, as Christophe Collard argues, "thematically and structurally dramatises the complexity of interpersonal relations" (82-98). Chekhov's text is an exercise in the deficiencies of monolog communication, and people's inability to adapt themselves to the needs of others. In this way, the play is a sensational conduit for larger questions about adaptation writ-large. What happens to a well-established text when transmogrified across media, or when the new text itself comprises a conglomerate of previous texts? André Bazin was particularly galvanized against what he called the "major heresy of filmed theater, namely the urge to 'make cinema'" (86). In other words, he criticized films that simply take a source text and film it without consideration of the camera's potential. It was this exhaustion with staid adaptations that helped spark the French New Wave, and it is

[19] For more on scholar Ronald Hingley's assertion of the play as such, see: Southern and Weissgerber.

equally against this charge that we can take up three outliers to the history of *Uncle Vanya* film adaptations: Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), Sophie Barthes' *Cold Souls* (2009) and Ryusuke Hamaguchi's *Drive My Car* (2021). Though each is markedly different from the others in terms of adaptive methodologies, genre, tone and formal style, they share two strands of inquiry. The first strand lies in their foregrounding of the agony of the actor playing Vanya and his difficulty of separating from the role: even while off-stage, these performers nevertheless channel an essence of the Chekhov, mirroring a theme in the play of feeling distressingly trapped within the pressing four walls of life. The second strand concerns these films' toying with the ambiguities of knowing where theatricality begins and ends: Malle's gradual slide into performance (and controlled flippancy between levels of fiction); Barthes breaking of the fourth wall and meta-casting of Paul Giamatti; and the drifting in and out of actual Vanya dialogue in *Drive My Car*. These textual flounderings constitute a metalanguage for the effects of the play's mounting entropy. Despite the transposition to film and its jarring modes of editing, the casting of transnational actors and the imbrication of voices, these works find ways to be thematically and emotionally faithful to a radical, more-than-a-century-old, canonical work.

Uncle Vanya is a particularly immersive work for the actor. As Larry Pine, who plays Dr. Astrov in Louis Malle's film, said of the rehearsal process with André Gregory, in which they met up sparingly, but intensely to "fuck around with some text," they wanted the play to "gently enter our souls" (*Like Life*). And yet for Giamatti's character of Paul Giamatti in *Cold Souls,* whose version of himself is merely more nebbish than he apparently is in his daily life, he laments that he has "reached a point where" he can "no longer separate from the character" and that he "feels stuck." The danger of inseparability is enough for Kafuku (Hidetoshi Nishijima) to avoid the role altogether in *Drive My Car,* saying that "*Uncle Vanya* drags out the real you... I can't stand that anymore."

The possibility of over-identification with the role is due to the text's prioritization of the characters' inner psychology over narrativity. It is a modernist work; Chekhov's play foregrounds his characters' rich inner lives to propel the narrative action, instead of relying on sensationalism to reveal the opposite. *Uncle Vanya* centers around the visit of Serebryakov, an aging, retired university professor, with his beautiful, twenty-seven year old wife Yelena, to their country estate. Watched over and cared for by his daughter,

Sonya, and his late first wife's brother Vanya (and Sonya's uncle), the estate is increasingly valueless. When the couple arrives, Yelena summons Astrov, a middle-aged doctor, to take care of her husband. Astrov instead lusts after Yelena, getting drunk while brooding over his latency. Vanya does the same, on both fronts, angered about a life in servitude of Serebryakov. Meanwhile, Sonya quietly pines after Astrov, thus creating a spider-web of unrequited lust that reveals itself more in the characters collective boredom than out of legitimate passion. Things come to a head when Vanya witnesses Yelena and Astrov kissing, followed by Serebryakov abruptly announcing a plan to sell the estate in order to fund his urban lifestyle; Vanya retaliates by attempting to shoot the old man, missing twice. His inability to handle his inner misery and anger further leads to a failed suicide attempt. The play ends with all the visitors leaving and Sonya delivering an ambiguous speech to Vanya about the promise of rest in the afterlife. Despite all its misery, Chekhov considered the play a comedy (Esslin, 200).

Uncle Vanya naturally lends itself to useful fracturing. Writing about the play, Nathan Southern and Jacques Weissgerber point out "the multiple characterizations and arcs [which] suggest a reality that is fractured into numerous perspectives" (323). Characters communicate on splintered wavelengths both literal and metaphorical, which these films dramatize at the very forefront. That "fracturing" is especially evident in *Drive My Car*, a film which features a trans-Asian cast performing *Uncle Vanya* in a panoply of Asian languages, including Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, English and Korean Sign-Language. The cast's multiple modes of linguistic performance bleed into their off-stage lives, breaking the traditional boundaries between life and performance. Dramatizing as it does a supremely avant-garde, transcultural take on *Uncle Vanya*, this adaptation can be seen as a mode of resistance, as Jessica Nakamura argues. If *Drive My Car*'s broad appeal stems, in part, from its "insistence on the universality of art," it also casts this universalism as a product of "Western influence and imperialism" (848-850).[20] Hamaguchi's film plays upon, and challenges, *Uncle Vanya*'s emblematics of Western realism partly through its linguistic web which, Nakamura suggests, evokes "histories of Japan's entanglements in Asia." Considering this and the *three* Murakami texts Hamaguchi

[20]Nakamura's consideration of how the introduction of Chekhov and his contemporaries such as Henrik Ibsen sparked the *shingeki* tradition of Western-inspired realism is excellent further reading.

borrows from,[21] *Drive My Car* becomes a cluster of multiple, unique adaptations in one. In other words, by deliberately nuking the wholeness of a more traditional stage-to-screen adaptation, Hamaguchi subtly undercuts his native country's deference towards Western idealism. In so doing, he argues for a necessary relitigation of Chekhov altogether, for what good is it to simply remount a canonized text without regard for modern receptivity or context? In this case, the relitigation both castigates and appreciates the original text: *Drive My Car* sees *Vanya* as both essential and due for newer eyes. Yet, this bric-a-brac adaptation style becomes markedly similar to Malle's adaptation, itself transculturally adapting Chekhov's subtextual experimentation for the American studio space. Meanwhile, as Martine Beugnet posits about *Cold Souls*, Barthes dramatizes a unique "process of dematerialization and rematerialization, of a person's spiritual and moral essence" (257-271). And this unique dramatization is not unlike a process of adaptation wherein established texts are reconfigured in a newer, distinctive manner. The discrepancies between these films and their source material provide an essential refreshment of Chekhov's intentions, if merely by echoing the Chekhovian ideal of formal experimentation.

Perhaps these seem like tenuous ties. Indeed, the differences between these various adaptations are vast. *Vanya on 42nd Street* is designed to capture a once private experiment, while *Drive My Car* is a Japanese literary adaptation that is arguably more concerned with the traumatic past of its central character than provincial life in Russia, and *Cold Souls* might better be thought of as a flashpoint in American independent filmmaking, more in line with the Charlie Kaufman brand of dryly comic surrealism than the play it references. Intention matters too. For example, the production that Malle filmed for *Vanya on 42nd Street* was, at first, never intended for a public audience. Yet, all three films parse the practices of translation and adaptation: onto a pseudo sci-fi world of soul removal in *Cold Souls*; into multi-lingual theatricality in *Drive My Car*; and within the studio acting world in *Vanya on 42nd Street*. All of them repurpose *Vanya*'s dialogue for non-*Vanya* settings, and all effectively constitute a transnational adaptation, given that none of them have period or geographical fidelity to the play.

Unlike the others, *Vanya on 42nd Street* follows the plotline of Chekhov's

[21] All from *Men Without Women* (2017): *Scheherazade, Kino* and *Drive My Car*.

original faithfully. But the film dramatizes the process behind the production rather than simply filming the action, thus fraying from Chekhov at the seams. Inspired by the Moscow Art Theater's group aesthetic which prized process over production, André Gregory had, over the course of five years, brought together Wallace Shawn, Julianne Moore, Larry Pine and others to rehearse an adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* by David Mamet whenever their myriad schedules allowed. Before Gregory brought in Malle, the cast had only performed the piece twelve times for invited friends. Each actor could bring two people to a performance, so there were never more than about twenty in the room (Taubin). This process lended itself to a very intimate style, as if the actors were never actually performing, but rather rehearsing, even when they finally did bring in an audience.[22] Despite this veil of secrecy, the film has since become the preeminent text on American studio acting, personifying Stanislavsky's assertion that "the best thing is when creation occurs spon-tan-eously, intu-itively, through inspir-a-tion" (Stanislavsky & Benedetti, 53).

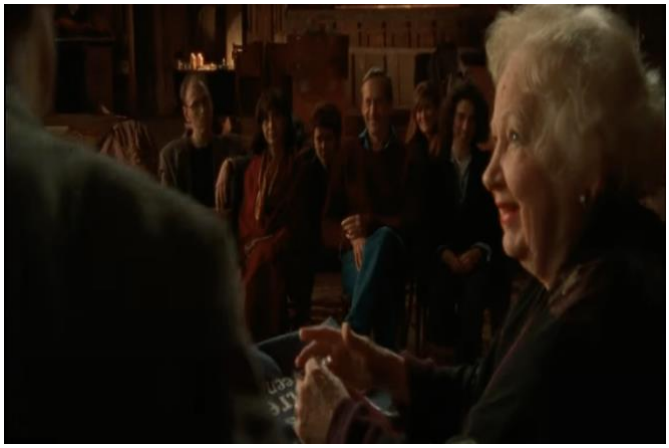
Writing about this undergirding process which birthed *Vanya on 42nd Street* has become somewhat *de rigeur* within the world of adaptation studies, particularly in an attempt at parsing the genre leanings of Malle's hybridization, or the relative value of labeling the film a gesture of finality for his oeuvre (Met & Rongier, 232-245). Instead, Collard focuses on the semiological meanings of playwright and screenwriter David Mamet's translation from Chekhov's Russian, arguing that it "illustrates the 'schizo-pragmatic' intersemioticity that historically established the dramatic arts as the most popular vehicle for adaptations, (82-98)" over the novel. Collard further argues that the film's setting mirrors Chekhov's "complexity of interpersonal relations," within what Madhur Jaffrey's character Mrs. Chao acknowledges is a "crumbling" but "beautiful" space, an otherwise innocuous piece of dialogue that highlights the film's straddling the line between documentary and fiction. The film's constant reinforcement of what is obvious – that this is not a polished production with traditional costumes, set or audience – hides Malle's illusory aesthetic. This begins in the opening sequence. First, Declan Quinn's traveling camera winds in and out of Times Square's streets and throngs of people, insisting upon location as a central tenet *and,* crucially, indicating that this is not *Uncle*

[22]An audience thick with the New York intelligentsia, including Mikahil Baryshnikov, Susan Sontag, Ralph Lauren, Lauren Bacall, Mike Nichols, Volker Schlöndorff and Louis Malle himself, which is how the French director first got acquainted with the production.

Vanya of the Russian provinces. This will not be a clean adaptation of Anton Chekhov's most famous work.

Nor is this the Times Square of our current day. As Malle tilts down to the street, he asserts New York's presence through its famed diversity and dilapidation from the first image: a close-up of a West 42nd Street street sign as Joshua Redman's *Pink Panther*-like score crescendos. Someone has spray-painted "Vanya on 42nd Street" alongside a metallic yellow "Hot Dog" sign, mimicking the guerilla-style version of a revered institution we're about to see. Porn theaters and sex toy shops bulge into the frame like the rock cliffs of a western landscape, in a suggestion that this gritty, unclean New York, and its folk, will be part and parcel of the whole enterprise: Quinn's camera drifts into the masses as bystanders take a peak directly into the lens.

When we finally notice the actors, their presence hardly registers, since Malle has so inconspicuously hidden them within the doldrums of bodily movement. Shawn, in a foreshadowing of the slovenly Vanya that he will play on stage, scarfs down a *knish* in an unkempt green flannel, mouth agape. Pine struts along the sidewalk and not-so-subtly clocks the revealing of a woman's buttocks as she walks past, a moment of Dr. Astrov's promiscuity. Julianne Moore and Brooke Smith, who play Yelena and Sonya, respectively, walk arm in arm in a display of friendship, mirroring the moment at the end of Act II when the aunt and daughter, so close in



age, will tentatively bury an unspoken hatchet. Pine even muscles his way in, grabbing Moore by the arm to say hello, while completely ignoring Smith, a choice of physical touch and attention that fits squarely within their future Chekhovian triangle. Then, George Gaynes, who plays Serebryakov, strolls into the theater, elegantly dressed in a cream-colored rain coat and black Panama fedora - a clear mark of his relative wealth. Shawn introduces his friend, a woman named Mrs. Chao (played by the celebrated Indian chef Madhur Jaffrey) to André Gregory, and mentions that her father translated Chekhov's Russian into Bengali, a fascinating nod to yet one more facet of this film's adaptation. But it is perhaps Gregory himself who sells this opening credit sequence as a false documentary, for the stage director ropes people into the theater space to begin.

In other words, Gregory is not playing himself, but acting as the director André Gregory in a filmed adaptation of a faux dress-rehearsal for the play he once directed.

Once we're whisked into the broken down old New Amsterdam, Quinn's camera takes in the whole, massive totality of this strange space. High majestic beams collide with billowing green fish netting, netting to prevent falling plaster from hitting the actors' heads. Shawn explains to Mrs. Chao and a couple other "friends" that "we're just squatting here, really." This little quip begins the transformation from the loudness of New York's outdoor space into our ciné-theatrical playground. The squatted space becomes Chekhov's squatted estate, and the opening lines of *Uncle Vanya* have been uttered without our conscious recognition. We never hear anyone say "begin" or "start the rehearsal," just that Larry Pine is overworked. Or is he Dr. Astrov now? The first, and only definite, indication that we're inside the play is his friendly kiss on Nanny's cheek (Phoebe Brand), a shot that reveals a small audience rapt with attention.

A small audience is revealed moments after Dr. Astrov (Larry Pine) kisses the Nanny (Phoebe Brand) on the cheek.

Malle's contribution to the film is self-evident; while Gregory's work with the actors, over years of play-acting, has primed the cast to inhabit their characters like second skins, Malle introduces a host of cinematic flourishes that deny the pulling of Gregory's play into the vortex of simple camera capture. Malle accentuates the details of rehearsal over production by highlighting the rundown space, the lack of formal costumes, a prominent shot of an "I 🖤 NY" mug, and Joshua Redman's score which filters into the space with the directional fidelity of a Times Square street performer whose music travels through the air ducts.[23]

Malle's interest in a distinction between performance and rehearsal is important; it is a performativity that recalls James Naremore's ideas of deception:

> In these moments when deception or repression are indicated, the drama becomes a metaperformance, imposing contrary demands on the players: the need to maintain a unified narrative image, a coherent persona, is matched by an equally strong need to exhibit dissonance or expressive incoherence within the characterization (Naremore, 72).

[23] "I think it's important to indicate that it's somehow a quintessential New York project. That's why in the soundtrack we kept the presence of the police sirens." Malle, 215

It is for this reason that Gregory plays a character, too - a version of himself, acting as a host for the small, invited audience (*themselves* indulging in a performativity as respectful observers within the film), and giving context to the decidedly un-furnished dress rehearsal. Gregory's cameos, in which he interjects between acts and cavorts with his distinguished guests during a food-supplied intermission, become a crucial contextualizing element. This is a bare bones, elevated rehearsal. There is no traditional set or costumes here; there is simply a massive, melting space that suffocates in a dreary manner faithful to Chekhov's text (Senelick, 814).[24]

Cold Souls similarly opens with a bending of reality and an introduction into the world of rehearsal. Here, Giamatti speaks directly to camera from the beginning of Act IV, with Vanya decrying his life's lack of purpose, a life with thirteen years to fill until he reaches sixty. "Well you see, I'm a madman," Giamatti proclaims with his arms tightly wrapped around himself, staring down the lens. It is not immediately clear where we are, or to whom Giamatti speaks. The opening credits are intercut with Giamatti's proclamation, and when we return to him, we can discern theater seats in the background, in soft focus. Andrij Parekh, Barthes' husband and cinematographer, rotates the camera around Giamatti as he struggles to control his emotions, his crumpled linen shirt askew, it is equally difficult to tell what the space is until Giamatti tells his director (Michael Tucker) "I can't do this anymore." "I have a pain in my chest," he complains, "like somebody put my heart in a vice and just tightened it." Giammati isn't talking about the physical heart but the emotional toll, a direct mirroring of Vanya's whimper to Astrov in the same scene that he "needs something... give me *something* at least." And then gesturing to his heart, "I feel such a burning pain here." Already the character and the actor are merging.

Paul Giamatti as Paul Giamatti as Uncle Vanya in *Cold Souls*

Barthes ends this opening gambit with Tucker's nameless director character reviving an old debate about Chekhov's tonal

[24] Senelick points out how often sentiments like "stifling" and impossibility to "breathe freely" are used to describe the environment, which Gregory & Malle subtly point to in this windowless, airless theater space.

umami. "It's not a tragedy," he tells Giamatti. "What happened to your sense of humor for Christ's sake?" And so the film signals its intentionality from the jump, lacing in little nods to Chekhov's text and Chekhovian rhythms like a steady bass drum.

In *Cold Souls*, the actor's plumbing of himself for the role has become unmanageable in its stress, until he comes across a *New Yorker* essay highlighting a strange new soul removal and storage service. Giamatti is skeptical, but ultimately decides it is worth a try, until the vacuousness he subsequently feels becomes more anxiety-inducing than freeing. Plus, the removal of his soul transforms him into an incredibly bland, broad actor. As a treatment, rather than retrieving his own soul, the company, led by the charming Dr. Flintstein (David Strathairn), suggests he rent the soul of an anonymous donor. He chooses the profile of someone he is told is a Russian poet, a not-so-veiled Easter egg meant to conjure up Chekhov, himself. His acting the next day at an invited dress rehearsal is agonized, filled to the brim with pain. Holding on to *this* soul is worse than his previous two conditions, and so Giamatti gives up and asks for his own soul back. That proves more difficult than he'd reckoned; the smuggling mule, Nina (Dina Korzun) has apparently taken the soul, without permission, to the daughter of a Russian soul-removal kingpin in St. Petersburg. *She* is hoping the soul of an actor will transform her into a famous one, herself, though she naively hopes for Al Pacino. Giamatti travels to Russia with Nina to get it back, which he succeeds in doing only after realizing that his own soul is much more complex than its comical chickpea shape.

Yes, this does not sound like an adaptation of *Uncle Vanya*. Like *Drive My Car*, we could rather say that *Cold Souls*'s plot merely borrows, thematically, from Chekhov's text. *Cold Souls* has a convoluted plot; however, combined with Chekhov's text, it raises core questions about rehearsal and performance as emotional conduits. Strathairn's Dr. Flinstein tells Giamatti that he does not like *Uncle Vanya* because, "It's so Russian. The characters are so unlikeable. Especially Vanya, so full of self-pity." Later, at the soul storage center, Flintstein offers him the opportunity to "peer into his own soul," but Giamatti is violently opposed to the idea, a correlation to Vanya's inability to admit his own culpability for his unsatisfactory life. Behind the trite joke that his soul is the shape, size and texture of a chickpea lies Vanya's underlying anxiety about the size of his emotional intelligence as compared to Serebryakov's, and thus a turning of the soul into a phallic instrument. Barthes plays with more subtext when, during a rehearsal after

his soul removal, Giamatti becomes a groping, casually assaultive partner to the actor playing Yelena, who responds with the *Vanya* lines, "When you speak of your love for me, I don't know what to say, I'm sorry." Like in *Vanya on 42nd Street*, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the actor's intentions and the subtext of what's happening behind the scenes; she could very well be telling Giamatti, not Vanya, that she does not wish to be harassed. Later, when Giamatti is perusing the plethora of artistic options in the soul catalog and considering what new personality to try on, he becomes a living embodiment of Vanya's great proclamation that "I could've been a Schopenhauer, a Dostoevsky."

In *Uncle Vanya*, we are witness to a torrent of speeches in which its titular character wonders if his life could have been more special. He bemoans his devotion to Serebryakov, and to the care and upkeep of his country estate, which has kneecapped him from a life amongst the intelligentsia. As Giamatti roams New York and, later, the streets of a frozen-over St. Petersburg, he wonders, too, what truly makes his soul. His hypocritical refusal to acknowledge his responsibility in his hard-lived life highlights a truism about Chekhov's play: that ignoring the self only burgeons the problems contained therein. When Giamatti finally *does* look into his soul, through a massive probing device, he sees that his humanity comprises not career accomplishments nor fame or money, but quotidian snippets of love and warmth: a baby being tended to; he and his wife (Emily Watson) embracing by a window pane. It is composed of pain: abandonment, medical problems. Giamatti is only able to move on once he learns that his soul is not the empty vessel he had feared it might reveal itself to be.

Drive My Car is, similarly, a film about process and reconciliation with the self. Centering on a renowned theater director and actor, Yūsuke Kafuku (Nishijima), *Drive My Car* begins with an extended forty-minute opening act in which he and his wife Oto (Reika Kirishima), dote on each other and cope with the infant death of their daughter, some twenty-four years prior. Though it seems Kafuku loves his wife, and vice versa, Kafuku never confronts his wife about, what we come to learn is, a history of extramarital affairs with actors she meets on the television set for which she writes. His decision has catastrophic consequences. Instead of coming home immediately after work one day, Kafuku stays away for fear of what the confrontation will mean. When he comes home he discovers her dead from a sudden cerebral hemorrhage; had he come home earlier, she might have survived.

The next two hours are devoted to Kafuku's direction of a production of *Uncle Vanya* in Hiroshima "some time later," where he is forced into a chauffeur-client relationship with Watari (Toko Miura), a quiet twenty-four year old woman with a mysterious scar on her cheek, whose purpose is to drive Kafuku between his rented home, an hour outside the city, to the theater and back every day, in his impeccably looked-after red Saab. They slowly warm to each other and learn that both have gone through irrevocable trauma. The two develop a magical bond, thanks, in part, to the strange coincidence that Watari is twenty-four, the same age Kafuku's daughter *would* have been had she never died. The two characters' inability to move forward in life is neatly contrasted with the irony of their constant motion inside this compact automobile. Hamaguchi sees Kafuku and Watari as mirrors of Vanya and Sonya, respectively, and seeks to elucidate these similarities through a careful interleaving of the driving scenes with the ones in rehearsal (Ordoña). During them, Kafuku listens to a cassette of his late wife speaking all of the lines from the play but Vanya's, a tape she had made for her husband when he was playing the lead himself. This object triggers a bizarre, unnerving connection between Kafuku and the ghosts of his past.

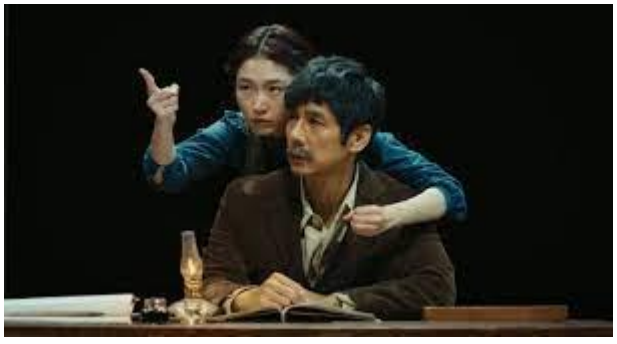
Throughout, Hamaguchi repurposes lines of Chekhov's to correspond thematically with the drama we are continually witnessing off-stage. This practice begins quite early on, after Kafuku has witnessed his wife on their couch having an affair. Driving around Tokyo, he is practicing the lines between Vanya and Astrov in Act I:

Vanya: For twenty-five years, he's been pretending he's someone he's not.

Astrov: You envy him, don't you?

Vanya: Of course I do! Such luck with women.

He then gets into a car accident that reveals he has glaucoma. Upon hearing these lines the first time, we might not register it as related to what has come previously. However, the later revelation that Oto has been carrying on not just one, but *many* affairs, recontextualizes the repurposed dialogue as subtextual extensions of Kafuku's actual life.



Sonya (Park Yu-rim) delivers the final speech in Korean Sign Language to Vanya (Hidetoshi Nishijima)

Unlike traditional narratives, in *Uncle Vanya*, the various characters' chaotic psychologies thrust forward the narrative, rather than physical action. For example, Vanya's decision to shoot Serebryakov seems potentially motivated by multiple factors (the estate sale itself, the loss of Yelena's love, the betrayal of Astrov, a need to protect Sonya and his late sister's memory); this bevy of possibilities means director and actor can dive into a sea of subtext. As an element in dramatic writing, Chekhov developed subtext in conjunction with Stanislavsky's notions of a psychorealist system of acting, a marriage of writing and speech that elucidates what is *not* spoken behind the words that *are*. "Chekhov often expressed his thought not in speeches," wrote Stanislavsky, "but in pauses or between the lines or in replies consisting of a single word" (Stanislavsky, 81-83). Martin Esslin argues that,

> It was [Chekhov] who articulated the notion that human beings hardly ever speak in explicit terms among each other about their deepest emotions, that the great, tragic, climactic moments are often happening beneath outwardly trivial conversation (200).

Considering this, *Vanya on 42nd Street*'s opening moments, *Cold Souls* frequent inseparability between Giamatti and Vanya, and *Drive Mr Car*'s textual repurposing, all exhibit subtextual relationships between actor, role and text that contextualize everything we will see, or *re*contextualizes what we have. In Malle's film, after the actors filter into their dilapidated space, Larry Pine starts complaining about how tired he is from rehearsing two plays at once. This exhaustion, and Shawn's subsequent "waking up" (and Pine/Astrov asking him how his nap was) ties the action immediately from behind-the-scenes life to on-stage frontality. In *Drive My Car*, this happens in a forceful bridge of Chekhov's text between the film's first act and the final moments. In the first act, Kafuku, returning home late at night after a performance of Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot*, hears the final lines of *Uncle Vanya* through his cassette as he parks in the garage. Spoken, as always, by his wife, Kafuku responds by rote, momentarily flat and devoid of meaning:

> **Vanya**: Sonya, I'm miserable. If only you knew how miserable I am.
>
> **Sonya**: What can we do? We must live our lives. Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya. We'll live through the long, long days, and through the long nights. We'll patiently endure the trials that fate sends our way. Even if we can't rest, we'll work for others, both now and when we have grown old. And

> when our last hour comes, we'll go quietly. And in the great beyond, we'll say to Him that we suffered, that we cried, that life was hard...

Listening to this, Kafuku remains in his stationary car with an artificial tear of eye medication running down his cheek. He goes upstairs, finds his wife dead, and we never hear this bit of dialogue again – except we do *see* it. In the film's penultimate scene, as Kafuku reluctantly steps into the role one more time, Lee Yoo-na (Park Yu-rim, as Sonya) delivers the fuller text of the final scene in Korean Sign Language. This speech, about rest and forgiveness of the self, follows immediately on Kafuku and Watari's drive to the very site at which the latter talks about having caused, however inadvertently, her mother's death. Her confession elicits Kafuku's first real admission of his own sadness; that he misses his late wife, that he does not care about her affairs, and that he just "wants her to be alive." All of the sadness and years of silent self-flagellation is at the forefront of the audience's mind as Hamaguchi shifts to the performance of *Vanya*. "You've known no joy in your life, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait... we will rest... we will rest." Her gestuality produces an exotic moment of twin lines of subtextuality, one which draws on the play's drama within the film itself, the other on Kafuku's journey towards absolving his own guilt. Because Hamaguchi has given us Vanya as a text in only fits and starts (and frequently through Kafuku & Oto via cassette), Sonya's lines are communicated not as a piece of Russian theater, but as little nuggets of pain and of wisdom, of sorrow and of regret, of joy and of hope – all for Kafuku, and for Watari, who sits, unblinking in the darkened hall of the theater's audience.

This brief shot of Watari suggests that she recognizes herself as receiving the promise of "rest." As Laura Sava articulates in a reformation of Maaike Bleeker's reprisal of Hans-Thies Lehmann, "'the aesthetic logic of the dramatic theatre presents the audience with a stable and detached point of view, allowing spectators to project themselves into the onstage world,' which 'simultaneously brings spectators closer to the world onstage, while creating a distance from their bodies as the loci of their looking" (150). In this lens, Watari sees herself receiving the same serenity of Korean Sign Language, the promise of catharsis and of the ability to move onwards.

Perhaps most magically, Hamaguchi fulfills this promise immediately. Kafuku's production of Vanya blacks out, and suddenly we are in COVID-19 era Korea. There is no announcement of the passage of time, but being within the pandemic clues us in that at

least a few months have elapsed. Watari, with a K95 mask on, shops for groceries. She exits, walks across a parking lot, and gets into the same red Saab. When she drives down the highway, she removes her mask, and Hamaguchi shoots Watari from profile in order to show she has had her scar, a memory of her guilt, removed. Then, a dog crawls into the front seat to be petted. Watari smiles, the first such show of emotion, and drives along the sparsely dotted highway, hugging a body of water, into the next stage of life. Though this coda belongs only to Watari, the implication of her ownership of the car suggests a finality for Kafuku, as well. So attached to this little red machine, Kafuku seemed unwilling for years to part with its company, nor, even, to let someone else drive it. She has become his lost daughter.

And what of the pandemic? The placement of this scene within an immediately recognizable global moment carries with it the weight of millions. So many lost we have not been able to say goodbye to, so many we wish we had. For Kafuku and Watari, those absent goodbyes are what hurt the most. Perhaps, it is in this way that Hamaguchi is most *unfaithful* to Chekhov's text, allowing a reversal of *Vanya*'s ending in which a defeated Sonya insists, instead, in repetitive incantations, that a brighter future is possible. Here, Hamaguchi allows his central characters to enjoy a tangible deliverance of that promise. Sophie Barthes, too, gives Giamatti and Nina a moment of closure on the misty sands of a Coney Island beach, where their unheard conversation suggests a ratification of the latter's absolution after years of illegal smuggling. Malle, meanwhile, lingers on the final moments of Chekhov's play, with a static shot hovering above Vanya's accounting table. As André Gregory and the rest of the small audience trickle onto the set, the performances linger on the cast's faces.

Adapting *Uncle Vanya* today simultaneously requires keen attention to shifting audience sensibilities and the core themes that made Chekhov's play such a revelation. These three films, made in three consecutive decades, retain essential truths and themes of the text while necessarily diverging to compensate for the new world. *Vanya on 42nd Street* has thus become a testament to modernist performance; *Cold Souls* a reflection of the new millennium's technophobic anxiety; and *Drive My Car*, made both before and during an improbable pandemic, mirrors a global society struggling to face down incomparable grief. All of them remain undeniable Chekhovian echoes of the soul.

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Creative Works

Zarses

Nizar Zouidi

Prefatory Note

The play was originally part of the capstone project for the Cambridge University online program of micro-masters in writing for performance and the entertainment industries on Edx platform (submitted May, 2021). The title/the name of the eponymous character is a corruption of the name of King Xerxes of Persia and of the short form of the word that means Nazarius in Medieval German. It was suggested to me by a guy called Ralph Zarse in the course's discussion forum. Its many origins suited my purpose.

I wanted this play to be an exercise in dramatic collage that extends beyond the immediately visible technique of putting the words of classical authors in the mouths of present-day characters. Narratives from different sources are also mixed to produce an incomplete story that is based on a narrative lacuna.

Story: There was regicide. While not everyone is convinced, a foreign spy has … confessed. Now, there is war. The general says that his majesty King Zarses will lead us to victory. Believe it or face the general's wrath!

List of Characters Ordered by Rank

Characters that are seen or heard on the stage:
Zarses is the new monarch of an unnamed country.
Artemis Appolan is the president of an occupied country (named after two of the wildest and freedom loving Greek gods).
Artabanus is the prime minister of the unnamed country named after the Persian minister who probably killed King Xerxes in 465 BC.
The General is simply the person in charge.
Female officer is more or less the general's associate.
Commandos.
Servants.
Voices.
Characters that are named but never seen or heard:
Leonidas Love is the former president of the occupied country.
The suspect is a foreigner we know nothing about.
Dr. Lya is named after the telepath heroine of A Song for Lya by George R.R. Martin.

Scene One

Sound of military boots slamming the ground in a regular pace that is occasionally interrupted by regular cannon shots. This lasts for 2 to 3 minutes. Drums are beaten too, but their sound seems too distant that the audience barely hear them. The curtain is drawn to reveal … darkness. The sound of boots is still audible but weakening. A flickering dim light suddenly springs from a small desk lamp on the far side of the stage, revealing the wrinkled face of an aged male military officer. His military uniform is grey and seems to have seen better days. The buttons of his shirt are shining in a kind of visual irony that further underscores the terrible state of his uniform. The sound of the military boots fade, but faint and distant cannon shots and explosions still tear through the silence every few seconds. The officer silently stands up and tries to fix the desk lamp. The light goes off. The officer slams the desk. The light goes on, and it is not flickering. The officer starts writing for one minute and then presses a call bell. Cannons suddenly stop firing. A female officer in a grey uniform comes onstage. A spotlight reveals her and follows her until she reaches the desk.

Female Officer: Good evening general, do you need anything?

General (He sits looking at her): Black as night, sweet as sin … The coffee I mean.

Female Officer: Of course, sir. (She does not move)

General: Did … the suspect talk?

Female Officer: No, sir.

General: It won't be necessary. Now have a look at this! (He hands her a piece of paper) It is your commander's invention.

Female officer (Immediately, with genuine enthusiasm): Inspiring! (She puts the paper on the desk right in front of the general)

General (Unbuttons the collar of his shirt): Damn, these uniforms are really too heavy for the tropics.

Female officer (Seductively, she leans on the desk to read): Judging by the suspect's body language, Guilt is never to be doubted! Wonderful, sir!

General: I'd rather take coffee than compliments just now. If anyone should check, make sure the suspect expires under the most unfortunate of circumstances no later than midnight.

Female officer: Coffee first, schemes later!

The light goes off suddenly. Cannon fire is heard from a distance. Drums. Curtain.

Scene Two

The sounds never stop, but they become more and more distant, and they eventually disappear a little before the first actor enters the stage.

A sinisterly ominous voice: Do not forget who put the crown on your childish head! My king.

The curtain is drawn, revealing a lavishly furnished office. Behind the office, the audience can see a full-size portrait of a monarch in a black military uniform hanging between two large windows.

Voice: I thought these Grecians shrunk appall'd at arms.

The ominous voice: No: they are bold and daring: these sad eyes Beheld their violent and deathful deeds.

Enter the monarch in the portrait, followed by the general and a chubby old man in a black suit wearing round glasses. The king sits on the chair behind the office looking at a pile of papers in front of him while the other two men sit on opposite chairs in front of the office desk.

Prime Minister Artabanus (he is the second voice): This is taking too long, general. You promised a swift end to this … operation.

General: Their capital has fallen already, but we need to dismantle the remaining opposition. This will not be easy without more resources.

Prime minister: Public opinion …

General (Interrupting): The public knows they must pay for their crime!

Prime minister: For all we know, the suspect expired during the investigation. All we have is a lengthy confession with too much art and little matter. Besides, we could have avoided war.

General: How dare you insult our late monarch?! They killed our king. If you cannot decipher the message with your eyes, I will brand every word of it on your body, traitor!

King Zarses (Still looking down): Gentleman, please calm down. let's not take this too far.

The two men exchange hostile looks, but they seem calmer.

King Zarses (Still looking down): Our options are direct occupation or forming a puppet government, is that it?

Prime minister: Yes, your majesty.

Zarses looks at the general. The latter smirks in triumph.

General: Mrs. Artemis Appolan will be sworn in as the interim president. Your majesty will attend her inauguration in Caria. This will be our moment of triumph.

Zarses looks at the general again pleadingly. The general seems to understand him as he gives him a derisive look.

General: Don't worry, your majesty. Everything will be fine. Security measures are in place. I will not let anything hurt you.

Zarses looks down again.

General: I believe there is nothing more to discuss. (He raises and walks towards the door. Prime minister looks at Zarses, who seems absorbed in the papers. He sighs and follows the general.)

Zarses (reading from the papers.):

Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?

He raises his head.

Zarses: To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment, To be … yourself … a coward.

Curtain.

Scene Three

Ominous voice: A great god is Ahuramazda, the greatest of the gods, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, created happiness for man, who made Xerxes king, one king of many, one lord of many.

Music, indistinct chatter, and laughter.

A female voice: Breach! Breach! Breach!

Gunshots and screams. The curtain moves up revealing the office of King Zarses. The two windows are broken. The portrait is disfigured with bullet holes. Zarses himself is on his knees with his hands on his head. Five hooded commandos pointing their Kalashnikovs at him.

The commandos (in one voice): bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

O, vengeance!

They tear his uniform. One of them punches him.

Commando (in one voice): Even a god-king can bleed.

Female commando: He is a king no more. (She kicks his groin)

Zarses (Not in pain.): You may my glories and my state depose,

But not my griefs; still am I king of those.

Curtain. Gunshots.

The curtain is drawn again. Zarses is sleeping on his desk. His head is buried in the pile of papers. He is motionless.

Enter servant with a cup of coffee.

Servant: Your majesty, sir. You have slept while working.

Zarses: What time is it?

Servant: It is 20 past midnight, your majesty.

Zarses: 20...20. I see.

Servant (Interrupting): Your mouth, sir, is bleeding. Should I call Dr. Lya?

Zarses dismisses him with a nervous gesture.

Zarses (reciting): I (am) Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of all kinds of people, king on this earth far and wide, the son of Darius the king, the Achaemenid. (Nervously) A dream, it was a dream, A BLOODY DREAM. I cannot unwrite this vendetta from my story. I studied all the written worlds old and new. That which is written cannot be unwritten. Death is written first, then life. Exists predate entrances.

Zarses faints. Servants enter the room.

1st Servant: Use my cellphone! Call Dr. Lya!

2nd Servant: Forgive me, ... sir... but ... shouldn't we .. call an ... exorcist?

1st Servant: Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Kafka. What exorcist can fight demons with these names? Call Dr. Lya or I will call the general and tell him what you said.

Curtain.

Last Scene

The king and president Artemis are holding a press conference. The general is standing behind the king while the prime minister is sitting with the audience.

Artemis: My thoughts not otherwise devoid of fear, lest mighty wealth with haughty foot overturn and trample in the dust that happiness which, not unblessed by heaven, Lucian Darius raised the flag of our mighty nation, but former president Leonidas Love trampled it with terror and tyranny. He made us the pariah of the world. No more shall our people suffer from the misguided ambitions of militarist dictators. His majesty King Zarses promised in his speech that his troops will withdraw from our land as soon as my government establishes order. Our independence will be restored. Those who claim to be fighting for it only delay it with misguided notions inherited from the oppressive regime of Leonidas.

Zarses bursts into an unsurpassable laugh.

General: Cut the feed! CUT THE FEED! What the hell do you think you are doing, your Majesty?!!!

Curtain

Artemis Voice (On the radio. It grows fainter with every word): The inauguration was attended by Megabates and Astaspes, great leaders of the Persians, kings themselves. They obey our Great king. the god-like bowman Imaeus and Pharandaces and Sosthanes, who drives his horses hard into the battle. the great Arsames that rules sacred Memphis and Ariomardus, whose kingdom is the ever-ancient Thebes.

View of My Neighbor's Back Door

Emi Wood Scully

Prefatory Note

"View of My Neighbor's Back Door" was essentially inspired by a recent bout of insomnia I had been struggling with. My bedroom opens up to a floor-to-ceiling window and looks out onto my backyard. The neighborhood behind our backyard has a house upon a hill, and its back door is only visible once all of the autumn leaves fall off of the trees. It is the only house that keeps its back door light on all night long. While I lied in bed, unable to shut my brain off, I often glanced at their back door light. One night, this poem came to me, and I wrote it down immediately.

Brittle
Copper leaves
Inconsistently lie to rest
on verdant grasses
still with
summer's echo.
November's manifesto
proclaims its inditement,
once again the barrenness.
Nature's short lived prismatic display
Ever-turning between houses.
Your back door light reveals itself
a little more with each receded leaf
becoming apparent.
Validation of the new season.
A ruthless commencement.
Its prerequisite for illuminating
the darkest cycle
with artificial light

in the event that
Someone bravely turns up
Knocking
to be let in from the cold.

Pictures Revisited

Ali Armstrong

Turn right into the neighborhood.
Take another right.
Go straight.
Turn left.
Second house on the left.
No. You don't have to stop. You have no reason to stop. The neighbors may look out the window and wonder who is out in front of the big iron gate. Go inside. It won't hurt. Stop crying. You're better than that. Wipe your eyes and smile. You're weak. You're breaking at the seams. You're staring into the window of an empty room. Turn around. Turn around. Turn around, damn it.
Maybe not. Park and see what's there.

A memory. Pictures.
The torn pages of a photo album stare up at me.
Things I tried to forget.
Laughs I wanted to fade.
Time that I wanted to disappear.
My knees are wobbling like a vase that's been hit by a baseball.
I'm sweating. I want to leave this place. Too much regret and not enough joy.

But I make my way to the front room. I see the pictures. We'd get fast food way past our curfew and watch whatever sappy rom com was on television. We'd move the couch cushions to make forts or throw them when one of us said something dumb. You'd point out family portraits on both sides of your family. You'd explain stories from the past, as if the pictures were aiding your ability to remember.
We'd take pictures on cell phones and digital cameras for the sake of having something to reminisce.
...to put in a frame in the bedroom that belonged to you.
Pictures.

The kitchen, where we'd eat homemade lasagna and too many pints of ice cream.
Remember when we ate a whole tub of frosting on your kitchen floor, talking about our high school teachers and childhood friends? The next day we felt like we needed to be rolled down the stairs.
There was that one Christmas that you got a food processor. You told me to come over as soon as possible so that you could present the concoction that you created out of fruits and vegetables.

The upstairs open area that led to the bathroom and three bedrooms. That bedroom. Your bedroom.
The bedroom where we snuck your mom's nice make-up before we met with those football players at the movie theater.
Where you crimped my hair and told me I looked like a glamorous 90s model.
Where we blared rap and country music with the big front window open while your parents did yard work.
The king bed where we all sat, gossiped, and shared memories.
The closet, where you hid my favorite college t-shirt for so long.
Where we tried on your long formal dresses and took goofy pictures.
Pictures.

The backyard. Where the gate and back door was always unlocked because your mom said I was family.
Where we spread out beach towels on the concrete to get a February tan in 75-degree weather. Your sister teased us for thinking we could possibly be sun-kissed on an overcast Friday afternoon.
Where we stood in the flower bed and took pictures.
Pictures.
Pictures.
Fucking pictures.
All over your mirror. All over that photo album that is burned into my memory.
You had laughed at the pictures. A laugh that resonated through every room in the house. A laugh that I can never shake from my mind. A laugh that will linger in my ear forever.

That cold February night in which all I read were news articles and letters signed "Love, your best friend,"
through blurry eyes and cold fingers, all I had were pictures.
I had hundreds of four by six moments in my hand that would stay with me when you did not
...sprawled on the bed of my college apartment, a place that you had never known.
I heard your laugh in that moment, ringing in my ear as a distant memory.

You need to leave.
You're crying again.
The iron gate is closed.
The door is locked.
It's okay to back out of the driveway.
One of our favorite songs just came on the radio. Convenient, right?
You can smile. There's no hurt.
Those memories are in the house. It's okay.
Turn around.
Take a left.
Go straight.
Take a right.
Drive home.
I will come back to you again.

Acknowledgements

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With all of our sincerest thanks,

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