Between Poetics and Production. A Russian Trace in *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* (Soyuzmultfilm / Christmas Films / S4C / BBC Wales)

Polina Rybina

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/interfaces/4729
ISSN: 2647-6754

Publisher:
Université de Bourgogne, Université de Paris, College of the Holy Cross

Electronic reference
Polina Rybina, "Between Poetics and Production. A Russian Trace in *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* (Soyuzmultfilm / Christmas Films / S4C / BBC Wales)", *Interfaces* [Online], 47 | 2022, Online since 30 June 2022, connection on 21 July 2022. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/interfaces/4729

This text was automatically generated on 21 July 2022.

Creative Commons - Attribution 4.0 International - CC BY 4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
It goes without saying that Shakespeare’s plays have been adapted repeatedly, for different media, for different viewers, and in a wide variety of contexts. At first glance, the series *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* (1992-94), which was commissioned by the British channel S4C, with scripts written by L. Garfield, dialogues recorded by a bevy of British actors, and production coordinated by D. Edwards, might be viewed as yet another British television adaptation of British classics. However, this is a transnational co-production, and Russian studios Soyuzmultfilm and Christmas Films were responsible for animating the shows. This article therefore seeks to explore the “Russian trace” in *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*, which reveals itself in both the poetics of each episode (directed by N. Orlova, N. Serebryakov, S. Sokolov, A. Zyablikova, etc.) and the specificity of the production process.

The series has been explored from multiple standpoints. While literary-minded critics have emphasized the inevitable cuts to the original plays (J. Andreas), which lead to “compromising” the complexity and power of the series’ source texts, educationally-minded authors (J. Bottoms, M. Tuck Rozett) have discussed the series as a pedagogical tool, focusing on the different ways in which the episode-long adaptations compensate for the reductions of the classic texts. L. E. Osborne prefers to read the animated films as an opportunity to delve into the director’s creative attempts to re-mediate Shakespeare, while G. M. Colón Semenza analyzes the animated tales as complex cinematic texts which draw the viewers’ attention to the non-realistic features of the episodes and “highlight the very technical apparatus” (60), contradicting critiques that the series is “dumbing down” Shakespeare for teenagers.
As a Russia-based scholar, I have the opportunity to add to this discussion by offering data linked to the production of *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* as seen and experienced by Russian film directors, animation artists and Christmas Films executive producers. Their opinions and understanding of the process were of utmost importance in helping to uncover a link between poetics and production. How does the analysis of film adaptation poetics expand when accompanied by information about the production process?

“The problem of how artworks are constructed to have certain effects and uses” (Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* 51) is put at the center of neo-formalist film poetics. Exploration of film poetic matter was carried out by Russian scholars like Yu. Tynyanov, V. Shklovsky, B. Eikhenbaum as early as in the 1920s. With their focus on the artist’s craft in structuring material in specific patterns, formalists’ insights are useful for the studies of film adaptation poetics. Building upon these formalist ideas (among others), D. Bordwell developed, extended, and sometimes reversed their principles, emphasizing the fact that the viewer’s task is to dynamize the patterns in the process of narration, to engage actively in the functioning of poetic matter.

One of the main and frequently emphasized effects of animated films is that of protean metamorphoses: “the very concept of stationary existence is completely abolished” (104), writes E. Panofsky in his essay *Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures*, noting the “fantastic independence of the natural laws” (104) characteristic of cartoons. P. Wells notes this characteristic amongst the elements intrinsic to animation: the primacy of the image, and its ability to metamorphose into a completely different guise. Wells maintains that “the animated adaptation can be addressed as a mode of metamorphosis” (202). The images of the animated film go through processes of construction and deconstruction, mutability and convergence which exist not only as an attraction (a set of jokes, for example) but also as a visual system capable of producing unconventional visual narratives to engage viewers.

Another significant factor to mention here is the adapted nature of the animated films under discussion. The poetic effect of adaptations rests upon the “double vision” (J. Boyum) which they inspire; the intertextual web woven by viewers around the film is part of the pleasure one seeks when experiencing adaptations (L. Hutcheon). In the second part of this paper, I discuss the poetics of the series with a particular emphasis on intertextuality and creative borrowings from Soviet feature films reworking Shakespeare’s plays. Prominence will also be given to the visual poetics of such directors as N. Orlova, N. Serebryakov, A. Karaev, who retold these seminal texts in their own visually idiomatic way.

Film production involves both the technical aspects of filmmaking and the collaborative efforts made by people and businesses. This conflation of the technical and the interpersonal, of the technological and the human agents (S. Krämer), allows for a wider understanding of the poetics/production bond. To analyze it, I suggest viewing it through the notions of opportunity, constraint and contingency.

The most basic and obvious link between poetics and aspects of production lies in viewing technology as an opportunity, a “machinic contribution to creativity” (Cubitt 88). The technical opportunity to construct and create is supported by the collaborative efforts of agents who exchange “chances”: the British proposal to collaborate on non-mainstream animated films was a fortunate happenstance for Russian animators, who
in return created an opportunity for an unconventional visual reading of the most British of classics – the works of the Bard.

However, there is always a danger that the materiality of communication – technical or interpersonal – will also be an obstacle. Thus, another central notion is that of constraint. In the chapter “Three Dimensions of the Film Narrative” of his book Poetics of Cinema, Bordwell writes about the plot structure of early films being dependent on the length of a film reel: “a technological constraint served as a simple boundary for the entire story to be told” (20). In The Cinema Effect, S. Cubitt mentions the Lumière’s negotiations regarding the supply of film stock, noting that “they could have gone for square or circular frames, or the portrait format of many of their autochromes. Certain technical constraints made it simpler to go for the landscape format still ubiquitous today” (82). These two examples of early cinema history illustrate the way in which technological constraints shape artistic decisions, and even the future of the medium. Limitations of external control – time, money, coordination of staff – are no less significant for the discussion of the production process. “By choosing within production constraints, filmmakers create film form and style”, Bordwell concludes (Film Art: An Introduction 25), voicing the need to always bear in mind the influence of production on poetics.

The third type of poetics/production relationship is also based on bringing the materiality of the medium to the forefront. Technology is linked not only to a well-described and predictable list of constraints but also to unpredictability, chance discoveries, “mechanical contingency” (Cubitt 42). Contingency can also be found in examples from early film history, in the probably apocryphal story of the way Méliès invented stop-motion, or the invention of the Kuleshov effect. It remains inherent to contemporary film production. Bordwell describes the preproduction process itself as being full of contingencies: on-location shooting out of continuity, shooting around stars who cannot be on the set every day, scheduling the most difficult scenes earlier, “before cast and crew begin to tire” (Film Art: An Introduction 17). From the collaborative point of view, there is always a “double contingency” (T. Parsons) of social interactions when both sides in the production process know that both parties can act differently, thus provoking instability.

The idea that Russian filmmakers’ poetics are an (in)direct outcome of production opportunities, constraints, and contingencies is at the center of this paper.

How Did It Happen?

In January 1989, several independent animated film studios were organized under the production umbrella of Soyuzmultfilm. In December of the same year, a Soviet-American joint venture, Christmas Film Studios, was created. The director of the studio, Elizabeth Babakhina, was convinced of the need for radical changes in many spheres: the complete transformation of the production process (particularly changing the pace of film work), as well as a new understanding of the target audience. The studio management defined three main lines of production: directorial debuts, unique experimental works (auteur animated films) and – the central line – mainstream works that would attract a broad audience. According to Babakhina, it was crucial to involve famous directors and animators in mainstream productions which were previously
kept separate from stars of Soviet animation industry like Yu. Norstein, E. Nazarov, or G. Bardin.

13 The first film made by Christmas Films in collaboration with British colleagues and under British supervision was V. Ugarov’s *Searching for Olwen* (1990), an adaptation of the Welsh tale *Culhwch and Olwen* from the *Red Book of Hergest*. The film was produced by L. Jones, who was described by Russian film critic L. Malyukova in her book *SuperCinema* as an enterprising and energetic producer who lacked experience in the production of animated films. However, it was L. Jones who, upon completion of the first project, brought representatives of channel S4C to Moscow to get acquainted with Russian animators and negotiate a new project. Unhappy with the prospect of another adaptation of Welsh epic tales, Russian animators were looking for other sources; according to Malyukova, Elizabeth Babakhina came up with the idea of creating animated versions of Shakespeare, the timeless Bard, an important figure in both British and Russian cultures.1 “The cautious British” (Malyukova 47) left to discuss the idea with their supervisors, who were fascinated by the project (Christopher Grace started his work as executive producer on the British side). Christmas Films became one of the first independent studios in Russia to collaborate with the British film industry.

14 At the beginning of the 1990s, with the country’s financial collapse, Russian animated film auteurs seized the unique opportunity to continue working without the long periods of inactivity characteristic of Soyuzmultfilm production processes at the time.

Figure 1. Igor Markozyan and Natalia Dabizha during the interview with the author.

© Polina Rybina.

15 In my interview with the current director of Christmas Films, Natalia Dabizha (who worked as an animator in *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale*, while also serving as director of *The Barber of Seville* from the *Operavox* series), and Igor Markozyan, the executive producer of *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*, both interviewees emphasized the fact that this project was an opportunity to achieve two results. Firstly, this ambitious project to produce six 26-minute films in two years (and another six films two years later) meant that many Soyuzmultfilm employees would be involved.
Workplaces were created, and numerous animators, artists and other professionals kept their jobs in the industry, a surprising outcome at a time of economic decline. Secondly, the collaboration with British colleagues was viewed by Russian professionals as an opportunity to raise the level of production, mainly from a technological point of view. Video controllers and new lighting equipment introduced during this project improved the quality of output and simplified the production process immensely (several stages of analogue production and post-production disappeared).

The opportunity was not one-sided. Scriptwriter Leon Garfield, for example, reworked the original scripts with the Russian directors, learning the language of animation, the art of laconic yet expressive audiovisual storytelling. Igor Markozyan emphasized in the interview that Garfield was interested in the specificity of animated film production, the way the dramatizations would look on screen. Natalia Orlova seems to have been fascinated by Garfield’s tactful approach in his collaboration with directors. According to Malyukova, the Russians witnessed the evolution of the scripts which were initially text- and fabula-oriented, only to later incorporate an understanding of animated imagery, the significance of pauses, the choreography of characters and the inherent potential of plasticity in animation in general. The final result bears witness to a high level of artistic exchange. Malyukova also mentioned a problem linked to several lengthy dialogues. Recordings of the Royal Shakespeare Company actors were sent to Moscow and directors could choose between different readings (directors then travelled to Cardiff to be present at the recordings), though the main difficulty was not the quality or style of the readings, but the expanded verbal track itself. The main “battle” that Russian animators were fighting was ultimately for the absence of words, for scenes without dialogue.

As well as opportunities, the project also presented constraints, which also influenced the directors’ poetic choices. For example, it became clear that Russian animators and British producers had a different idea of their target audience. According to Colon Semenza, “the consensus among commentators is that the targeted group was young teens, especially British fourteen-year-olds, who now face mandatory written exams on Shakespeare’s plays” (40). The Russian artists, however, targeted not only teenagers but also viewers of auteur animation; their main task was to rewrite Shakespeare’s plays by means of different artistic approaches, to appropriate famous tragedies and comedies on the animated screen.

Markozyan recalls the circumstances that surrounded E. Gamburg’s work on Romeo and Juliet. Gamburg, the director of several animated parodies, who was especially famous for A Robbery in...Style (1978), a short film which played upon American, Italian, Russian and French crime films, instilled his version of the tragedy with the animation-styled comic (Lady Capulet pulling Lord Capulet by his over-gown to prevent him from joining a fight). The target audience being one of the main constraints, the love scene between two young protagonists had to be shown metaphorically. Nudity is represented in double exposure (naked bodies are transparent and “poetic”), intimate moments are shown in a scene with Romeo and Juliet, fully dressed, flying into the sky while small cupids draw their bows to inspire love and desire. Markozyan emphasized the importance of this metaphorical depiction for the producers, who had a clear idea of the target audience, thereby ensuring the series’ success.

Many decisions made by Russian artists were a result of their inability to limit their task to purely educational goals. Orlova, for example, was interested in staging Richard
as an animated symphony of murderous desires: blood-like wine splashing onto the screen from the glasses, Richard’s cloak streaming after him like a river of blood, the raven morphing into the murderous king. The directors’ intentions to experiment visually with Shakespearean plots also made them turn to the Soviet cinematic tradition of adapting the Bard (films by Y. Frid, S. Yutkevitch, G. Kosintsev): this approach fostered the “Russian trace” in the international project and transformed an apparent constraint into an opportunity.

Zyablikova gives yet another fascinating example of a constraint turned into an opportunity: Garfield insisted on keeping the Induction in *The Taming of the Shrew*. This seemed a mistake to the film director, since it would lead to cutting more essential elements of the main action. However, by preserving the Induction, Zyablikova had to rethink her approach to dramatizing the play: theatricality became key to the overall structure of this episode (curtains, acts, the artificiality of child-like passions, and even an additional character – a dwarf, inspired by Velázquez).

An example of a purely technical constraint is the use of texts recorded by British actors. Lip-synching turned into an unusually difficult issue because Russian animators had to study mouth movement in English and only then could they set to making the characters talk.

The most intriguing third type of the poetics/production relationship – contingency – can be considered from both technical and collaborative angles. Due to technical limitations at Soyuzmultfilm, Russian artists had to be incredibly inventive in solving different visual tasks which nowadays are solved quickly with computer technologies. One of the hilarious stories told during the interview with Dabizha and Markozyan was devoted to animators managing to create an effect of fire burning in a fireplace (at a time when samples were unavailable) with medical equipment (catheter light).

The collaboration between different professionals, directors, actors, and animators reveals the significance of chance discoveries, decisions made from sudden inspiration. Zyablikova, the director of *The Taming of the Shrew*, told a story of finding a model for the puppet of Petruccio. The team working on this episode was searching for the right type – artistic, smart with a “come-what-may” attitude. Zyablikova met the model (an Armenian actor) for the puppet of Petruchio on a bus on her way to work. The actor’s image was later placed on the poster of *The Taming of the Shrew* displayed at the presentation of the series (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1994): the model holding his puppet can be seen in the background on the poster. The photo of Zyablikova was taken during her short talk with the special guest at the exhibition: Charles, Prince of Wales. This shot is an illustration of both opportunity and contingency during the production and distribution processes.
Figure 2. From left to right: Christopher Grace (the executive producer of the series), Aida Zyablikova (the director of *The Taming of the Shrew*), Charles, Prince of Wales, Natalia Filatova (interpreter).
Why These Adaptations Look the Way They Do

Most directors involved in this project (Robert Saakiants, Efim Gamburg, Maria Muat, Aida Ziablikova, Alexei Karayev, Yuri Kulakov) made only one film each, with the exceptions of Nikolai Serebryakov (*Macbeth, Othello*), Natalia Orlova (*Hamlet, Richard III*) and Stanislav Sokolov (*The Tempest, The Winter’s Tale*). The interplay of animated images and their live-action predecessors in Soviet film adaptations of Shakespeare catch the knowing audience’s attention from the outset. Muat’s *Twelfth Night*, Serebryakov’s *Othello*, and Orlova’s *Hamlet* each rework a whole range of motifs inspired by Soviet adaptations (directed by Y. Frid, S. Yutkevitch, and G. Kosintsev, respectively). The dominant motifs of each episode also represent an imaginative approach taken by Russian animation artists who rewrote British classics with the effects of their own visual poetics. Directors’ previous work in animation influenced not only their stylistic but also their production choices (for example, animation techniques, teams of production designers, animators, or composers).

Searching for visual inspiration for her animated version, Muat turned to Yan Frid’s classic *Twelfth Night*, starring the Russian actors Mikhail Yanshin (Sir Toby Belch), Klara Luchko (Viola/Sebastian), Georgy Vitsin (Sir Andrew), Bruno Freindlich (Feste), and Vasili Merkuryev (Malvolio). Frid, the director of several Soviet musical comedies and operettas, adapted Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* in 1955; his subsequent films (*The Dog in the Manger, 1978; Die Fledermaus, 1979*) made him one of the most famous directors in Soviet mass culture. Images created by Yanshin (who was also a Moscow Art Theatre...
star), Vitsin and Merkuryev are reinterpreted in the animated tales. Vitsin’s recognizable persona emerged later, thanks to famous comedies about a trio of bootleggers (performed by Vitsin, Yu. Nikulin, E. Morgunov). At the time when Frid was making his adaptation, Vitsin’s image was forming. His thin face and pointed, slightly turned-up nose are exaggerated in the puppet of Sir Andrew. The puppets of Sir Toby and Malvolio are inspired by Yanshin and Merkuryev, creating a *dejá vu* effect that seems to be intended not for British teenagers, but for the post-Soviet family audience. To enhance this effect, Muat makes use of several *mise-en-scènes* that mimic Frid’s film space structures and camera work: the drinking scene (II. iii), staged almost exactly like Frid’s version, is interrupted by Malvolio, whose voice (Gerald James) reminds the Russian viewer of Vasili Merkuryev’s voice. In an episode when Malvolio finds a letter, there is an animated equivalent of the camera work in Frid’s film (a close-up of Malvolio’s feet with a message on the ground, then a camera tilt, showing the character from the bottom to the top).

27 Muat works with allusions that can be read by the audience of a particular generation and with a specific national film culture. Intentions to mischievously “smuggle” images and values familiar to the Russian viewer into the film, which sounds British, produce a compelling interplay of visual and audio tracks.

28 Colon Semenza writes in his article:

> [...] the artistic procedures used to transform and shape the raw material of the plays – the syuzhet – serve to balance or undermine the larger corporate agenda motivating the film project. Whether the animators deliberately sought to work against the grain of the producers and financiers is unclear and, ultimately, it does not matter since our emphasis should be on teen viewers’ engagements of the finished artistic products (63).

29 From my point of view, the intention of animators was not to deliberately work against the grain, thereby undermining the power of the financiers, but rather to rely upon national specificity in their contribution to an artistically challenging international project. Two other examples of intertextual engagement of a knowing audience are linked to the films’ dominant motifs and their metaphoric or symbolic imagery.

30 Orlova’s stylized animated version of *Hamlet* creates many compelling visual motifs. Her version might seem to resonate with L. Olivier’s 1948 adaptation, which reworked the play using both expressionistic influences (dark Elsinore with its narrow corridors, winding stairs and sinister spaces) and *film noir* imagery (the Prince as Detective, the searching eye of the camera, etc.). Emphasizing her independence from this version in the interview (“I have not seen it, I’m afraid”), Orlova spoke about the central metaphors guiding her interpretation (stifling labyrinths, corridors leading into the walls, smoking torches which prevent one from seeing clearly).

31 One of the more significant elements, which supports the overall meaning of this episode, is in tune with G. Kosintsev’s *Hamlet* (a film adaptation Orlova likes – though not to the extent of admitting to a direct intertextual engagement with it). In the 1964 film, the theme of imprisonment in Elsinore and different ways to escape from it is vital. Hamlet (I. Smoktunovsky) seems to achieve this freedom only through his death, and even then the viewer does not necessarily perceive death as liberation: Hamlet’s body is carried back to Elsinore to rest there forever. Unlike Hamlet, Ophelia (A. Vertinskaya) escapes earlier – and this escape is visually supported by the image of a bird flying over the sea. This visual metaphor (a long-lasting flight of a crying seagull
seen from a distance) is supposed to stay in the viewer’s memory: Ophelia’s soul has finally left the prison. Kosintsev prepares the viewer for this scene of liberation by showing Ophelia’s room in Elsinore where the walls are covered with images of fantastic birds and beasts. Orlova introduces a similar metaphor in her animated version: when the white figure of Ophelia disappears in the marsh, the viewer sees a white crane staying very erect, then flapping its wings and flying towards the sun. Staging death in silence, and off-screen, was crucial for the director, who preferred subtle ways of reaching a crescendo.

Orlova worked on the longest and darkest of Shakespeare’s texts. Paint on glass technique, which is intensive and laborious, might serve as a metaphor for the passionate preoccupation of the main protagonists with their cause, both in Hamlet and Richard III. One of the effects of the technique is the audience’s (and protagonists’) inability to see the narrative world clearly, to view the elements of this world as stable and lasting. The universes of Hamlet and Richard III are each ever-changing, flickering and vibrating, an effect that renders a visual equivalent to the spiritual voids presented to the audience.

For Orlova, tragic characters are elusive and ungraspable. Nikolai Serebryakov, however, sees them as monumental figures. His films in the series are made using a cell animation technique. In Othello, Serebryakov worked as both director and production designer, drawing inspiration from a well-known Soviet adaptation of the tragedy to make the murder scene more expressive. In S. Yutkevitch’s Othello, the dominant motif of a threatening (black) hand starts developing halfway through the film. The contrast between black and white hands first strikes the viewer when Iago (Andrey Popov) puts his hand on Othello’s (Sergey Bondarchuk) in a close-up, an image that immediately precedes Othello’s words: “Avaunt, be gone! thou hast set me on the rack” (III. iii. 329). This touch of Iago’s hand works as a sign of physical contamination, which completes the corruption already performed on Othello’s spirit. The Moor is “on the rack”, and he is going to free himself of his inner torture. In the scene with Desdemona (Irina Skobtseva) – almost immediately following the dialogue with Iago – Othello tells his wife her “hand is moist”, suspicious of her infidelity. Desdemona’s hot and moist palms are signs of her “liberal heart”; it is a “sweating devil here that commonly rebels” (III. iv. 36-37). Nevertheless, in Yutkevitch’s film, this potentially erotic imagery turns into a threat: after holding and caressing Desdemona’s hands, Othello demands his handkerchief – his black hand menacingly protruding from the left upper corner of the screen towards Desdemona’s white face.

When Desdemona fails to produce the handkerchief, Othello springs to his feet, his hands reaching out for her neck, thus foreshadowing the tragedy’s final scenes. In the murder scene, Othello slowly approaches Desdemona with his hands outstretched; the viewer gets the point-of-view shot of Othello, foregrounding his black hands in a close-up. His terrifying advance is accompanied by the organ music that played during their church wedding.

In the animated version, the close-ups of Othello’s hands posed against Desdemona’s white face, blocking the view, dominating the frame, conjure up the memory of the 1955 film. The effect produced is powerful, since Serebryakov’s films play with Soviet monumental imagery of different kinds.

The drawing style of Macbeth (designed by V. Morozov and I. Urmanche) makes the viewer think of the Russian and Soviet avant-garde of the 1910s and 20s, and painters...
such as K. Petrov-Vodkin (who happened to be Serebryakov’s father’s teacher at the Russian Academy of Arts). Monumental bodies and austere faces emphasize the tragic characters’ strength, and their muscular body types. Dark shadows play upon their bodies to remind the viewer of athletes flexing their muscles. The central theme of both animated tragedies – *Othello* and *Macbeth* – is violence, with its consequences and its magnetism. The close-up of a hand is an intertextual element in *Othello*, but it is a structural element in *Macbeth*. A medium shot of the main character with a hand or hands outstretched gives an impression of a distorted perspective (not unlike the experiments of Petrov-Vodkin). Visual distortions support the theme of paranoia, a tragic deformation of the world, Macbeth’s “proleptic imagination” (H. Bloom) taking over reality.

Serebryakov is interested in the representation of two powerful figures – a male and a female – that simultaneously support and oppose each other. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Othello and Desdemona turn into inseparable duos through the choice of drawing techniques and color motifs. Dark Macbeth and fair (though evil) Lady Macbeth visually echo the dark Moor and his fair wife. The director represents highly sexualized female images (Colon Semenza), though Lady Macbeth is a dominant woman and Desdemona is an attractive victim. Highlighting the women’s slender grace, body curves and feminine fragility, the films oppose them to a muscular, heavy-jawed, dark-skinned male corporeality. Such representation is also due to the artist’s understanding of the human body as a composition of geometrical figures (circles, triangles, and oval shapes).

Desdemona, one of the most fragile characters in the film, is shown singing the famous song (music by M. Tariverdiev):

The poor soul sat [sighing] by a sycamore tree,
Sing all a green willow;
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,
Sing willow, willow, willow (IV. iii. 37-40).

Her singing is accompanied on the visual track by an image of Desdemona’s body floating down a narrow river, which reminds the viewers of John Everett Millais’ Ophelia. By establishing an exact parallel between two female characters, the authors of the film make the viewer respond to the animated version as a replay of a number of recognizable visual texts.

The reflexive nature of the series reaches its peak in one of the most charming episodes – A. Karayev’s *As You Like It* (production designer Valentin Olschwang). The visual poetics (using the technique of watercolour paint on glass), inspired by A. Watteau’s paintings and the world of *fêtes galantes*, transposes the events in the forest of Arden to an 18th-century French garden party, where guests wear fancy dresses and experience social freedom. Before taking part in *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*, Karayev had already established a preference for the technique used in *As You Like It*: his paint-on-glass animated films include *Welcome* (1986), an adaptation of Dr. Seuss’ *Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose*, on which he collaborated with Oscar-winning production designer and director A. Petrov, and *Inmates of the Old House* (1987) with Olschwang, who also joined Karayev two years later to work on yet another adaptation of Dr. Seuss, *The Sneetches*.

With its attention to detail, Olschwang/Karayev’s *As You Like It* continues the artist’s and director’s interest in the lyrical representation of everyday life. This is particularly
evident in the 9-minute film *Inmates of the Old House*, which focuses on objects found in a house in the country and the sounds they produce: a ticking clock, a music box, creaking stairs, or the sounds of falling leaves in the garden.

At first glance, *As You Like It* appears to be text-centered. Nevertheless, if we consider the visual imagery, we can see how additional meanings appear which expand our understanding of the verbal text. Rosalind describes her mood swings in Garfield's abridged version (brackets mark the abridged parts):

> He was to imagine me his love, his mistress; and I set him every day to woo me. At which time would I, [being but a moonish youth,] grieve, be [effeminate, changeable, longing and liking,] proud, fantastical, apish, [shallow], inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles; [for every passion something, and for no passion truly any thing, as boys and women are for the most part cattle of this color; would now like him, now loathe him; then entertain him, then forswear him; now weep for him, then spit at him:] that I drove my suitor from his mad humor of love to a living humor of madness, [which was, to forswear the full stream of the world, and to live in a nook merely monastic.] And thus I cur’d him, [and this way will I take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep’s heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in’t] (III. ii. 341-353).

On the visual track, this passage is represented by the simultaneous appearance of masked *commedia dell’arte* characters who later vanish in a whirlwind of masks flying into the “camera”. The Italian comedy imagery is entirely incorporated into the Watteau-like landscape of this episode, and supports Rosalind’s playful description of love and how to cure it. The final phrase of the monologue “And thus I cur’d him” is said by a mask hanging in the center of the frame. In the next frame, masks land on the waters of a forest brook and are carried away by the flow: words, taken from Rosalind’s monologue – “the full stream of the world”, “to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep’s heart” – are represented with visual images, which also receive a childlike accent. Hand-made boats sail on the forest brook together with the masks.

The scene of Orlando’s fight with the lioness is filtered through the imagery of Henri Rousseau: it starts with an ironic visual allusion to the *Tiger in a Tropical Storm* mixed with *The Repast of the Lion*, and then continues with a play on *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope*. In this intertextual sequence, Orlando is transformed first into a zebra, then into an antelope, before finally appearing as a blood-splattered victor. In the end, he also wins the love of Rosalind who, having abandoned her Watteau-inspired outlook, appears as Botticelli’s Flora, scattering flowers on the ground.

In general, the whole episode plays self-reflexively with the name of its technique – *paint on glass* – referring the viewer to many easily recognizable works by French and Italian painters.

In their classic text *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, Adorno and Horkheimer emphasize the role of production in simplification of the poetic matter of the cultural product, maintaining that “the interest of countless consumers is focused on the technology, not on the rigidly repeated, threadbare and half-abandoned content” (108). This study of *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* suggests that animated films, more than any other cinematic form, highlight the link between technology and filmic poetics; they compel the viewer to always bear in mind the “active making” of the work, its constructed-ness.
Conclusion

Relying upon three concepts – opportunity, constraint and contingency – I have attempted to establish links between the poetics and the production of the animated film series. The opportunity to create the unique artistic vision of a classic text arose for Russian animated film professionals thanks to a commission from British TV channels. Production was complicated by inevitable constraints (both technological and collaborative) which ultimately came to be seen, not as obstacles, but as chances to rewrite the works of the Bard with animated film resources through the efforts of an international team. The series’ “Russian trace” reveals itself in various animated film techniques, applied in this rewriting, and also in a “heavier” intertextual layer of the films (notably through allusions to Soviet adaptations of Shakespeare), in an effort to make the project “richer” and more resonant in different contexts and environments.

These cultural echoes are also the result of an intense search for images undertaken by Russian animators. The sources of the images are varied, from classic visual texts to everyday contingent experiences. Interviews with four of the professionals involved helped to uncover these elements of the creative process and incorporate them into this research, thereby supporting the idea that there is a need to expand the field of adaptation studies, to engage further with production specificity and diverse artistic know-how, and (most importantly for this author) to invite practitioners into the drama of adaptation studies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

BLOOM, Harold. Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. New York: Riverhead, 1998.

BORDWELL, David, and Kristin THOMPSON. Film Art: An Introduction. 1979. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

BORDWELL, David. Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988.

BORDWELL, David. Poetics of Cinema. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.

BOYUM, Joy Gould. Double Exposure: Fiction Into Film. New York: Universe Books, 1985.

CUBITT, Sean. The Cinema Effect. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

HORKHEIMER, Max, and Theodor W. ADORNO. Dialectic of Enlightenment. 1947. 1972 (in English). Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002.

KRÄMER, Sybille. Medium, Messenger, Transmission. An Approach to Media Philosophy. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2015.

HUTCHEON, Linda. A Theory of Adaptation. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
NOTES

1. The issue of who was the first to suggest the idea seems to be of high importance to the Russian side.

2. Personal interview by the author with Aida Zyablikova.

3. Personal interview by the author with Natalia Orlova.

4. In 1952 he graduated from the Leningrad Higher School of Art and Industry named after Vera Mukhina, the designer of a famous monumental sculpture Worker and Kolkhoz Woman, one of the iconic works of Socialist Realist art. Serebryakov was professionally trained to be a woodworking artist.

ABSTRACTS

Given that it was commissioned by channel S4C, with the scripts written by L. Garfield, dialogues recorded by British actors, and production coordinated by D. Edwards, the series Shakespeare: The Animated Tales (1992-94) could easily be viewed as a purely British television adaptation of British classics. However, this is a joint project, in which Russian studios Soyuzmultfilm and Christmas Films were responsible for animating the shows. This article therefore explores a “Russian trace” in Shakespeare: The Animated Tales, which reveals itself in both the poetics of each episode (directed by N. Orlova, N. Serebryakov, S. Sokolov, A. Zyablikova, etc.) and the specificity of the production process. It focuses on the interplay of animated images and their counterparts in Soviet film adaptations of Shakespeare. Indeed, M. Muat’s episode adapting Twelfth Night, N. Serebryakov’s adaptation of Othello, and Orlova’s interpretation of Hamlet rework a whole range
of motifs inspired by Soviet adaptations (directed by I. Frid, S. Yutkevitch, G. Kosintsev, respectively). The dominant motifs of each episode also represent an imaginative approach taken by Russian animation artists who rewrote British classics through their visual poetics. The directors’ previous work in animation influences not only stylistic but also production choices (animation techniques, teams of production designers, animators, composers). Part of the article therefore focuses on the aspects of production transformed due to the British influence and yet still deeply rooted in the traditional style of work at Soyuzmultfilm (e.g. long production cycles).

To explore this production specificity and its influence on poetics (the poetic matter), I interviewed several professionals involved in the project (N. Orlova, N. Dabizha, I. Markozyan, A. Zyablikova).

Puisqu’elle a été commissionnée par la chaîne S4C, avec les scripts rédigés par L. Garfield, les dialogues enregistrés par des acteurs britanniques, la production dirigée par D. Edwards, la série télévisée _Shakespeare: The Animated Tales_ (1992-94) pourrait facilement être considérée comme une adaptation télévisuelle purement britannique de la littérature classique britannique. Cependant, il s’agit d’un projet commun, dans lequel les studios russes Soyuzmultfilm et Christmas Films ont leur part de responsabilité dans la réalisation des épisodes. Cet article explorera donc la « marque de fabrique » russe dans _Shakespeare: The Animated Tales_, qui se révèle à la fois dans la poétique de chaque épisode (réalisé par N. Orlova, N. Serebryakov, S. Sokolov, A. Zyablikova, etc.) et dans la particularité du processus de production. Je me suis concentrée sur l’interaction des images animées et sur leur équivalent dans l’adaptation filmique soviétique de Shakespeare. En effet, l’adaptation de _La Nuit des rois_ par M. Muat, celle d’_Othello_ par N. Serebryakov, et celle d’_Hamlet_ par Orlova se réapproprient de nombreux thèmes, inspirés par les adaptations soviétiques (réalisées par I. Frid, S. Yutkevitch, G. Kosintsev respectivement). Les motifs principaux de chaque épisode représentent également une approche imaginaire par les artistes russes qui travaillent dans l’animation et qui ont réécrit les classiques britanniques avec leur poétique visuelle. Le travail dans l’animation par les réalisateur qui ont précédé n’a pas seulement influencé les choix stylistiques mais aussi les choix de production (métodes de travail dans l’animation, équipes de chefs décorateurs, animateurs, compositeurs). Par conséquent, une partie de cet article se concentre sur les aspects de production qui ont été transformés suite à l’influence britannique et qui sont toujours bien ancrés dans le style traditionnel du travail à Soyuzmultfilm (par exemple dans les longues productions filmiques). Pour explorer cette particularité de production et son influence dans la poétique, j’ai interrogé plusieurs professionnels qui ont été impliqués dans ce projet (N. Orlova, N. Dabizha, I. Markozyan, A. Zyablikova).

INDEX

**Keywords:** poetics of adaptation, animated films, animated film production, Shakespeare (William), Shakespeare: The Animated Tales, Christmas Films Studios, S4C

**Mots-clés:** poétique de l’adaptation, films animés, production cinématographique des films animés, Shakespeare (William), Shakespeare : The Animated Tales, Christmas Films Studio, S4C

AUTHOR

POLINA RYBINA

Lomonosov Moscow State University
Polina Rybina is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Discourse and Communication Studies, Faculty of Philology at Lomonosov Moscow State University. Her primary interests include film adaptation and the theory of film narrative, as well as adaptation and narrativity in contemporary theatre. She is the author of articles on film adaptation and appropriation published in Russia, Italy, France, several chapters on the history of the 20th-century drama in The History of the Twentieth Century Literature (Moscow, 2003; 2014; 2019; 2020).